



Title: Prey For Darkness

Author: Kazlyn

Character: Terry Thorne

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## **Part One**

Terry Thorne leaned up against the wall taking a mouthful of beer, the music changing to a more defined drumbeat as the DJ faded into a new record. The club was beginning to fill up quicker now which meant that the bars were probably about to ring last orders... Or at least, that would have been the case in London. Up here in Scotland they had completely different opening times...

He glanced round the club, trying to spot the changes. It was eight years since he'd last been here. He'd still been in the SAS and married then and they'd just come off exercise with a group of Royal Marines. One of the Marines had suggested a night out... Which was how they had all ended up in this particular nightclub... "Electric Whispers" it had been called then, if he remembered correctly... And he'd been impressed with the size, not having expected anything like this anywhere north of Glasgow. Two huge dance floors, a bar on almost every wall... Brightly lit, but with the dark corners for those clandestine meetings. Ah, but that had been a good night... not that he was entirely sure how they had

made it back to base... He turned his attention back to the crowded dance floor, taking another mouthful of beer.

It was the long, copper-coloured hair that caught his attention - as she walked down onto the dance floor with two other women... She was tall and unlike her two friends she was dressed completely in black, her hair loose around her shoulders and down her back... He smiled when he saw that she was wearing spectacle type sunglasses. Sunglasses in a nightclub... Well, it took all types. Then as she turned, beginning to dance, he realised that she was wearing black lipstick. Goth, he assumed. Christ, were they still around? He'd take bets that beneath the glasses she was wearing black eye shadow...

He started to look away but found his attention caught by her as the three of them began to dance. She had her back to him, her hair flowing in a red sheet as he watched her dance, making slower, more seductive movements than her friends who were bopping around. All three of them were laughing and joking, obviously out to have a good time. The music began to change again to a Latin beat and one of the girls - in a psychedelic halter-neck dress - grabbed the Goth and started to tango. The third girl - a small blond in a blue sequin top - laughed at them and shook her head. The girl in the halter-neck let the Goth go, grabbing the girl in the blue top and started to tango with her. Terry smiled, caught up in their good-natured idiocy.

Mark frowned, bending slightly to ask, "Who are you watching?"

Terry glanced at him, pointing out the three girls who were now twisting their hands in the air, pretending to be Spanish dancers. "The Goth and her mates!" he told him over the music.

Almost as if she had heard him, the redhead turned. She was still dancing, hands circling above her head but he could have sworn that she was looking right at him... Not that he could really be sure... Not with those damned sunglasses she was wearing. Then she turned back, joining in with the other two girls who were doing toreador impressions.

Mark nudged him, pointing out someone with a tilt of his head. Terry turned. Another woman walked passed the two men towards the bar, wearing very little. Mark glanced at Terry, whistling softly and raising his eyebrows, and they both looked after her until she disappeared in the press of people. The two ex-soldiers grinned at one another.

Terry let his gaze travel over the rest of the people in the club, pausing to check out one or two of the women but his attention was finally drawn back to the dance floor... to her. The music changed again to a pounding, heavy rock beat - the theme tune to one of the latest Hollywood epics. The three girls had changed position slightly as they had danced. The Goth was almost facing him now, rather than dancing with her back to him. She had taken off the glasses and as he suspected, she was wearing black eye shadow. She was wearing a blouse, unbuttoned far enough to hint at cleavage, giving a brief flash as she moved, but nothing more.

Then he realised that she was looking at him. For a long moment their gazes locked. Then she smiled.

The breath almost stopped in Terry's lungs. Then he was breathing again and she had broken eye contact. He took a long swig of beer, trying to work out if he had actually seen what he thought he had seen, or if the lighting in the club was playing games with his mind... Because he could have sworn that she... she... A vampire...?

The logical part of his mind was telling him not to be so stupid, that he had obviously had too much beer... And yet he knew that he had seen what he'd seen. But vampires didn't exist... They were a figment of people's over-active imagination... They weren't real...

Only Mark was nudging him... "Did you see...?"

Terry glanced at him, nodding slowly, and then looked back at the redhead. She looked up and smiled as she saw that they were still watching her. But now her teeth were perfectly normal.

"Trick of the light, mate..." Terry attempted, grinning, laughing at his own foolishness.

The small blond waved at someone she knew and said something to the girl in the psychedelic dress. She nodded and the blond pushed her way across the floor to throw her arms around a young man. Terry looked back at the other two girls. The Goth had put her glasses back on. Terry watched her as she danced. Curvy and voluptuous, the seductive twist of her hips and the slow, almost languorous movements of her hands were so completely different from the all-over-the-place but equally mesmerising bopping of her slender, willowy friend. One of two young men in kilts and black Prince Charlie jackets - obviously part of a wedding reception who had moved the festivities to the club - bumped into the friend. He turned, putting his hand on her shoulder and mouthing an apology. She grinned, throwing her arms round his neck, dancing carelessly with him. The bloke he had been dancing with grinned at the redheaded Goth, giving her an apologetic shrug of his shoulders. She threw her head back, laughing, and started to dance with him. Terry watched him, seeing the captivating effect she had on him...

Then she turned and scanned the bar area again, her gaze coming to rest once more on Terry. She gave him a broad smile. The music changed yet again to the latest single from a new boy band. The girl in the psychedelic dress let the kilted man go, turning to say something to the Goth. They turned to the two blokes, making their apologies. The young men both looked crest fallen but didn't make a fuss, continuing to dance as the girls turned and both made their way off the dance floor.

Terry and Mark watched them. The Goth moved like she danced, with a graceful, sexy swing of her hips. The women turned, making for the bar, walking right towards the two soldiers. The redhead pushed her glasses up onto her head as she stopped, grinning at them, "Want to dance?"

Slightly taken aback at their boldness, but not entirely displeased, Mark grinned, dumping his pint on the ledge beside him. Terry however shook his head, "I'm sorry. I don't dance."

The girl in the halter neck had grabbed Mark's hand and was leading him towards the steps of the dance floor. The Goth quirked an eyebrow at Terry. The dark eye shadow accentuated her eyes. "Then do you simply want to watch me dancing? Or are you going to buy a girl a drink?"

Her accent was stronger than the rest of the people here, more like the broad heaviness of one of the other guys in Terry's "office" who hailed from Glasgow. He smiled, offering, "Can I buy you a drink?"

She returned the smile and Terry found himself disappearing into the dark depths of her eyes. Then the spell was broken as she blinked slowly. "Vodka and Irn Bru, please."

"Vodka and Irn Bru it is..." He hesitated then asked, "What's your friend drinking?"

"The same..."

He nodded, putting his beer on the ledge beside Mark's glass and walked the few steps to the bar. She lounged against the wall as she waited for him to return, moving in time to the music. The friend dancing with Mark waved at her from the dance floor and she waved back. Terry glanced at his mate and the girl and shook his head. Mark was in his element.

Smiling, Terry turned his attention back to the bar, handing over the money as the bartender put the two glasses down, waiting for his change. Then he lifted the glasses and turned back to her. She took the offered glass and he put the second on the ledge beside Mark's, lifting his own pint.

"So," she asked, "what brings you to this part of the world?"

"My friend and I are going climbing."

She frowned, gazing at him levelly, then asked, "Don't they have mountains in Australia?"

He smiled, "Yes. They do. But I'm working in London now."

She took a drink, giving him another serious look. "An Aussie businessman who works in England and climbs mountains in Scotland for pleasure." The grin returned, "Quite a globe-trotter!"

He raised his eyebrows, "You have no idea!" He took a long pull on his beer then it was his turn to give her a level look. "Although, I'd place your accent as Glasgow..."

She laughed, surprised that he could place her accent. "Close! Elderslie, actually... Birth place of William Wallace..."

"Braveheart," he quipped. "Yeah, I saw that movie."

"Hmmm," she said, uncommittedly. "William Wallace was better looking than Mel Gibson... And much taller!"

Terry smiled, taking another long drink of beer, somehow getting the impression that she wasn't actually joking, that somehow she had an insight into it that he would never understand. Or maybe it was just the fact that she was Scottish, talking about a film based on the exploits of a Scottish hero. "I'll take your word for it."

"It wasn't a bad film... But I was looking forward to seeing Wallace, dressed as a woman, escaping from the walled city of Perth... They missed that bit out."

Terry looked at her, "What?"

She laughed, "William Wallace was cornered here in Perth, which at that time was a walled city. He escaped by dressing up as a woman." She grinned again, evilly, "And Mel Gibson would have done it so perfectly."

Terry opened his mouth to comment, then closed it again. Then he took another drink of his beer trying not to picture Mel Gibson in a corset. The redhead laughed, glancing at the ledge where the other's drinks stood. "You didn't get anything for yourself!" she accused. Terry looked at his now almost empty pint glass. "What are you drinking?" she asked, starting for the bar.

"No problems!" he assured her. "I'll get it."

She smiled at him as he turned, heading back to the bar.

He had to wait for a little longer than before and ordered a beer for himself and Mark and another vodka for her. He glanced at her and then round at Mark, who was still enjoying himself on the dance floor with... And suddenly Terry realised that he hadn't even asked their names! He handed a twenty pound note to the barman then he turned, looking back at the redhead. A young man, obviously the worse for drink was trying to talk to her. She was ignoring him, but he persisted. She said something to him.

And then he tried to take her hand. Drinks and change momentarily forgotten, Terry started to move to intervene, but the man went suddenly pale, backing off rapidly - as if she had slapped him, even though she hadn't moved. Eyes wide, shaking his head, the man turned. Bumping into another group of young men and losing most of his beer, he moved away into the crowd in the direction of the exit.

The Goth watched him for a second longer, then turned slowly towards the bar, almost as if she knew that Terry had been watching. She simply looked at him for a moment and then she flashed him a smile. And he saw them again, unmistakably. Fangs...

The bar tender had tapped Terry on the shoulder. He dragged his gaze away, turning for his change, shoving it in his pocket and picking up the three glasses. Reality was telling he was wrong. They weren't real! They couldn't be real! Vampires didn't exist! //Christ, mate, pull yourself together!//

But he couldn't push away the sudden nervousness. Nor could he quieten the soldier's instinct that was warning him get out of this situation as soon as he could.

He turned, walking back across to her, pouring the vodka into her glass and setting the empty one down on the ledge. He looked at her for a moment then, taking a deep breath, he asked, "Smile for me?"

She frowned at him for a moment. But then she smiled.

He shook his head telling her, "No... Smile for me like you just smiled at that guy!"

She quirked an eyebrow again and dropped her head, taking a drink from the glass. When she looked up at him her eyes had changed colour to a bright emerald green, the fangs evident as she smiled at him. Her whole manner had changed, suddenly predatory. "Is this what you wanted to see?" she asked.

He swallowed, caught by the pure, green depth of her eyes. She moved closer, slipping her arm round his waist. Instinctively he tried to move away, but she was immensely stronger than she looked, holding him immobile. Fear began to flutter in his chest, the adrenalin beginning to pump. Then she laughed lightly, letting him go, stepping away, taking another drink and when she looked back at him her eyes were normal, the fangs gone.

Panic flared briefly, instinct telling him that he was trapped, that if he tried to move she would stop him... Then his soldier's sixth-sense reminded him that she hadn't attacked him; she had let him go...

And common sense tried to tell him that he hadn't seen it... He hadn't!

"You..." he tried. "You..."

"Don't exist?" she finished for him. "Why? Because you have never met any of my kind before?" She laughed lightly, "I think you'll find that there are many more of my brothers and sisters than you realise."

He looked at her, eyes wide. She looked right back at him, calm and self-assured, as if nothing had happened. Except that her eyes still caught him, still held him...

"Tel, you all right?"

Terry jumped, throwing a startled look at Mark who frowned, "What's up?"

Terry looked at him, then at the redhead, then at her friend. Then realised that the small blond and her bloke were also standing with them. Panic washed through him again. Christ, what if they all were...?

If he made a scene now then...

"I..." he tried.

The Goth laughed, turning to Mark, "Sorry, my fault. Tall, scary redhead propositioned him and shocked him." She held out her hand, "I'm Kaz."

"Mark," he told her, taking her hand and lifting it to his mouth, doing his impression of a 'right proper gent' and kissing her on the back of the hand.

Kaz grinned, turning, introducing, "This is Chris, Karen and Ali." They all nodded at him. Kaz turned, "And this is...?"

Terry cleared his throat and found his voice, "Terry."

Another heavy rock song started playing. Chris whooped and grabbed Mark's hand dragging him back onto the dance floor. Karen and Ali made for the bar. Terry watched them go then glanced down at where Mark was dancing with Chris.

"Don't worry," Kaz assured him, her voice earnest and sincere. "I'm not about to drain your friend and leave him for dead..."

Terry looked at her, still not quite believing that he was actually having this conversation. "Are they...?"

She shook her head, "They are simply my friends. They protect me. There are many who don't understand."

"No shit!" he croaked.

She smiled; taking another drink then put the glass on the ledge. She moved closer to him, her eyes changing colour again. Mesmerised he watched them fade to bright emerald green. Still caught in the depths of her gaze he let her take the pint glass off of him. She pushed him gently back against the wall, putting his glass beside hers. Then she ran her fingers across his chest, "There is nothing for you to fear, Terry. I am not in the business of death. I hunt to survive... But I rarely kill..."

He swallowed, breath coming in rapid, uneven gasps. //Her eyes! God her eyes!//

She slipped her hand behind his head, leaning towards him, kissing him gently, lightly on the lips. Her other arm slid round his back and she kissed him again. Then she let him go, stepping away from him, smiling at him but saying nothing.

He looked at her, suddenly bereft, suddenly needing to kiss her. Instinct screamed at him to leave, to get away. But he was lost completely and utterly in her eyes, in the danger she promised. He stepped towards her, grasping her shoulders, pulling her towards him, kissing her deeply. She responded, sinking against him as he wrapped his arms round her, letting him kiss her.

Then she pushed him away, lowering her eyes, breaking the connection. She seemed to be having trouble breathing. He reached out, touching her arm and realised that she was shaking. He started towards her but she held up her hand, moving back slightly with a shake of her head, stopping him. Keeping her eyes lowered she warned him, "If... If we continue... I will need to feed..."

He looked at her, suddenly realising why she wouldn't look at him. She was giving him a choice. Without the lure of her eyes he was free to go...

No, without the lure of her eyes he was simply free to decide to go. Even as common sense told him to run, the adrenalin began to pump through him. The danger excited him... And she excited him. She had caught his interest even before she had used her eyes on him...

He caught her shoulders again, pulling her towards him, kissing her. She moaned softly, collapsing against him, slipping her arms round his waist to run her fingers up and down his spine. Her touch thrilled him. He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her as close as he could, kissing her with a desperate passion he had never felt before.

It swept through him, wrapping around the small flicker of fear, slowly stifling it, until all that mattered was the movement of her hands across his back and the taste of the vodka on her tongue. She pulled away, looking at him again, the depth of her gaze searching his soul, pulling at all the little secrets he had locked away deep within his heart. Then she was kissing him again, her tongue pushing its way into his mouth as her hand slipped behind his head. She kissed him for a long time, one hand caressing the back of his head, the other still moving against his spine.

Then, slowly, she trailed kisses along his jaw, down onto the soft, vulnerable skin of his neck. Terry trembled in her grip, lost in the sensation of her mouth and her tongue against his throat and her fingers on his spine. Gently she pushed him backwards until the wall stopped him.

Kaz gripped him tightly, lips pulling back across the sharp, vampire teeth. Then she bit down - hard - drawing the first stream of warm, tangy blood into her mouth. Terry clutched at her, gasping in ecstasy as the agony knifed through him. Then he gave himself up to the waves of pleasure that pounded through his body as Kaz drew in



another mouthful of blood: then another. Terry moaned softly, clutching her tightly, knowing that his manhood had also responded to the sensation and not caring.

Then, all too soon, she lifted her head away, growling softly in his ear before kissing him again on the mouth. He tasted his own blood. Damn it, he tasted his own blood! And even that thrilled him.

She pulled away finally, both of them breathless. For a long time they looked at one another. She reached out, caressing his cheek with the backs of her fingers. She shook her head and spoke softly, "Forget..."

There was no way he should have heard her voice over the thump of the music, but he heard it, almost as if she had planted the word directly into his head. He tried to take a step forward, but his legs wouldn't move. Then darkness was sweeping in from the edge of his vision, blurring out the sparkle of her eyes, the red shimmer of her hair.

Ali stepped in from behind Kaz, taking Terry's weight as the Australian's eyes rolled back in his head and he started to fold towards the floor. Kaz disappeared towards the door as Karen turned, waving frantically at Chris, who took Mark's arm and dragged him off the dance floor, up to where the small group were standing.

"What happened?" he asked, rushing over to help Ali.

"Not sure," the young man told him. "He just folded."

"Do you have a lift home?" Chris asked.

Mark shook his head, slapping Terry lightly on the face. His Australian buddy wasn't long back from a nasty hostage negotiation where he'd had to go in to bring the hostage out himself. It hadn't quite gone to plan and Terry had been injured. The docs had said he was okay, but... "Tel? Terry? Can you hear me?"

Slowly Terry opened his eyes, looking at him, his sight bleary, "What...?"

Mark grinned, relief flowing through him, "Tel, it's Mark. We're going to get you back to the hotel, okay?"

"Um," Terry tried, still confused, "Okay..."

"I have a car," Chris offered. "I'll take you to your hotel."

Mark looked at her, "Are you sure?"

"Yeh," Chris told him. "Not a problem." She smiled at the relief on the tall man's face. "I'll just let Kaz know, okay? Then I'll meet you outside. The car's only round the corner."

"Fine!" Mark smiled. "And thanks!"

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## Part Two

Kaz was quiet, legs curled under her on the sofa. Lost in thought she gazed at the black and white images of the Bogart movie on the television without seeing them. Karen walked through from the kitchen carrying two mugs of coffee. She glanced at Kaz, then across at Ali who shrugged. Handing a mug to Ali, Karen sank to the floor, leaning up against the sofa.

It wasn't often that they saw Kaz in such a melancholy mood. Usually she was bright and full of life - sometimes even reckless in her joviality, when she hadn't fed for a time... like tonight. That was when they really had to watch her. Karen hadn't seen it, but she was positive that Kaz had "revealed" herself to the Aussie before she had even spoken to him. Most of the time people laughed it off or ignored it when Kaz did that, but there was always the one who would cause problems. And that was when the "fun" really started...

She smiled slightly as she remembered the reaction of the two young guys in the first pub they had gone into. It had only been eight o'clock but the two men had already had too much to drink. They had been pestering Kaz and Chris, refusing to take "no" for an answer, noising up Kaz because she was wearing black lipstick, noising up Chris because of the psychedelic material of her dress. Finally Chris had been unable to stop Kaz as she bared her fangs and growled at them. The more balshy of the two men had started screaming, backing off and falling over a table into another man's lap, knocking the drinks over the floor. The balshy bloke's friend had looked at her in disbelief, then dropped his pint and turned and ran. The bouncers had carried the first man out, struggling with him as he yelled, "She's a vampire! She's a vampire! She's a fucking vampire!"

Karen's smile faded as she looked back at Kaz. It was a long time since Karen had seen her as withdrawn as this. She took a sip of the coffee then asked quietly, "What's wrong, Kaz?"

The redhead turned, looking at her, "Hm?"

"You were miles away. What's up?"

"Nothing... Just thinking..."

Ali shot a look at Karen then grinned, "About a blond Aussie?"

She looked at him and laughed, "A blond ex-SAS Aussie!"

"He told you that?" Karen asked, sitting forward, suddenly interested.

"Erm..." Kaz frowned, "Not exactly..."

"One of these days," Ali warned her, drawing his eyebrows together, "You are going to share someone's thoughts and get the shock of your life!"

"Ali, darling," Kaz assured him, "I have no intentions of ever sharing your thoughts again!" She heard a key in the lock from the hallway and told them, "Chris is back."

Karen put her mug on the floor and pushed herself to her feet, "I'll stick the kettle back on."

The living room door opened and Chris walked in. Dumping her coat and her bag on the couch, she grinned at them, "Mark and Terry are safely delivered to their hotel! And Terry was almost completely compus mentus by the time we got to the there..." She dropped into the chair opposite Kaz, missing the look on the redhead's face. "Wow! What a night!"

Karen laughed from the kitchen, "Yeah!" She appeared in the door, doing her best impression of the inebriated man from the pub, "She's a vampire! She's a vampire! She's a fucking vampire!"

Chris grinned at her then looked back at Kaz, "He deserved it! There's nothing wrong with my dress!" She looked down, smoothing the fabric across her legs, "I really like my dress!"

"And as long as you like it, my dear," Ali told her solemnly, "that's all that matters..."

She pulled a face, "What's wrong with my dress?"

"Absolutely nothing!" Karen assured her, turning back into the kitchen to make Chris her coffee. "Just ignore him, he's jealous!"

Chris grinned at Ali, offering, "I've got a little black and orange number that would really suit you!"

Kaz smiled at the banter, thoughts still with the Australian soldier... For some reason she could still hear the echo of his emotions inside her head. She knew that he was still awake, she could sense his frustration at not being able to remember what had happened after Mark had gone to dance with Chris again...

She had never had this residue of her prey stay with her so long before... It wasn't uncomfortable. It was just unusual...

Karen had come back in, handing Chris a mug. "Ooh! You're a sweetheart!" Chris cooed.

"What hotel are they in?" Kaz asked her.

"Would you believe, the Skye just down the road?"

That was it then, Kaz realised. The `Skye` was only a ten minute walk from where they were now. The Aussie was staying with her so long because he was so close...

Chris frowned, looking at Kaz over the rim of her mug, "Why?"

"No reason, really..."

"U-huh," Chris said flatly, glancing at Ali and Karen. The redhead never usually took such an interest in where her victims stayed... Victims... Chris hated that word. But it was the only thing that really described it...

"You have," Karen pushed, "been awfully quiet since we got back."

Kaz looked at them, seeing the concern on their faces, sensing their worry. She opened her mouth to tell them that it was nothing - then closed it again, realising that they deserved to know the truth. They put their lives on the line to protect her; they gave up part of their own lives to be with her for no other reason than they were her friends. There had always been those who had stood by her, mortals who had protected her from the perils of the mortal world... Without them she would have been destroyed long since. She had never lied to a friend - except in his or her own interest - and she wasn't going to start now.

She smiled, "It's nothing, probably... It's just... I can still sense his presence." She frowned slightly, her eyes losing focus, "The residue has never stayed with me this long before..."

Her friends exchanged looks. She smiled again, coming back to them, "But if he's only down the road then that explains it."

Chris remembered vividly the times she had shared her blood and her soul and her heart-secrets with the vampire, the way that she had somehow been inside Kaz's head and had lingered there for a time afterwards, senses heightened to that of a vampire's, feeling her own emotion through Kaz, seeing as she did... "But," Chris asked, "If you sense him... can he still sense you?"

Kaz looked at her, "Could you sense me?"

Chris looked back at her, suddenly realising that Kaz obviously had no idea. She swallowed, glancing across at Ali and Karen. Ali closed his eyes, telling Kaz quietly, "I can always sense you. For hours afterwards I can always sense you."

"And me," Karen confirmed. "I can see with your eyes for longer each time you... you..."

"Feed from you," Kaz finished for her.

Karen gazed into her mug of coffee, nodding slowly. Kaz unfolded from the chair, crossing the room, pulling back the curtains to look out into the darkness across the river at the lights of the town. Chris put her mug on the floor then pushed herself to her feet, walking quietly across to stand behind her friend. "Kaz... you may not be safe here..."

Kaz said nothing for a long moment, frowning, lost in thought... Then she turned, looking at Chris then at Ali and Kaz. "No..." she told them slowly, "I'm safe... He's... curious. But that's all..."

Ali pulled a face, draining the last of his coffee. Karen shook her head. She didn't like this. She didn't like it one little bit. Kaz had been in a strange mood since they had left the club, walking alone ahead of her and Ali, not wanting to talk. Usually she was exuberant, full of fun... This melancholy introspective concerned Karen. And now Kaz was admitting that it was possible that the Australian could pinpoint exactly where she was.

Kaz had assured them many times that in her five hundred odd years she had never ever come across such a person as a vampire slayer. But it was a worry that had etched itself into Karen's subconscious. She hadn't believed in vampires until Chris had introduced her to Kaz. It was possible that there were those out there who spent their lives trying to destroy vampires...

What if, as ludicrous as it sounded, this Australian was a vampire slayer? How could they protect their friend if she had potentially allowed a slayer inside her head?

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Terry Thorne lay wide awake in the hotel room; staring into the darkness and listening to Mark's gentle snoring. He had no idea what had happened at the club. Mark had told him that he'd simply passed out, putting it down to a whole day driving, lack of food, too much alcohol and the release of stress from his previous hostage negotiation. Which all made sense - kind of.

The last negotiation hadn't exactly gone to plan. He'd taken a "leave of absence" from work - not knowing if he was going to have a job to come back to - in order to see the negotiations through. He'd broken the rules by getting emotionally involved with the hostage's wife... He'd been injured...

And then there had been all the hassle of Dino and him setting up shop on their own... So, passing out in a club after a long day's drive having had a liquid dinner wasn't all that incredible...

Except that every time he closed his eyes he could see the face of the redheaded Goth he'd talked to in the club. Every time he closed his eyes he was drawn into another world where he could hear her voice in his head, could see the world as he'd never imagined it sparkling in emerald green eyes...

There was something about her, something important that he knew he should remember, but that slipped away from him as he wracked his memory trying to find it. He remembered buying her a drink, he remembered her asking what he and Mark were doing in Perth, and he remembered her talking about William Wallace and Mel Gibson dressing up as a woman. He even remembered kissing her... and his body's response to it.

But there was more, he knew that there was more. There was something that he was missing, something that for some reason he couldn't remember.

He swore, turning onto his side. Then gave up and climbed out of bed. Switching the bedside lamp onto the dimmest setting, not wanting to wake Mark, he padded across the room. Lifting jeans and a T-shirt from his holdall he pulled them on then rummaged quietly for a pair of socks. Finally, having scribbled a note to let Mark know he had gone for a walk, he lifted his jacket and a room key and slipped out into the deserted corridor.

He took the stairs rather than waiting for the lift, restless and anxious to move. The foyer was empty of guests, the night clerk busy with paperwork. The young man lifted his head, nodding to the Australian as Terry walked passed and out into the streetlamp lit darkness. A taxi drove by, heading into town.

Terry looked out across the bridge, wondering for a moment about crossing the river back into town, but the distant call of voices told him that the clubs must have been just letting out. Wanting solitude, not wanting to have to deal with whatever trouble he might come across alone in a strange city, he turned the other way, heading down river towards the edge of town.

Thoughts full of the tall, redheaded Goth, he walked along the street. Had he really collapsed from stress... or had something else happened?

Damn it, what was it that he was missing? What was it that he couldn't remember? He ran his conversation with her over and over in his mind, searching for a clue, searching for anything that would trigger the elusive memory...

But there was nothing sinister in what he remembered, nothing that left him feeling uneasy...

So why did he feel as if she was there, walking along the road at his side?

A car came up the hill towards him, its headlights blinding him. He stopped, watching it as it went by, realising that he had walked right out of town, leaving the streetlamps far behind. At some point it had started raining, a fine, misty rain that had soaked him. Making a small sound of disgust, shaking his head, he turned and headed back the way he had come.

Just as he reached the first set of streetlamps, he paused, turning to look across the road. Standing alone on the other side was an old, sandstone tollhouse. Lights were on behind

the drawn drapes, music floating softly through an open window. He had no idea how long he stood there, the rain growing heavier, simply looking at the curtained window.

He knew, almost as if she had called out to him, that the redheaded Goth was in there. Slowly, drawn towards the sandstone building, he crossed the road. Then jumped back onto the pavement as a car horn blared and a taxi swerved to avoid him.

Suddenly, inexplicably anxious that whoever was inside the building would look out the window to investigate the horn blast, he turned and began to walk quickly back along the pavement towards the hotel, pulling up the collar of his coat. Christ! What was he doing? What the hell was he doing? What had he been thinking about?

//Middle of the bloody night and you're wandering along the middle of the bloody road!//

Behind him, a shadow detached itself from the edge of the tollhouse. Oblivious of the rain that soaked her hair and through her skirt and blouse, Kaz watch the Australian's retreating form as he strode up the hill, back towards the town. Then, frowning, she turned and headed back into the house.

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### **Part Three** *(back to top)*

The young blond was gorgeous. He had the clearest blue eyes Kaz had ever seen and a little lopsided smile that made her grin. He had come up to her at the bar, asking if she had wanted to dance and now he had put his arms round her waist, drawing her close as they danced to a Latino beat. She laughed, throwing her head back as he let her go to do his very best Ricki Martin dance impression. Then, grinning, he slipped his arms round her again.

The hunger was beginning to stir within her. It was only just approaching eleven, but she had only fed once the night before... on the Australian. Still, there was time for her to enjoy herself, time to have a little fun and tonight there would be no need to hunt. Her victim had already found her.

The music slid into a slower, more hypnotic beat. The boy drew her closer, taking her hand and capturing it to his chest, his other arm still round her waist. He gazed into her eyes and she smiled, touched by his gentleness, by the delicacy of his courtship. She could smell the alcohol on his breath, but he was by no means drunk. //You,// she considered, //are about to have the most fantastic night of your young life!//

It had been over five centuries since she had been mortal, but she still remembered the effect the tall, pale, dark-haired gentleman had had on her the night he had "kissed" her, the night he had first drunk of her blood.

She had "been" with men before. It was how she had survived, selling her body in and around the slums of Glasgow for the pitifully few pennies and the cheap ale...but he had

been different. He had been a "gentleman" and it had been the colour of her hair that had first drawn his attention to the pathetic, grubby woman he had passed, fascinating him and drawing him to her. He had taken her back to his rooms, had her cleaned and dressed in the finest cloth, fastened sparkling jewels around her neck, treated her like a lady.

He had sat for hours that first night; talking to her, gently drawing a brush through the long, copper tresses. Then he had said that he didn't want to pay her, that he wanted her to stay with him and that she would never want for anything again. She had turned, starting to protest...but the touch of his cool fingers on her skin thrilled her, the delicate trail of his lips down her neck sending shivers through her, deep into the pit of her belly.

She had started to learn the real art of seduction that night, unwittingly as he began to teach her how to hunt as a vampire, how to really use the gifts of her body, her eyes, her touch, her hair... And when his fangs had pierced the fragile skin of her neck she had almost fainted from the ecstasy, the shudder of her orgasm matching the beat of her heart and the draw of his lips against her neck, his fingers digging into her back, clutching her like life itself as he drank from her.

Oh, she knew very well the effect she could have on both men and women. She had lost count of the number of people she had left sitting in the semi-darkness of a bar, a tavern, a club, even the odd theatre, remembering nothing more than the woman who had kissed them so deeply that it had caused a more devastating reaction than the most passionate sex they had ever had.

And for this young man who danced so tenderly with her, for his kindness and chivalry, she would pull out all the stops...

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Mark shook his head and sighed, following Terry as the Aussie rushed up the stairs and into the nightclub. This was ridiculous! This was bloody stupid! They had missed a whole day's climbing because Terry had insisted they stay in Perth and find the redheaded girl he had been talking to the night before. Mark had pointed out that they had absolutely no idea where she was going to be - even if she had decided to hit the clubs again that night. Tel had simply given him a quiet little smile, assuring him that they would find her.

He had been so emphatic that Mark was beginning to have serious doubts about the Aussie's sanity... That morning Mark had decided that, for the moment, it would be better to play along with Tel. Now however, he was beginning to wonder if he should persuade Tel to have the docs look him over again... Maybe they had missed the beginnings of post-traumatic stress... Or perhaps he should contact Dino first in London and fill him in on what was going on... Dino had been with Tel on the last job and might possibly have a better understanding of what was going on inside Tel's head...



The Aussie was four or five stairs ahead and Mark took the last few steps two at a time, not wanting to lose him.

She was here. Terry Thorne could sense her presence, could almost smell the perfume she wore. He pushed through the doors into the huge upper room and smiled as he saw that the club wasn't even three quarters filled, that it was only just beginning to fill up. That should make things easier... not that he had ever doubted he would be able to find her.

He stood for a moment, sweeping his gaze across the room then took a slow, deep breath, almost like a wild animal sniffing the air. He frowned slightly then walked leisurely across to the rail around the sunken dance floor. Mark followed him, feigning nonchalance, glancing round the club to see if he could see either the Goth or one of her friends.

Terry stopped at the rail, looking down at the dancers a few feet below. Mark turned slightly, ignoring the dancers to look across at the nearest bar. He scanned the crowd, but he came up empty. There were blonds, brunettes and the odd redhead - but none that he recognised. He turned back, glancing at Terry and opening his mouth to ask if he wanted a drink.

The stunned attentiveness on Terry's face pulled him up short. Slowly, Mark turned his head, following the Aussie's gaze - and saw her: dancing with a young blond who looked barely out of his teens, her head nuzzled in against his neck.

Mark groaned silently, cursing himself for giving in to his friend. He had no idea what had gone on between Terry and the redhead, but it was obviously not as important to her as it had been to Terry. He glanced at the Aussie, trying desperately to think of a way to get Tel out of the club - and readied himself for trouble when he saw the wild, glazed look in his friend's eyes. He slipped an arm round Terry's chest, trying to draw him away from the rail. "Come on, mate," he tried. "Leave it. She never promised you anything."

Terry let himself be guided back a step, hearing Mark, but from a long distance away - like the music, which had become a background rumble to the beat of his heart, his blood pounding in his ears as he watched her. Snatches of memories from the previous night began to flash through his mind. Eyes locked on the veil of copper hair that flowed down the Goth's back, Terry let himself be gently pushed back another step.

Kaz lifted her head from the youngster's neck. Eyes closed, breath coming in fast, ragged gasps, the young man staggered against her. She held him upright, trailing kisses along his jaw back to his mouth. Dancing behind Kaz, Ali and Chris scanned the crowd around the rail, ready to warn the redhead if it looked like anyone had seen anything amiss.

It was Mark's height that Chris saw first, head and shoulders above the others at the rail. Then she saw Terry, his eyes fastened fervently on Kaz.

Chris swore, grabbing Ali, shouting at him, "The two blokes from the club last night are here!"

Ali looked at her then, as she turned and pushed her way across the dance floor towards the two soldiers, he reached for Kaz.

Terry stopped, refusing to allow Mark to move him back any further. He saw a man that he recognised grab the redhead's arm, talking to her insistently and the protectiveness that swept over him astounded him. Then another sensation rushed through him as Kaz turned and looked directly at him. He made a small sound, deep in his throat as her gaze locked with his.

He shook his head, frowning in incredulity, the memories of the previous evening growing stronger... An image, of Kaz smiling, slammed at him. Only there was something wrong, something he couldn't quite place...

Then reality reasserted itself and he was looking at her, here and now, and he saw the fangs as she grinned at him. Suddenly, everything that had happened the previous night slammed into focus. He remembered the drunk man she had terrified, he remembered asking her to smile for him, he remembered the depth of green in the emerald eyes... He remembered the unbelievable bliss as she had kissed him then sunk her fangs into his neck, drinking his blood, her mouth working against his neck as she had drawn the life-giving liquid from him... He remembered the taste of his blood on her tongue as she had kissed him again...

His response to it all astonished him, his manhood straining suddenly against the fabric of his jeans.

Not knowing what else to do, still under the impression that it was something far simpler, Mark tried to stand in front of Terry, to block his view - and the eye contact with Kaz was broken. Suddenly, inexplicably bereft, Terry panicked. He snarled at Mark, lifting his hand to shove him out of the way. Chris saw Terry bring his arm up and shove Mark backwards. The tall soldier stumbled away, as if unprepared for the strength of the blow, staggering against the rail. With a cry of despair, Chris shouldered her way toward him, placing herself between him and the Australian soldier, her eyes locked on Terry, as he stood immobile.

Terry hadn't even seen her, his gaze running over her head and onto the dance floor where Kaz stood. Chris frowned in confusion then turned slowly, looking at Kaz, looking at the expression on the vampire's face. She saw there something she had never, ever seen before. Instinct told her not to interrupt, but that same instinct pushed tension through the pit of her stomach. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Mark push himself off of the rail. Chris moved, throwing her arms around Mark's neck and kissing him soundly on the mouth as he started towards Terry again. Mark resisted, but was unable to do anything for a moment, taken unawares as Chris wrapped herself around him.

Frantically, Terry searched the dance floor for the redheaded Goth, some sixth sense telling him that he had to re-establish contact, that he had to get to her... and hold her, cradle her in his arms...

Then he found her again, blue eyes welding with green... For a moment they stood looking at one another, the mass of dancers swarming around her as she stood still. Deliberately, he walked towards the steps leading to the dance floor, his eyes never leaving Kaz's.

Behind Kaz, Ali had a hold of the young blond. Dazed, still caught up in the wave of heightened sensation, the youngster staggered back slightly, bumping into a girl behind him. Ali held him, turning him and guiding him gently to the side of the dance floor and up the steps. Glancing back Ali hesitated, stunned at what he saw. Chris was in the tall soldier's arms... and the other soldier was pushing his way across the floor to where Kaz stood immobile.

What the hell was going on?

Youngster forgotten, Ali turned, heading back down the steps, but the soldier had already reached Kaz - and simply stood, looking at her. Ali hesitated again, watching as the soldier took Kaz's hands and slowly began to dance with her.

Still not sure what, exactly, was going on, but realising that there was obviously no immediate danger, Ali remembered the youngster. Swearing, he turned, but the blond had disappeared in the crowd. Muttering to himself, wishing that Karen hadn't had to work, Ali moved up the steps, starting to look for the young man to make sure he was okay.

Kaz looked into Terry's eyes, tension fluttering in her stomach. Caught up in the feed, she hadn't been aware of him until Ali had warned her that he was here, but when she had turned, when she had seen him, his presence had slammed at her, her senses almost overloading. Wide eyed, shock stealing through her, she realised that he remembered her, truly remembered her - not as the woman, but as the vampire...

Now he was dancing with her, his hands resting gently on her hips, the heat of his body burning through the fabric of her dress, making her skin tingle. She clutched his shirt in her hands, almost intoxicated by the musky fragrance of his skin, the scent of his desire mingling with the undercurrent of his fear and apprehension. This man knew what she was and it exhilarated him as much as it terrified him...

The situation troubled her... She had never had to deal with anything like this before... She had never felt anything like this before... No one had ever stayed with her so long and with such strength... But she didn't resist as he drew her closer, slipping an arm round her waist, lifting his other hand to cup the back of her head.

Gently, he kissed her on the lips. Then he drew back. He swallowed, feeling suddenly light-headed, terror flaring for a brief moment. Adrenalin pumping through him he found

himself wondering if this was simply a reaction to her closeness... Was this, for her, simply another hunt? Was she driving him crazy just so that she could feed from him?

Then he saw his apprehension mirrored in her eyes, heard her thoughts inside his own head, felt her emotions sweep through him in a wave that left him trembling... He looked at her, knowing that this was as different for her as it was for him - and he didn't fight as he began to lose himself again in the green of her eyes. "Kiss me?" he rasped, his throat suddenly dry. "Kiss me like you just kissed him..."

She said nothing, but she slipped her hands around his waist and slowly their lips met. Gently at first then more urgently they kissed one another, tongues probing each other's mouths, the sharpness of her fangs strange against his tongue. The hunger began to burn deeply inside her and finally she had to pull away, knowing that unless she drank from him now she would lose control completely. He looked at her, his breath coming in quick, rapid gasps.

She kissed him softly on the lips, trailing her kisses along his jaw, down towards his ear. His hand gripped her hair, his other fingers digging into her back. She growled softly against his ear, hands clenched round the fabric of his shirt, holding him to her as she nuzzled into the nape of his neck, licking and kissing him.

Sensation washed through him... and then the agonising stab of ecstasy as she bit down, drawing the first of his blood into her mouth. He trembled against her; she could feel his heart hammering in his chest, the rich tang of his blood against her tongue unbelievable, perfumed with fear and desire. Lost in him, she drew another mouthful then another...

She could feel the hardness of his arousal pressing against her and found suddenly that she wanted this man as she hadn't wanted anyone since her mortal days had ended... The realisation astounded her...

Terry moaned softly, clutching the vampire, never wanting her to stop as the pleasure spiralled upwards with every movement of her lips against his neck. He wanted to push her to the floor and make love to her right here. The thump of the music wrapped itself around him as the ache in his groin gathered towards climax... All she had to do was drop her hand, touch him, and she would own him...

As she drew another mouthful of his blood, she heard his voice in her head, shouting her name, and then he started to collapse against her. She broke away, fear suddenly stabbing at her... but his eyes were open, he was still conscious and even as she looked at him, he found the strength to stand. She wrapped her arms round him, hugging him close, giving him time to get himself together. Silently, she swore. Was it any wonder he had collapsed? She had fed from him twice in twenty-four hours...

He sensed her guilt and shook his head, "I asked... It's not your fault."

The world was alive with colours he had never seen before, a staggering array of perfumes and scents that he could separate into different, distinct components. He realised that he was seeing with her eyes, his own senses bound in hers...

He looked at her, "I don't want to forget. Don't make me forget... not this time..."

She shook her head, "I can't promise that..."

He kissed her gently, "I'll only find you again."

She knew that he was right. He had found her at the tollhouse and he had found her here this evening, simply by following his soldiers' instinct. Somehow a bond had formed between them, a bridge that he could look along to find her and she knew that she had strengthened that bond by feeding from him again.

His soul was laid open before her and she couldn't help but look deeply into it, opening herself up to him in return, laying her own soul bare...

He wanted her - as she was, knowing what she was, knowing the power she could wield over him. Danger had always been part of his life, always would be part of his life, he craved it, thrived on it. It had made him who he was and she was yet another facet to it.

She also made him feel alive in a world of death and suffering that he had numbed himself to. His armour had been chinked in South America. Now she had torn it wide open.

In truth, she had no wish to make him forget, she had no wish to let him go. She wanted to stand here on the dance floor, looking into his eyes forever, but he was pale - too pale. She knew that if she let him go he would be able to stand, but it would be an effort... He needed to rest. She let him go carefully then took his hand, leading him through the press of people towards the steps and up to where Chris stood chatting to Mark.

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#### **Part Four** *(back to top)*

The sky was clear, the moon shining brightly as they crossed the bridge and headed back towards the soldiers' hotel. The taxi turned onto the bridge, crossing the River Tay towards the 'Skye'. Nestled against Terry, his arm thrown round her, holding her close, Kaz look out at the shining globe. Chris sat on the other side of Terry, Mark in the front seat beside the driver.

The silence still stretched between them. No one had said a word since Terry had kissed her outside the club while they waited for the taxi. It hadn't been intended - he had simply stumbled against her as they stepped out of the club onto the pavement. She had turned to steady him and then forgotten to breathe as she dropped into his gaze again and he had taken her face in his hands and kissed her.

Chris was worried about her. Kaz could sense her friend's concern, but there was an underlying current that she couldn't discern, something that Chris was keeping so close to her heart that even vampire intuition couldn't read it.

Mark was also worried, but she didn't know him well enough to read his emotion... although it was obvious that his concern was for Terry... Something about the last mission that Terry had been on...

Kaz closed her mind to everything but the scent of the man sitting beside her and the soft glow of the moon in the night sky. For a moment she allowed herself to forget what she was... As the car crossed the bridge she was simply a woman, wrapped in the arms of the man who wanted her - a man she wanted.

Reality crashed in.

What was she doing? What was she thinking? She was a vampire! An immortal creature that preyed on humanity, seducing them, feeding from them and then discarding them. Had she `played` at being human so long that she had finally forgotten the nature of what she was? Had the last century of her existence made her forget the danger she courted every night?

Only in the last hundred years had her existence become easier as books and films had reduced vampire mythology to good natured ramblings of good versus evil - humanity, of course, playing the righteous murderers of blood-sucking killers... Until then she had been forced to move carefully lest she incite a mob to track her down, drive her out, destroy her, the same way humanity destroyed everything it didn't understand. Only in the last ten years had she discovered what had sprung up to become the `Goth scene` and found in it a place to lurk, to be herself.

Had her existence become so easy, her defences dropped so low, that she had forgotten the danger... Because here she was, breaking her own rules, accepting a ride home from a gentleman having let him remember who she was... what she was...

"Stop the car!"

Chris and Mark both turned, looking at her. "Kaz...?" Chris began.

"Stop the car!"

Terry's arm tightened round her, "Kaz...?"

She started to panic, "Stop the fucking car! Now!" The driver hit the indicator, pulling into the side.

"Kaz?" Terry had tried to turn to look at her, but she had already opened the door, was pushing herself away from Terry as the car drew to a stop. She leapt out, slamming the door behind her before he could move, running back across the bridge.

Chris swore, opening her door and starting to get out. Terry had already started to move, opening the door to get out the other side. Mark cursed, reaching into his pocket and pulling out his wallet, dragging out a ten pound note and pressing it into the bemused taxi-driver's hand. He opened the car door, pushing himself to his feet.

Chris had hold of the Aussie's arm, pulling him back as he tried to go after Kaz, "Terry! You won't find her!"

He tried to throw her off, but Mark had reached them, wrapping his arms round Terry's chest and holding him tightly.

"Kaz!" Terry yelled, fighting to get free. "Kaz!"

"Leave it, Mate!" Mark tried. "Leave it!" Then he swore, taking Terry's weight as the Aussie's legs gave way and he collapsed against him. Slowly, he lowered Terry onto the pavement then he looked up at Chris, demanding, "What the hell is going on?"

Chris dragged her gaze away from the distress on Terry's face, looking at Mark, telling him, "I don't know! I don't know!"

Terry sat on the cold stone, no longer having the strength to do anything but look at the place where Kaz had disappeared. What had happened? Had he done something? Had he not done something? Where had she gone? Why...? He was suddenly lost; unable to think clearly, knowing only that he had to get to her, had to be with her... He could still hear her in his head, could still see with her eyes...

He looked up at Kaz's friend. She looked back at him, shaking her head, shrugging her shoulders, telling him, "I don't know. I'm sorry..."

Mark frowned, seeing for the first time the blemish on Terry's neck and the small stain of blood on the collar of his friend's shirt. He reached out, touching the mark, breaking the newly formed skin that had healed over the fang marks. Immediately small globes of blood began to well up. Terry jerked away from him as if burnt, covering the mark with his hand.

Mark swallowed...

Then he looked up at Chris and the distress in her eyes told him everything he needed to know. He shook his head, not wanting to believe it, starting to laugh, but the bite mark on Terry's neck was real, the speed with which Kaz had disappeared was real... And, although it was difficult to tell in the streetlights, Terry seemed very pale...

Mark's soldier's training took over, pushing aside what he couldn't accept to deal with what he could understand. He stood up, helping Terry to his feet, "Come on, Mate. Let's get you back to the hotel." He looked at Chris, "And then we have a lot of talking to do."

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Terry had fallen asleep almost as soon as he sat down on the bed. Mark had taken the Aussie's shoes off, covering him with a spare blanket. Now he and Chris sat in the easy chairs beside the window nursing a single malt and the story she had just told him was amazing, almost beyond belief.

"Five hundred years..."

Chris nodded, trying to smile, "Give or take a decade..."

Mark shook his head, trying to take it all in. "Five hundred years..." He looked at her, "And all that stuff we've heard about vampires is rubbish?"

"It makes sense, doesn't it?" she pointed out. "Why kill? Dead bodies turning up regularly in your back garden is going to cause suspicion. Why not seduce them, take what you need then let them wind their merry little way home, none the wiser?"

Mark said nothing for a long moment then asked, feeling awkward about asking her for some reason, but wanting to know, "Have you...? I mean, has she..."

"Fed from me?" Chris finished. She nodded, "Yes. She's fed from me...and Ali...and Karen... Only with Karen and I it's different... she feeds from our wrists..."

He looked at her for a long moment and she met his gaze levelly, seeing another question in the dark brown eyes, "You want to know what it's like..."

He coloured slightly, "Well... um..."

She smiled at his discomfort, "With me it's different... My experience wouldn't be the same as yours..."

"Because you're female...?"

She shook her head, "No. Because I'm a friend and because she has no need to hunt to feed from us. She uses seduction to pin her victim, but there's nothing sexual between us when she feeds... there never has been. Same with Karen. Same with Ali."

He was silent for a while, running through all the information, trying to take it all in when common sense was telling him that this conversation was ridiculous and that vampires existed only in fiction and myth... But didn't they say that every myth was somehow



grounded in fact? Which just made the whole situation so much more damned confusing. "So?" he asked finally, needing to know more. "How did you meet her?"

Chris dropped her eyes, staring into the whisky in her glass, "She stopped me from jumping into the Tay." She laughed softly, looking back up at him, "Long, boring story that I have no intentions of telling you... She stopped me and that's all that matters. Karen and Ali I introduced to her later and since then we've been watching her back."

Mark mulled this over for a while, sipping the whisky, reaching for the bottle again when he finished what was in the glass. On the bed Terry murmured something, tossing fitfully for a moment before quieting again. Mark watched him then turned back to Chris. "Why Terry?"

Chris shrugged. "I have no idea... Why not...?"

Mark sighed, frowning, trying his damndest to puzzle the whole thing out, but there was still too much information missing, too much that he didn't know. He shook his head, "Why did she run like that tonight?"

"I don't know, Mark," Chris told him softly. "I wish I did." She sighed then continued; "I've known her for ten years. In all that time she's never stayed with anyone she's fed from for as long as she stayed with Terry tonight. She always leaves, we move on to the next club, the next bar..." She dropped her eyes, gazing back into the whisky. "I still can't quite believe that she even got into the taxi. It's not something she would normally do."

She downed her drink. Mark followed suit, reaching for the bottle, filling their glasses again. "There was something though..." she went on. "Something she said last night about Terry... about his..." She paused as if searching for a word, then finally settled on, "residue..."

She saw the frown on Mark's face and tried to explain, "For a little while after she's fed, she can always hear the thoughts of those she feeds from, sense their emotions, and in return we see as she does for a while. You can't hear her thoughts or feel her emotions, but... it's almost like she's standing right beside you for a time. Last night Terry stayed with her for far longer than any of the others..." Chris shrugged, "We put it down to..."

She stopped suddenly as if realising that she had gone too far, said too much. "Put it down to?" Mark pushed.

Chris started to protest then realised that he wouldn't stop until he'd badgered the information out of her. All he had to do was keep feeding her whisky to loosen her tongue - which would work because right now she wouldn't stop him, right now she wanted to get very, very drunk. Things were beginning to unravel at the seams and she had no idea why. It scared her that Kaz's actions were so out of character: it scared her that both Mark and Terry knew what Kaz was: it scared her that events were running

faster than she could control: it scared her that she was happily getting drunk with a complete stranger...

Tears welled behind her eyes and she let them fall. Her voice, when she answered him was barely more than a whisper. "We put it down to the fact that she lives so close."

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Terry dreamed - of a tall woman with fiery, silken hair that flowed down her back. Her laughter echoed in his head as she darted ahead of him through the trees, hair streaming behind her as she ran, always managing to evade his grasp at the last moment.

Then she had disappeared, leaving him lost and alone in the depths of the forest, the laughter still there, teasing him as he turned around and around, searching for the way back. He started forward, calling her name, but the trees reached out, wrapping themselves around him, holding him immobile as he screamed her name at the top of his lungs. Terror spread icy tendrils up his spine as he struggled to get free. Then he froze, paralysed by the emerald glow of her eyes as she stepped from behind a tree, gliding across to him, her feet making no mark on the ground.

She reached out, touching his neck...

Terry slammed awake in a tangle of bedclothes, breath coming in fast, panicked gasps, unable for a moment to work out where he was... Then it all flooded back - the nightclub, the dance floor, the bridge... She was a vampire! Christ! She was a vampire! She had fed from him - twice. She had walked into his life and changed it irrevocably. Then she had fled from him, disappearing into the darkness - and he had no idea why.

Sunlight streamed in through the window, disdainfully draping itself across the wall and over the floor, mocking him.

He turned, glancing at the clock then looking across at the other bed to see if Mark was still asleep. The Englishman was indeed still asleep - fully clothed, his arm draped over Chris, holding her close. Stunned, Terry gaped at them for a moment.

Then he flopped back against the pillows, confused and disoriented, trying to work out what the hell was going on and what the hell he was going to do now. Nothing would ever be the same again. He closed his eyes, throwing an arm over his face to block out the light, memories sliding back to the night before when he had stood with her on the dance floor and asked her to feed from him again.

He had already been aroused when she had growled softly in his ear. All she would have had to have done was slip her hand into his jeans and work him, like her tongue worked against his neck, and he would have lost himself to her - completely, utterly and willingly. When she had bitten down, drawing that first mouthful of blood, he had wanted

to push her to the floor, take her right there and then, drive her as deeply into pleasure as she was driving him.

He knew that he meant something to her, that it wasn't simply a carnal ploy essential to her survival. Even now he could sense the echoes of her emotion in his head, could feel the press of her body as if she was lying next to him...

So why had she run? What had happened that had terrified her so much? Because, he now realised, that was what he had seen in her eyes as she had pushed him away and jumped from the taxi - pure and absolute terror. He had, after all, seen it in enough eyes to recognise it, but that look on someone's face had never affected him like this before... Was it simply because he cared for her? Or was it something more dangerous... Was the wall he had built around himself, to protect himself from all the death and suffering, finally beginning to crumble?

Christ, this was a mess! This was such a bloody mess! "Kaz..." he breathed softly, willing her to come back, willing her to walk along the corridor and knock on the door.

But the door remained stubbornly silent as the sunlight inched its way slowly along the wall.

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### **Part Five** (*back to top*)

The weather had changed. The bright, warm sun of the previous few days had been replaced by heavy, oppressive cloud, pregnant with un-shed rain. It clung like a blanket to the tops of the trees on the hills to the East of Perth. Terry Thorne sat in the window of a cafe, staring into space, the untouched black coffee lying cold and forgotten on the table in front of him.

Saturday. Over a week since he had seen her in the club. Seven nights since she had thrown open the door of the taxi and disappeared into the darkness. They had looked for her every night since then, but hadn't been able to find her and slowly, but surely he had felt the bond between the two of them fade to nothing - until he was left with only vague echoes of her.

She had contacted Chris once, on the Sunday night, to say that she was all right and that they weren't to worry. Then they had heard nothing more.

He ran it all through in his mind again, hoping that he would see something that he had missed the first hundred times he had gone over it... but he still couldn't find an answer. Chris had sat on the Sunday morning with him and repeated everything she had explained to Mark and all it had done was raise even more questions...

At the heart of it all was his need to be with Kaz, a need that had only intensified as the physical link with her had gradually evaporated. Even his sleep was littered with dreams

of her... He recognised that it was now an obsession, he was aware that it had taken over his life and the truth was that he didn't particularly care. Tomorrow he was due to leave here, to return to London. Dino expected him there on Monday morning, so that they could go over the final details of setting up the company with the lawyers.

And yet even as half his mind was working out how quickly he could come back to Perth after the meeting, the other half of his mind knew that he wouldn't be leaving in the first place. Tomorrow night would find him wandering the streets of Perth again, trying to find her.

He shook his head, frowning, sorting through everything Chris had told him of vampire fact, as opposed to vampire fiction. Literature, it appeared not unsurprisingly, had altered certain facts to make the villain more sinister. Kaz, for example, didn't kill. Nor could she appear as mist or shape shift into a bat or a wolf, although she did have an amazing affinity with animals, dogs especially. She wasn't limited to walking the streets in the hours of darkness, but she risked burning her skin in strong sunlight.

From there, however, fiction merged more readily with fact. She couldn't feed during the day. The "hunger" was a nocturnal creature and she did have unnatural strength, speed and healing ability...

None of which mattered a goddamned bit if he couldn't find her!

Then, suddenly, he remembered something she had said to him the week before... "I think you'll find that there are many more of my brothers and sisters than you realise."

Was it possible that she wasn't even in Perth any more? Was it possible that she had gone to Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh or even further a-field? He swallowed, closing his eyes, concentrating hard and trying to sense her presence... "Kaz..."

But there was nothing. Only the dull, empty ache.

"Are you going to sit there nursing that coffee? Or do you want a fresh one, since they don't give refills in this heathen country?"

Startled, Terry snapped his eyes open, looking at the man who was sliding into the seat opposite him, "Dino?"

"The one and only!" the American grinned. "So do you want a fresh coffee?"

"Um... yes," Terry replied, still completely thrown by his friend's presence. "What are you doing here?"

"Mark called me. I said I'd fly up..." He ran a critical eye over the Australian, taking in the haunted, hollow eyes and unshaven face. "He's worried about you. Now I understand why. You look like shit, by the way."

Terry laughed, "Thanks..."

The waitress walked across, taking their order and disappearing with Terry's cold mug of coffee. "So," Dino pushed. "You want to tell me what's going on?"

Terry looked at him, quirking an eyebrow. "No..." he tried.

"Then let me take a guess?" Dino retorted, sitting forward and clasping his hands on the table. "You meet this girl, a special girl, the kind of girl you never thought you'd meet, even in your wildest imagination. You fall for her and then she jumps out of a taxi and legs it for no apparent reason... And you haven't seen her in nearly a week." He gave the Australian a flat, level look, "Am I right?"

Terry looked back at him, eyes flashing with the anger that pulled his lips into a tight line. There was only one possible person who could have given Dino all this information. "Mark?" he demanded tersely.

Dino nodded, "And the girl, Chris. She's worried about her friend. Mark's worried about you. They picked me up from Dundee and filled me in on the way over."

"He had no right!" Terry began, but Dino cut him off.

"He had every right! He's your friend! And, surprisingly enough, so am I, which is why I'm here!" He sat back in his chair, shaking his head, calm again after the flash of temper. "And in all honesty, if it had been anyone but you guys, I'd have said you were crazy! Hell, I'm not actually sure you're not! Maybe you've both done one extraction to many..."

Terry looked at him. The anger had faded, leaving him exhausted. Dino was right: Mark had had every good reason to call him in on this. It was just... It was just that there seemed to be so little anyone could do. The waitress arrived with two steaming mugs of black coffee and two thick slices of strawberry cheesecake. Dino smiled at her, thanking her. She returned his smile then moved away to serve other customers.

The American turned back to Terry, "First you eat. Then you can show me around this town and brief me on what the hell's been going on! I said we'd meet Mark and Chris back at the hotel in couple of hours. I want to hear your side of the story!"

Almost an hour later, leaning on the railing, looking down into the waters of the Tay as the river flowed passed; Terry finished his run down of the week's events. Dino whistled softly. "I've heard some stories in my time, but this... this..." He shook his head. "When it comes to women, buddy, you sure as hell don't make it easy on yourself!"

Terry smiled, glancing at his friend but saying nothing. Dino turned, resting his back against the railing. "What do you want to do?" He glanced at Terry. "If you want to stay here for a while longer, I'll understand."

Terry shook his head, "I don't know, Dino. I wish I did..."

Only an hour and a half ago it had all seemed so simple. He would stay in Perth for as long as it took to find her again, but now... Now that real life had intruded, things were different. Dino was right, even though the story was true it seemed incredible now - like a half remembered dream that he hadn't wanted to wake up from.

They had been searching for her for five nights and had found nothing. There wasn't even a guarantee that she had stayed in Perth... Five days travel could put her anywhere in the world.

His heart wanted to stay, but now that Dino was here he was beginning to realise that he couldn't put his life on hold for someone who didn't want to be found. He had responsibilities - to his son, to Dino and the new business, to the people who, right now, were sitting happily within the embrace of their families not realising that within hours their lives would be terrifyingly turned upside down by events that they couldn't even begin to imagine.

"Look," Dino told him, "I don't fly back until Sunday. Why don't you, I and Mark go out and get absolutely rat-arsed tonight?" He turned, slapping Terry on the shoulder. "In fact, why don't we pick up a bottle or two of Scotch and just stay in the hotel room, get rat-arsed in private? We passed a store back there doing the best deal on Bowmore!"

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The first bottle lay almost empty on the coffee table. Terry Thorne was laughing so hard his sides were sore. Mark had given up trying to sit on the bed when he'd slid to the floor for the third time and now sat on the carpet, leaning against the bed and laughing hysterically.

"So..." Dino continued, draining his glass. "So there we were...." He reached for the whisky bottle. "lying in the middle of this god damned field, surrounded by cows, with this huge Serbian yelling across at us, taking pot shots and spooking the god damned bovines..." He filled his glass, standing up to hand the bottle over to Terry, continuing. "And Terry here decides that..."

The telephone rang. Dino reached over for it, doing his best Australian accent, "...he's bloody had enough cow shit and..." He lifted the receiver, dropping back into his normal voice, "Hello?"

"Dino?" The accent was female and liltingly Scottish.

"Yes."

"Dino, it's Chris. Be in the foyer in five minutes...and bring Terry and Mark." She didn't wait for a reply, putting the phone down.

Dino heard the undertone in her voice and was almost completely sober by the time he put the phone back in its cradle. "That was Chris. She wants us down in the foyer in five minutes."

Terry's heart lurched. "Why?"

Dino stood up, reaching for his jacket as he shook his head. "She didn't say, but it sounds serious."

Terry and Mark were both on their feet instantly, snatching up their jackets and following Dino.

Terry paced the foyer as the minutes stretching like hours, wondering what had happened, wondering if Chris had finally managed to find Kaz. He pushed that thought away. He couldn't afford to believe that Kaz had come back because if she hadn't, if it was something else, it would rip him apart to lose her again. But what else could it be...?

Then, finally Chris's green Peugeot pulled up at the front of the hotel. She opened the door, starting to get out, then got back in again as she saw the three men moving quickly towards her. Mark pulled open the front passenger door, sitting beside her, Dino and Terry climbing into the back. As soon as the doors were closed, Chris pulled away, her voice distraught as she started to explain, "I'm sorry, I just didn't know what else to do. I can't get hold of Ali or Karen..."

"Why?" Terry asked, leaning forward, tension pushing tendrils of ice through his stomach as he saw her obvious distress.

"It's Kaz..."

Terry could feel the blood draining from his face. Dino glanced at him, putting a hand on his shoulder as Chris continued, "I thought I'd check the house again. I found her. She was lying on the floor..."

She trailed off, her throat closing over any more words. Mark put his hand on her leg, trying to comfort her. She glanced at him then turned her attention back to driving, pulling out onto the main road, heading for the tollhouse. "I couldn't lift her but..." The tears began to flow down Chris's cheeks, "She's so weak! She opened her eyes, but I don't think she knew who I was and she's so pale... I don't think she's fed since Saturday... She's going to need more blood than I have to give and..."

She hesitated for a moment, glancing at Mark and back at Terry. Then, making a small sound of distress, she plunged ahead, "It was too dangerous... not alone... She's too weak, she wouldn't know..."

"She'd drain you?" Mark asked, calmly and quietly.

Chris swallowed, shaking her head, taking strength from Mark's unruffled, analytical response, calming herself down. "No. Not completely... at least I don't think so... Oh, God, I don't know. I've never seen her like this before."

"You need us so she can feed?" Dino asked. Suddenly the incredible story they had told him had become chillingly more sinister.

Chris was nodding, "Yes... If you..." She indicated to turn, slowing down and pulling across the road into the steep, downhill drive. "Damn, this is such a mess!"

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### **Part Six** *(back to top)*

She was lying on the floor exactly as Chris had left her, wrists and ankles bound with brightly coloured scarves that stood out starkly against the black of her clothing and the paleness of her skin. Terry rushed across to her, dropping to his knees beside her. Slipping an arm beneath her shoulders he lifted her, cradling her in the crook of his arm and brushed the few errant strands of red hair away from her face. "Kaz...?"

She was cold. Her skin had the frail, opaque appearance of parchment. Terry felt his own blood turning to ice in his veins. His stomach flipped, his heart jumping into his throat. He had seen death often enough to recognise it... He wanted her to open her eyes, to smile... anything! But she lay lifeless in his arms, the vibrancy that had coursed through her the last time he had seen her, gone. His voice caught in his throat as he called her name again, "Kaz...?"

Chris dropped to her knees opposite, trying to undo the knot on the scarf that tied Kaz's wrists, but Mark knelt beside her, gently moving her hands away and carefully sliced through the material with a pocket knife. He did the same with the scarf round her ankles. Then he took Kaz from Terry, gathering her against his chest and lifting her, walking across to the sofa and gently laying her down on it. "She needs to feed..." Chris began. Then she trailed off, hugging herself, shrugging her shoulders in despair. "... somehow..."

Mark looked up at the blond woman, assuring her, "We'll work something out."

Almost as if he wasn't aware that Kaz was no longer lying in his arms, Terry remained kneeling in the middle of the floor, his eyes glazed. Dino saw him beginning to tremble and walked quickly across to him, slapping him on the shoulder, demanding, "You just going to sit there?"

Snapped back to reality, Terry glanced up at him then climbed shakily to his feet, walking over and sinking down to perch on the edge of the sofa. Reaching out he ran the back of his fingers down her cheek, tracing the line of her lips with his thumb. Mark watched him, an idea forming suddenly. He handed him the small, sharp blade of the pocket knife. Terry took it, not looking at it, his eyes still fixed on the porcelain face of the woman who had tried to disappear from his life a week before...



"So what the hell do we do now?" Dino asked quietly. If she had been any other ordinary woman it would have been easy, he would have phoned 911 - or 999 as it was in the UK. But this, apparently, wasn't any other ordinary woman... and he didn't have a god damned clue what to do...

"We try to..." Chris began, "to..."

Mark pushed himself to his feet, folding his arms around her, holding her close. "We let her feed," he told Dino simply.

"So..?" Dino pushed, glaring at him. "What...? We just open our veins and pour it into her mouth?"

Terry looked, finally, at the knife in his hands. "Yes..." he told them quietly. Taking the knife he pulled the blade across his thumb. Blood welled, but the pain didn't bite until he had brushed the blood gently across her lips. Ignoring the pain he opened her mouth and let the red, life-giving liquid drip slowly onto her tongue.

The sane, clinical part of his mind screamed in disbelief. Kaz's tongue moved against his skin. The rest of his mind screamed in joy. He grinned, dropping off the sofa to kneel at her side. Her lips closed around his thumb and he revelled in the pain as she sucked weakly, pulling the blood from the wound. He caressed her hair, saying nothing, watching in delighted wonder as her eyes flickered open.

The hunger burned through her, the tang of blood against her tongue wiping all coherent thought from her mind. She drew it down, swallowing it, using the last reserves of her strength to draw more, but it wasn't enough...

The man who watched, the human who offered her the blood, was smiling at her. There was fear in the room, human fear, but it wasn't coming from him...

The hunger tore at her. She lifted her hands, her eyes never leaving his, drowning in the twin blue pools. Grasping his fingers she pulled his thumb from her mouth, finally breaking free of his eyes to let her gaze travel down the length of his arm - to where the sweet perfume of his blood pulsed through his wrist.

She growled softly, inhaling the scent. Then she turned his wrist upward, biting down. She heard him gasp, heard him moan her name... but it had no meaning. All that mattered was the warm blood that flowed down her throat...

Terry watched her, fascinated, as the pleasure erupted, flowing through him in waves, matching the movement of her mouth against his wrist that matched the thump of his heart in his chest. It expanded within him and he gasped softly, feeling himself harden and strain against the material of his jeans. He dropped his head, kissing her lightly on the forehead, losing himself to the ecstasy that pulsed through his veins...

Then he was being hauled away, pulled backwards. He struggled against the grip, trying to free himself, trying to stay with her, desperate not to lose the tug of her mouth against his arm. Dino's voice cut through the haze, insistent, demanding, drawing Terry back to the room. He opened his eyes, still wrapped in the depths of bliss, and looked at the redheaded man who knelt in front of him.

Dino's eyes were wide with concern. Chris was beside him. "She's taking too much from you!" Dino warned him again.

Terry nodded, unable to say anything and tried to pull his arm gently away from her. Kaz clung to him, pausing for a moment to growl softly, but she was still weak and didn't have enough strength to stop them, as Dino reached across her, helping Terry to pull away from her grasp.

She snarled at them and turned, launching herself off the sofa with a scream of frustration, knocking both of them sprawling backwards onto the floor. Baring her fangs she went for Dino's neck. Terrified, he tried to fight her off. Stunned by the sudden animal ferocity, Terry lay unmoving, able only to watch as Dino tried to fend Kaz off. Then Mark jumped in, grasping her round the waist and dragging her off of the American. She struggled like a wild cat, hissing and snarling until Chris pinned her against Mark's chest and slapped her soundly across the face.

The pain cut through the hunger. Stunned, Kaz looked at Chris. Reality reasserted itself. Kaz saw the concern in Chris's eyes then looked beyond her to where Dino scrambled backwards away from them. His fear washed towards her, turning her stomach as she realised what she had almost done. Her legs gave way as she fought her stomach's attempts to throw up.

Terry saw her collapse and scrambled across, his concern for her outweighing his horror at what had just happened, but Mark had already taken her weight and was lowering her gently onto the floor. She was shaking her head, her body beginning to tremble. Terry took her face in his hands, ignoring the blood that still dripped from his wrist and kissed her gently on the lips. He tasted the metallic tang his own blood. She moved her head, trying to pull away. Confused, Terry let her go, sitting back and looking at her.

His blue gaze jolted through her.

"No..." she whispered. She had spent the whole week trying to wipe him from her mind, wipe him from her life. He was a human, a mortal and she was a vampire, a nocturnal creature who hunted humans and fed from them. She could not allow her unexpected depth of feeling for this mortal to root any deeper... The only reason she had come back to the toll house tonight was because the link, the bridge between them, had finally evaporated two nights before and she had wrongly assuming that he was no longer in Perth...

Yet, even when she could no longer sense his presence, she had still been unable to feed from anyone else because of the thoughts of him. Every time she had closed her eyes, she had seen the depths of his soul, remembered the look on his face at the nightclub, knowing who she was and what she was and still wanting to be with her. Following fast behind that image had come the memory of his hands in her hair and his hardness against her as she had fed from him on the dance floor.

And here he was now, kneeling in front of her. She could hear his thoughts, sense his concern for her well being and his joy at having found her again. And...

"No..."

He couldn't be in love with her! She refused to believe it. It wasn't true! There hadn't been enough time, he knew nothing about her... She was simply an infatuation, another danger to add to his life...

Even as she denied it, she knew that she was fooling herself. She had gone almost feral, she had attacked one of his friends. Yet he still wanted to be with her...

All her disappearance had done was show him how alone he was without her. She had misjudged his tenacity, misread the true depth of his feelings and she realised now that in trying to drive him away she had succeeded only in drawing him closer to her. No matter what happened now, he would never leave her side.

And in truth, lost as she was once more in his eyes and in his soul, she had no desire for him to leave...

She dragged her gaze away from his, looking at his wrist. The wound was beginning to heal over, the blood drying on his skin. The hunger still gnawed at her, but she knew that she had already taken too much from him and she also had amends to make...

She glanced back up at him reaching out to cup his cheek in the palm of her hand. He smiled, turning his head to kiss her palm, then lifted his hand to capture hers, holding it against his chest.

Dino had pushed himself to his feet and now stood on the far side of the room, watching the silent conversation that was obviously taking place between Terry and the female redhead. He didn't like this. He didn't like this one little bit. Adrenalin still coursed through him from when she had attacked him. She had bared fangs at him... God damn it! She had bared fangs!

Almost as if she had heard what he was thinking she turned her head, looking at him. He met her gaze with hostility, but her eyes were calm now, the animal rage he had seen in them before had gone.

His manner showed that he didn't like her or trust her. Not that Kaz could blame him. Considering the circumstances his attitude was more than understandable. She had attacked him... If it hadn't been for Mark... "I am sorry..." she told him.

He nodded, curtly, saying nothing.

She turned, trying to look round at Mark, telling him, "Thank you."

"It was nothing," he protested gently.

"It was everything," she contradicted. "Without you I would have drunk from your friend before I regained my senses."

"Shh," Terry told her, squeezing her hand, reaching out to run his fingers down her cheek. "It's all right..."

"No," she insisted, "It's not all right." She looked back across at Dino. "Because now he is wondering what's going on here, wondering if I've somehow wrapped you in spell, trapped you in some mystical power and stopped you both from thinking straight."

"It had crossed my mind..." Dino admitted coldly.

Kaz nodded slowly, closing her eyes, sinking back against Mark, her strength deserting her. She had made such a mess of things... "I'm sorry..."

"It's not your fault!" Chris said suddenly, shifting uncomfortably, starting to get to her feet. When she had contacted her on the Sunday evening, Kaz had explained that she didn't want Terry Thorne in her life and that she was going to stay away until he had gone back to London. She had spoiled everything by bringing Terry here tonight... "I brought them to you!"

Kaz dragged her eyes open, looking at Chris, surprise pushing concern through her as she saw the tears coursing down her friend's cheeks. She heaved herself away from Mark, reaching for Chris, dragging her into an embrace, telling her softly, "No... Oh Chris, no..."

"Yes!" Chris sobbed trying to pull away. "You told me that you couldn't be with him and I still brought them here..."

"Chris," Kaz consoled quietly, rocking her friend like a child, glancing at Terry, her insides tearing apart as she saw the shocked confusion on his face. "I panicked..." she tried.

"Why...?"

Still holding Chris, Kaz closed her eyes, fighting to find the right words to try to explain to him what had happened that night in the taxi, why she had fled from him, but the only words she could find were. "Because you made me feel human again..."

Terry looked at her aghast, not understanding. "What?"

Kaz opened her eyes, looking across not at Terry or Mark, but at Dino. The American saw the despair in her eyes and, perhaps because he was new to the situation, he suddenly understood. He glanced at Mark then looked back at the redheaded woman kneeling on the floor. "She's not human," he said quietly. "She hasn't been human for five hundred years. She's locked herself away from the sunlight, coming out in the hours of darkness to feed from people like us."

"And then," Mark put in, glancing at Dino then looking back at Terry, beginning to understand himself, "suddenly she finds you."

Dino nodded, starting to walk towards them, "And there's something about you that's different, that draws her to you..."

Mark looked at Kaz, everything falling into place as he watched her tenderly cradling her distraught friend in her arms, "And it makes her forget for a while that she isn't human."

Terry's eyes never left her face. "Kaz...?" he tried.

Mark glanced back at Dino then pushed himself to his feet, stepping round the two women and dropping back onto his knees on the other side, reaching out to relieve Kaz of the burden of Chris. Kaz looked at him for a long moment, then let Chris go, turning back towards Terry, trying to explain, trying to make him see why she'd had to leave.

"Please..." she began. "Understand... I am a vampire! An immortal creature who seduces humanity to feed from them, take their blood and then discard them." She looked at him, her face full of wonder. "Only you wouldn't be discarded. You came back to find me and it felt wonderful... so wonderful that I broke my rules, the rules that have kept me alive for so long, and I went with you, let you remember who I was... What I was..."

She had started shaking again but Terry was transfixed, the emotion that washed across her face mesmerising him. Dino and Mark listened in silence as Chris sobbed softly, all of them hearing the depth of pain in Kaz's voice... "My existence has become so easy that I had forgotten the danger... The danger of a mob at my back intent on destroying me because their priests and clergy damned me as a demon, as a whore of the devil, as an animal to be torn apart and sent back to the hell I had come from..."

Shaking her head she told him, "I fear fire as much as you do, I fear a sword as much as you do, I fear dying as much as you do! And yet, there I was, riding in a car with your arms around me, relishing the scent of you, savouring your strength... forgetting the nature of what I am."

She fought for control, beginning to lose herself to the power of the hunger inside her, the scent of the blood in the room slamming at her in waves. "So I left..."

She closed her eyes, clenching her fists and digging her nails into the flesh of her palms, using the pain to keep herself coherent. "And still you plagued my dreams and my waking hours and when the link with you finally evaporated..."

"You were as lost as I was..." he finished. "We were both lost."

She heard his words in her head and dragged her eyes open, looking at him, "Yes..."

Dino looked from Kaz to Terry and back, seeing the tangible link that bound them, watching the silent communication that went between them again. He still wasn't completely sure of her, but the pain in her voice had been real, the terror in her eyes when she talked of the mob had been real and he found himself beginning to wonder just what she'd had to survive, what mind numbing things she had witnessed in the five hundred years she had been walking the earth? He glanced at Mark who still cradled Chris in his arms. Mark looked back at him, returning his gaze levelly, obviously thinking the same thing.

Terry slid forward slowly on his knees, reaching out to fold his arms around Kaz, caressing her hair. "You need never be afraid again," he murmured softly, kissing her forehead. "The mob will have to get through me."

"Us," Dino corrected, still looking at Mark who nodded his agreement. Kaz and Terry both lifted their heads, looking up at him. Dino turned, looking at them, telling Kaz, "The mob will have to get through us."

Then, peeling off his jacket, he dropped silently to his knees beside Terry, unbuttoning his shirt sleeve and offering Kaz his wrist. She looked at him, uncomprehending. He smiled at her, prompting gently. "You need to feed..."

She took hold of his arm, needing no second bidding, turning his wrist upward and biting into the soft flesh. He gasped at the fleeting pain then smiled in surprise as she drew the first mouthful of blood. It wasn't an unpleasant experience... simply... different. Then, softly at first, but with increasing strength he heard her voice in his mind.

He closed his eyes, concentrating, trying to catch the words but instead he found himself looking deep inside her memories, travelling through some of the last five hundred years with her, feeling some of the pleasure and the pain she had suffered, seeing some of the things she had seen. He saw a tall, elegant man with long dark hair that he knew was her sire, the vampire who had claimed her. He watched one of the first performances of Shakespeare's "MacBeth". He stood by the banks of Loch Leven, knowing that Mary Queen of Scots was held prisoner in the castle there. He saw a ragtag army of highlanders in plaid fleeing North following Bonnie Prince Charlie, knowing that they would be dead within a few weeks at Culloden. He saw a crowd wearing the red-white-blue rosettes of

the French revolution cheering as Madame la Guillotine took another life. He stood on top of the hills above Glasgow looking down on the Clyde shipyards as the bombers droned over-head among the blossoms of anti-aircraft fire, the searchlights stabbing the sky, Clydebank burning...

Then the images faded. He opened his eyes to see her lying back against Terry, a small smile on her face as she watching him, Terry's arms wrapped round her. Dino swallowed, looking at his wrist for a long moment before looking back at her. Then slowly he asked, "Who was Bonnie Prince Charlie?"

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### **Part Seven** *(back to top)*

Mark had driven Dino back to the hotel and said that he'd take Chris home. Behind the closed curtains of the old toll house the rain battered off the window, driven by the wind that howled round the chimneystack. Terry had set a huge fire in the grate and then he had pulled Kaz down onto the sofa with him, wrapping his arms around her as they lay and watched a movie on the TV - something simple, something uncomplicated that any couple in the world would have done.

Except that it wasn't long before his head dropped gently against hers and she felt the soft caress of his breath against her hair, deep and even as he slept. She smiled, letting him sink more deeply into sleep before gently extricating herself from his arms, padding silently down to the bedroom, grabbing a blanket and walking back up to put the blanket over him. Then she sat on the floor, the film forgotten as she watched him sleep, watching the steady rise and fall of his chest. He looked so much younger when he was sleeping...

But he was so much younger, she reminded herself. Five hundred years younger. The doubt that had fled earlier, banished by the depth of his eyes, pricked at her again. What was she going to do? Where did they go from here?

She sighed, sitting back, trying to work through the dilemma. She couldn't leave him. This week's events had only shown her that all he would do was hunt her down again. And without him now, part of her would be missing, a part that she had no wish to lose. She hadn't thought herself capable of loving any deeper than friendship. Only to find that she was very deeply in love with this man. Which presented a problem she had never considered before. He was human and she was a vampire... a five hundred year old vampire.

She pushed herself to her feet, crossing to the window and pulling the curtain back slightly. Wrapping her arms around herself, she watched the rain fall in sheets, the wind whipping the tops of the trees. How many times had she seen nights like this? How many times had she sat beside a fire, listening to the howl of the wind down the chimney just before she left to hunt?

Fourteen eighty-something she had been born. She had been about sixteen years old when Jacques de Lusignan had found her in the slums of Glasgow, but, destitute and illiterate, she had already lived a lifetime. He had taken her from that life, given her another existence, shown her what mortal life could be like and when he had offered her even more, she had been powerless to say no.

But she hadn't seen him since they had parted company in Paris. He had taken her to see the "excitement" of the Revolution, feasting as much on the atmosphere of the crowded squares where Madame La Guillotine worked her justice, as he had on the blood of the People. But when the crowds began to thin, as the numbers of the aristocracy dwindled and the excitement had faded, he had decided to go to the New World - "New Orleans!" he had told her, his eyes sparkling. "Ou tu prefers Quebec, ma petit? Ou Los Angeles? Qu'est-ce que tu voudrais?"

"Je ne sais pas..." she had smiled, taking his arm as they strolled through the dark, back streets of Paris, assuring him. "Je vais y reflechir..."

And she had thought it over. She had thought about nothing else for days. In the end she had told him that she wanted to go back to Scotland...

The wind picked up suddenly, rattling through the house, bringing her back from the past. Behind her, on the sofa, Terry frowned, making a small sound in his throat and she knew that in his dreams the howl of the wind sounded like the wail of a mortar. She turned and walked back to him, sitting on the edge of the sofa, caressing his hair, whispering softly. "Shhh." Reaching down through the link she projected her presence, reassuring him that he was safe. He frowned again, murmuring something that sounded deceptively like, "Okay..." and then settled back into sleep.

She leaned over and kissed him gently on the forehead. "What," she murmured softly. "would Jacques think of you?"

If Jacques de Lusignan were here now, things would be so much easier. She could have asked him what she was supposed to do, sought his council on where to go from here... She knew that she was another facet to the danger that Terry thrived on. Even as her attack on Dino had astounded him, it had thrilled him. But he had a life that he loved and a son that he adored... And deep in the back of her mind a small voice was asking what would happen once the novelty of her being a vampire wore off, once the thrill had become another mundane part of his existence...

A light touch in her mind told her that he was waking up. She pushed her thoughts deep into the darkest recess of her mind, knowing that if she didn't he would pick up the residue of her concern, and after everything that had happened tonight, now was not the time to discuss it.

Terry took a deep breath and his eyes drifted open. He looked up at her, smiling sleepily, "Hello."



"Hello," she smiled back.

He realised that she had thrown a blanket over him and asked, "How long was I asleep?"

"Not long..." she assured him.

The copper highlights in her hair burned almost golden, dancing in the flickering light from the fire. The tender smile she gave him lit the whole of her face and he knew then, beyond a doubt, that her attraction was nothing to do with her vampire nature. He had, perhaps, lost his soul in the emerald green eyes of a hunting vampire, but he had lost his heart to the smile and the vivaciousness of the woman beneath.

But there was a melancholy in her eyes, a sadness that he ached to take away from her.

He threw the blanket back, reaching for her, pulling her down towards him, kissing her deeply on the mouth. She returned the kiss, losing the past in his presence here and now, abandoning herself to sensation and the musky scent of his desire. He caught her hair in his fist, holding her as the kiss turned desperate and more brutal. She responded to the urgency, running her hand down his side and along his leg, feeling the heat of his body through the material of his clothing. She could almost taste the tangy fragrance of his blood as it pounded through his veins, perfumed with the scent of his arousal.

He wrapped his arms round her, crushing her to him and she moaned softly, letting him take control. He sat up, taking her with him, still kissing her. Then he swung his legs off the sofa, breaking the kiss to move round her and kneel in front of her.

He looked at her for a long moment, almost spellbound as she looked back at him, the firelight sparkling in her eyes, the fabulous smile even wider. His arousal strained against the denim of his jeans, begging for release. He leant towards her, kissing her again as he slid one hand behind her head, tangling in her hair, moving the other to undo the buttons of her blouse. The heat of his fingers burned along her spine as he reached beneath the blouse, running up from her waist to find the fastening of her bra. Tongue probing his mouth, she slipped off the sofa onto her knees, her fingers deftly loosening the buttons of his shirt.

He gasped at the icy coolness of her skin against his as she slid her hands beneath his shirt to push it off of his shoulders. Giggling wickedly, she took advantage of the fact that he had pulled away and pushed him sideways. He cried out in astonishment, rolling onto his back as he landed on the floor. The shirt, half way down his arms, pinned his hands at his side. She crawled up his body, brushing her hand lightly across the hard bulge of his sex, running her tongue along his bare chest from his navel to his Adam's apple. He groaned softly, trying to touch her.

She dropped her head to kiss him again. He pushed off on one shoulder, flipping her over. She yelped in surprise as she landed on her back. Then she grinned as he straddled her, discarding his shirt before dropping forward, taking his weight on his hands and

lowering himself towards her to capture her mouth with his. He trailed his kiss down her jaw to nibble at the sensitive skin of her neck. She ran her fingers down his back, sighing in delight.

Then he lifted his head, sitting up, offering her his hand to draw her up. He kissed her again, his hands moving round her back, beneath her blouse, caressing her skin as her fingers worked on the buttons of his jeans. He dropped his kisses onto her neck again, pushing the blouse down to her elbows before gently pushing her back onto the ground. Grinning wickedly, he pulled away, holding his weight above her on his arms again, telling her, "Two can play at that game!" And suddenly she realised that her hands were now pinned to her side by her blouse.

She had the strength and the speed to overpower him, but she had no desire to. He was touching her as no one had touched her since Paris. He was touching her as no mortal had ever touched her, even in the dim, dark days of her own mortality when she had sold her body to eat.

He had dropped his weight onto one elbow and now pushed her bra up, dropping his head, capturing the tip of one breast in his mouth, running his tongue around and across the nipple as his fingers kneaded the other, sending long forgotten sensation through her, her nipples hardening beneath his touch. She gasped softly, biting her lip.

He moved down her, tracing kisses along her belly, fingers undoing the button on the waistband of her skirt. She lifted her hips, letting him slide it down from her waist. Then he moved back up, kissing her again on the mouth, fingers dancing across her body, trailing down until they pushed beneath the elastic of her knickers. She groaned in delight as, almost immediately, he found the small mound of her clitoris and slowly began to work it, his mouth suckling at her neck again.

Sensation swamped her, the scent of his body, the perfume of his blood, the movement of his tongue and his fingers against her... Her fangs slid slowly into place, her eyes changing colour as the hunger grew with her arousal.

"Terry..." she warned, her voice husky, concern stealing through her. She had already fed from him once tonight...

He lifted his head, seeing the fangs, seeing the emerald green of her eyes, knowing that it meant she would want to feed from him again. For a moment his fingers paused and she felt bereft, wanting to scream at him to keep going, not to stop, never to stop. Then he was telling her, "I don't care! I want you. God, I want you so much."

He kissed her brutally, desperately, plunging his tongue into her mouth, cutting his lip on the sharpness of her fangs. The tang of the blood against her tongue pushed her over the edge. She growled, shoving him backwards as she sat up, wanting him to take her, wanting to feel the hardness of him inside her. She pulled off her blouse and bra, discarding her knickers as he slid his jeans off, releasing his fully aroused manhood.

Then he shoved her down again, pinning her to the floor beneath him, kissing her. Her hands caressed his back, fingers digging into his skin as he trailed the kiss down her jaw and onto her neck once more. She growled again, deep in her throat. Terry shifted position, pushing himself up onto his elbow and one knee, guiding the tip of his arousal into her with his other hand.

He paused and she opened her eyes, looking deeply into his, unable to stop the soft hiss of anticipation. The sound undid what was left of his sanity. He pushed inside her, filling her, her hips tilting up to meet him. Then he drew out to push back in, loving her in long slow strokes that grew gradually faster, his mind lost to everything but the climax that was beginning to build inside him and the cool heat of the woman beneath him. He abandoned his body to sensation and the sound of her desire, slamming against her, the rush of elation a perfect foil to the stab of pain as her nails dug into the flesh of his back.

The hunger built to an almost unbearable level. She clutched at him as he drove her further and further into ecstasy, the smell of his body, the perfume of his blood as his heart pounded in his chest, sending her senses reeling. She wrapped her legs tightly around him, clinging to him, clawing at his back, her hips moving to meet his as he pounded against her.

The tightness in her belly began to expand through her, as he cried out softly and moved even faster, plunging them both towards climax. Minds and bodies linked, the bubble built until it was too much to bear. Then it exploded, shattering through them, both of them screaming in release as he spilled his seed inside her. The after shocks shivered through their entwined bodies as they clung to each other. Then exhausted, gasping for breath, he lowered himself gently on top of her, his cheek against hers.

But the hunger tore at her. "Terry..." she pleaded.

He dragged his eyes open, looking at her. Then he closed his eyes, his voice a whisper as anticipation surged through him. "Do it!"

She pushed him over onto his back, sitting up on her knees, her hands slipping behind his neck and beneath his shoulder. Pulling him up she bent her head towards his. He relaxed into her grip, letting his head fall back as her mouth fastened onto his neck. This time there was no gentle lead in. She bit down harshly. He gasped, his senses overloading and his body going limp as the sharp fangs pierced his skin. There was a brief moment of darkness and then sensation washed through him again and he felt her draw the first mouthful of blood from his veins.

The tang of his blood, perfumed with sex, and his complete submission in her grasp sent her spiralling down into ecstasy again. She moaned softly, holding him more tightly, her nails digging into his skin as she drew another stream of blood into her mouth. He made a small sound, deep in his throat, murmuring her name. She drew a third mouthful of blood then lifted her head away, easing him back onto the floor. He lay for a moment, gasping for breath as she looked down at him. He opened his eyes, looking up at her.

She smiled, lying down beside him, her head on his chest. He wrapped his arms round her holding her close. Tired, but content, she lay for a long time simply listening to the sound of the rain against the window, the howl of the wind round the chimney, the crackle of the fire and the thud of his heart in his chest.

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Ali glared at Dino, demanding, "Who the hell is he?"

"Kaz?" Karen asked, looking from Dino to Terry. "What's going on?"

"Guys..." Terry began.

Ali fixed him with a cold hard stare. "I wasn't asking you."

Kaz pushed herself to her feet, walking across to her friends. "Ali, please, let's talk downstairs." She took his arm, guiding both he and Karen gently towards the door and down to the kitchen.

"What," Ali demanded, pulling his arm free as they reached the bottom of the stairs, "is going on, Kaz? Who the hell is the American?"

"His name's Dino..."

"But what's he doing here?" Karen pushed. "I don't like this Kaz, there's too many people getting involved!"

"He's a friend of Terry's," Kaz explained. "Chris and Mark called him after I disappeared. They were concerned about how he had reacted. They thought he needed a link with..." She trailed off, not sure how to explain it, finishing finally, "with reality."

Ali's mouth dropped open. "And you're not reality?"

"That's not what I meant..."

"Really?" Ali countered.

Kaz sighed. "You both know why I disappeared..."

"Yes," Karen interrupted. "So why are you suddenly all cosy with him up there?"

Kaz smiled, appreciating the concern of her friends, knowing that they were only looking out for her best interest and, truth be told, she couldn't quite explain what had happened. So how could she start to explain to them that all she wanted was to be in Terry's arms, that all he wanted was to be with her? "Because he's in love with me..." she tried. "And I think I may be in love with him..."

Karen looked at the redhead in disbelief. Ali shook his head reminding her, "This time last week you were running away from him as fast as you damned well could!"

"And it didn't make any difference," Kaz countered. "He stayed here looking for me. He would still have been here even if I hadn't come back..."

"Then why the hells did you?" Ali implored, trying desperately to understand what was going.

"I had to..."

Karen saw the look in Kaz's eyes and reached out, touching her friend's arm, suddenly worried. "Why? Kaz what's wrong?"

Kaz gave her a melancholy smile, "Nothing's wrong now... But..." She wrapped her arms round herself, walking passed them to the other side of the kitchen, suddenly embarrassed. "I couldn't feed. I hadn't fed since I left him on the Saturday night..."

Ali whistled softly, glancing at Karen who was looking at the vampire, aghast. "Why the hell not?"

Kaz turned, looking at them. "Because last Saturday night he opened his soul to me. He knew who and what I was and he still wanted to be with me. I couldn't get my head round it. I ran from him because I was terrified of what he was making me feel and every time I tried to feed, all I saw was him, the look in his eyes as he danced with me..."

"He knew..." Ali echoed. Suddenly things started dropping into place for Ali. That was why Kaz had made no attempt to get away from Thorne on the dance floor of the nightclub, that was why she had stood immobile, as Thorne had pushed his way towards her. There was something else, something that had been bothering him since last Saturday night... "He wasn't there by chance, was he? He knew where to find you?"

"Yes," Kaz replied, simply.

"But..." Karen began, confused and worried by the things Kaz had just told them. This was all going too fast and getting completely out of control... "How could he know? I mean... didn't the usual forgetting stuff work the night before?"

"I don't know," Kaz told her quietly.

"Has this ever happened before?" Karen demanded.

Kaz looked at her, admitting, "No. Never."

Shaking her head in disbelief, Karen sank slowly into one of the kitchen chairs. Maybe Kaz was losing her sanity. Maybe the centuries of living as she had been forced to, had

finally taken their toll... Or maybe there was something more sinister going on. Her thoughts returned to her nagging concerns about vampire hunters. What if this was an attempt to lure Kaz out of her safety net so that they could kill her? "We should have got you out of Perth on Saturday morning when you could still sense him!" she told Kaz. "Damn it! I knew there was something not right about this!"

"There's something else..." Kaz told them softly.

Ali and Karen looked at her. Ali groaned, "Oh God..."

"Last night..." Kaz began, trying to find the right words, still horrified by what had so nearly happened the evening before. "I... I attacked Dino. I wasn't thinking clearly because I hadn't been able to feed all week and when they pulled Terry away, because I was taking too much from him..." She swallowed, hugging herself more tightly. "If it hadn't been for Mark..." She shook her head, changing the explanation slightly; "Mark dragged me off of him before I could do any damage."

"Oh, God..." Karen pushed herself to her feet, walking round the table to Kaz. "Are you okay?"

Kaz smiled, taking her hand. "I'm fine...and thankfully, so is Dino."

"Did Thorne see this?" Ali asked.

Kaz turned. "Yes."

Ali quirked an eyebrow. "And he still wants to be with you?"

Kaz gave him an unfathomable smile. "Yes..."

Ali pulled out a chair from the kitchen table, dropping slowly into it, resting his head in his hands. "Okay... Let me get this straight... Thorne breaks through whatever magic it is that you use to make people forget, tracks you down to the nightclub and then what... asks you to dance?"

"He asked me to feed from him."

"He what?" Karen asked, aghast.

Ali looked up at Kaz. "What?"

"He saw me feed..." She trailed off, then grinned. "That must have been what broke the conditioning..."

"That still doesn't explain how he found you to begin with," Ali countered. "Or why his thoughts stayed with you long after they normally fade..."

"Kaz, are you sure you can trust them?" Karen asked. "Are you sure they are who they say they are?"

Kaz nodded. "Yes."

Ali sighed, then asked. "So where do you go from here?"

"I'm not sure... They have to be in London tomorrow. Chris took Mark to arrange tickets for he and Terry to fly down on the same flight as Dino. Once their business is finished in London, Terry's coming back up." She looked from Ali to Karen. "I think we should wait and discuss it then. I think we all need to get used to this new situation..."

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### **Part Eight** *(back to top)*

The wind still whipped at the trees driving the white tufts of cumulus cloud across the sky, but at least the rain had stopped. Dino gazed out of the window, across the river towards Perth. It was a truly beautiful day, enhanced by the after effects from Kaz feeding from him last night. Her presence still lingered in his subconscious and he found that the colours were brighter, his vision sharper... He could see the sun glittering in a rainbow sparkle on the ice crystals in the high cirrus cloud, the dappled green that danced across the grass as the wind shattered the shadows of the trees, and that was nothing compared to the sights and sounds he had experienced the previous night.

Was this what Terry had succumbed to? Was this how Terry now saw the world?

Behind him, the Australian paced the carpet. Kaz's two friends had been distinctly put out when they had arrived. The young man's gaze had been openly hostile, the woman's eyes flashing distrust. After Kaz had led them out of the room, Terry had explained who they were, filling Dino in for the first time on the details of how they had all met, about the first time Kaz had fed from him. It was a story that would have been unbelievable had he not experienced it first hand.

Now they were simply waiting for Kaz to return with Ali and Karen. "What do you think?" Dino asked, turning away from the window.

Terry stopped pacing and turned to look at him. "I don't know."

He watched Terry start to pace again and smiled at his friend's obvious discomfort. It was almost like watching him fret about meeting the girlfriend's parents for the first time...

Dino glanced at his watch. Almost eleven thirty. There was still time. It would only take them twenty minutes to drive to Dundee and the flight to London wasn't until two. Terry was coming back to London and both he and Mark had decided to leave the car here and fly down to London with Dino. Chris had taken Mark to arrange the tickets and from the

way Mark was around Chris, Dino had a fair idea that Terry was not the only one who would be spending a lot more time in this part of the country.

If Mark couldn't get them on the Dundee flight, he would try to get them on one of the Heathrow flights from Edinburgh. Chris had said it was only an hour's drive...

"You don't have to come back to London," Dino offered. "I can meet the lawyers, set things up."

Terry turned, looking at him. "We agreed to do this together..."

Dino smiled. "You sure, buddy?"

"We discussed it," Terry told him again. "Kaz agrees. I can't just suddenly give everything up to move here... Besides, I gave you my word."

"I know... But you've found something incredible here..."

Terry grinned sheepishly. "Yeah. I have..."

"Then will you stop pacing and sit down!" Dino quipped. "That's probably a three hundred year old carpet you're wearing a hole in."

Terry gave him a wide grin. "Hadn't thought of that..." Then his face dropped, as another realisation suddenly hit him, "Bloody hell..."

"What?"

"She's older than Oz!"

Dino grinned back at him. "She's older than the good old US of A!" His grin widened. "She was born around the time that Christopher Columbus was sailing across the ocean blue... When Scotland and England were still skirmishing at the border and long before Henry the Eighth had even married his first wife."

Terry gave him a flat, level look. "And since when did you start reading history books?"

Dino's smile faded and his frivolous manner evaporated, as he realised that he had never had any interest in facts and figures, such as the ones he had just thrown at Terry. Hell, up until recently he had thought the whole of the United Kingdom was simply called England! But now it suddenly hit him... Now he suddenly saw just how much he knew of the rich tapestry of history that joined each country on this United Kingdom of Great Britain to one another, Scots, Welsh, English, Irish,... And that had all come from Kaz last night...



The enormity of it astounded him. Until now he'd had no idea of the amount of information she had given to him when she had opened herself up to him... And all because she had been so desperate to prove to him that she could be trusted. He sank onto the arm of the sofa, lost for words.

Terry frowned, concern pushing through him as Dino sat down: almost as if his legs were about to give way, but Dino was looking up at him again, his eyes full of wonder as he told him softly, "She told me... Last night as she fed..." He shook his head. "Jesus..."

The door opened again and Kaz walked through, followed by Ali and Karen. Ali eyed them both warily, but the hostility of before had gone. "Everything okay?" Terry asked.

"No," Kaz told him honestly, walking across to him. "but it will be..."

He smiled at her, slipping his arm round her waist and pulling her to him, kissing her gently on the forehead. Then he looked up at Karen and Ali. "I understand your concern," he told them. "But Dino can be trusted. We've worked together. He's saved my life and I wouldn't have anyone else watching my back."

Ali nodded, glancing at the American. "So what do you do?"

"We rescue people." Dino told him.

"Like mountain rescue?" Karen asked.

"No," Dino told her. "Rescuing hostages from their kidnappers."

Ali looked from Dino to Terry. "So you're with the army?"

"No," Terry told him. "Army trained..."

"Navy!" Dino contradicted.

"Well, I was army... He was Navy." Terry gave his friend a mock sorrowful look. "But we all have our crosses to bear..."

Ali looked from one to the other. Despite himself, as the easy banter between the two men continued, Ali started to feel more at ease with them and the way Terry was holding Kaz, told him more than any words could that Terry would defend her with his life. And if both Terry and Dino were still here after Kaz had attacked the American then perhaps she was right. Perhaps he should give them a chance, but first he needed to talk to Chris, find out her side of what had happened last night. Then, and only then, would he be able to set his mind at rest.

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He had left her in the toll house and flown down to London. And all the way down he had thought about her, her quiet presence in his mind reassuring him. And even though he was asleep now a small part of him was still awake because she was awake. So he knew that he was dreaming of her, dreaming of what had happened last night, of her strength as she had held him in her arms, her lips at his neck, the scent of her hair intoxicating him...

The alarm stabbed into Terry's reality, dragging him from his dreams. He slapped at it, shutting off the noise and slowly opened his eyes. Sunlight flooded in through the windows, draping itself across the carpet. Terry closed his eyes again. It was too bright, way too bright. Deep in the back of his mind he heard her quiet laughter...

He jumped as Dino hammered playfully on the closed bedroom door, yelling, "Up and at 'em, Terry my boy! Up and at 'em. Coffee's already on! Do you want Danish or a bagel?"

"Can't a man get a long lie in, in his own bloody house?" Terry yelled back with a smile, stretching languorously. "An Englishman's house is his castle, you know!"

"You ain't no Englishman!" Dino threw back, walking away down the corridor.

"When in Rome..." Terry returned.

"We ain't in Rome! So do you want Danish or a bagel?"

Dino had been staying in Terry's spare room since they had arrived back in London after the last deal. Dino had been negotiating for the release of a Frenchman, who had been kept in the same compound as the husband of the American woman Terry had agreed to help. He and Dino had worked so well together and with the others on the team that the congratulatory, drunken mutterings of setting up their own company had blossomed into an actual plan. Which was why they were due to see the lawyers today. Where hostage negotiation was concerned, everything had to be tied down solidly by the lawyers, just in case things went terminally wrong.

He had hoped, originally, that it would mean he could spend more time with his son... And then fate had thrown him into the path of a red-headed Goth who had turned out to be more than he had bargained for.

Of course, with the London City flight direct to Dundee, it wasn't out of the realms of possibility to have an office there... Especially with HMS Condor, the Royal Marine base, and RAF Leuchars being so close to Dundee. There was potential there for recruitment. He hadn't lost his SAS ties, and that could get him invited in through both doors...

He stopped short, suddenly realising where his thoughts had been leading. Why was he suddenly making almost permanent plans to stay up there?

Because she's nothing like anything you've ever encountered before. He closed his eyes, memories flowing back to the Saturday night when they had exhausted themselves

making love... only to have her drive him off the cliff a second time as she sank her fangs into his neck. The mere thought of it made him hard again and he suddenly found that the bed was far too big, wanting her to be there with him so that he could wrap his arms round her and...

What?

Sink his fangs into her neck...?

Jesus, what was he thinking about? What the hell was he thinking about? Turning into a vampire himself? The thought thrilled him as much as it terrified him. But, he realised, he had no idea what he was contemplating. He had no idea what her existence was truly like. He had images, the thoughts and memories that she had opened up for him when she had drunk from him on the dance floor. But what was it truly like? What terror had she gone through as the mob had come after her, fuelled by the priests, intent on burning her...

//Hush, my love...// Her voice was gentle, her presence suddenly stronger through the link. //It is past. It is gone.//

//But it's why you left me!// he objected. //You told me! You said...// He searched for the words, //My existence has become so easy that I had forgotten the danger... The danger of a mob at my back intent on destroying me...//

//Yes,// she admitted, //that's why I ran. But things have changed. Things changed the moment I realised that you were still with me... Everything that happened before that is past. And we must talk about the future. But not here, not now...//

His alarm stabbed through the air again, breaking the spell. And by the time he had switched it off and laid back again, her presence had receded and he knew that she was asleep. He shoved the covers back, swinging his legs out of bed and pushed himself to his feet. They had things to discuss. But it would wait until he was back in Scotland with her.

Until then, he had a company to help create.

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Things had gone well. In fact things had gone fabulously. The meeting with the lawyers had gone so smoothly that they had decided to take a chance to try to see someone in the banking institution they had tentatively approached for the initial financial backing they would need. The young woman had looked over their proposal, asked a myriad of questions and then told them that getting their money was definite possibility. She, however, couldn't clear that amount of money so they were to leave it with her and she would have an answer for them in the morning once she had cleared it with her Manager.

Which was why a slightly inebriated Terry and Dino were now falling out of the taxi outside the entrance to Terry's apartment building. Dino threw his arm round Terry's

shoulder. "You know, buddy! This could be that start of a beautiful partnership! I reckon that we only need to get two of the insurance companies on our side and we can afford to do some charitable work for the poor bastards that have been left high and dry!"

"I think," Terry told him as they wove their way through the door and into the entrance hall. "I think we should drink to that..." He stabbed the button for the elevator.

"Damned fine idea, that man," Dino told him in his best British accent, slapping him on the shoulder. "Damn fine idea!" The elevator door opened and they staggered inside. "Got any beer?"

"None of your American rubbish, mate," Terry told him seriously. "Got some good old Aussie beer though." He frowned, waving a finger in front of Dino's nose. "You know, it doesn't taste the same over here..."

"Nothing tastes the same in this godforsaken country!" Dino told him. "Especially the coffee."

The elevator doors opened and they wandered out into the corridor, heading for Terry's flat as Terry fumbled in his pocket for the door keys. "I will admit, though," Dino continued, "to preferring a good bottle of Scotch over bourbon... sacrilege though it may be..." He grinned. "Actually, I just happen to have a good bottle of Scotch in my room!"

Terry turned as they reached the door, looking at him. "Were you holding out on me? And I'll bet it's Bowmore!"

Dino pulled a serious face, putting his hand on his heart, assuring him. "I would never do that, partner! And you are perfectly correct."

Terry finally managed to get the key in the lock, opening the door and stepping through to hold it open for Dino. "Then if you get the Scotch, I'll get the glasses." He grinned lopsidedly. "Want to order pizza?" He switched the light on and turned.

Both men stopped dead as the door clicked closed behind them. Suddenly sober, Terry wondered for a moment if he was seeing things, hallucinating. But then Dino swore and Terry realised that he too had recognised the tall, elegant man who sat in one of the easy chairs, head down, elbows propped on the arm of the chair, long fingers clasped in front of him, his long dark hair caught back at the nape of his neck. Terry had only seen him once before, an image from Kaz's memory.

Jacques de Lusignan opened his eyes, looking up at them, giving them a dazzling smile, "Good evening, Gentlemen."

The vampire unfolded elegantly, walking across to the carpet towards the two men with an easy gait that hinted of strength and agility. "I see that no introduction is necessary..." The accent was soft but unmistakably French with a hint of US.

Anyone breaking into Terry Thorne's home was an act of aggression and his soldier's instinct was already running through defence tactics, as he demanded softly, "How did you get in here?"

Jacques laughed, a quiet, light flutter. Reaching slowly into the inside breast pocket of the long, black, leather coat, he pulled out a small black case, undid the ties and flipped it open to show them the contents. "One should never leave home without one's lock picks."

Dino glanced at Terry, who was eyeing Jacques with suspicion as the vampire bowed deeply. "My apologies, Monsieur Thorne, for taking such liberties, but I felt that it would be unseemly to wait for you in the corridor. Your neighbours may just have taken exception... And I was unsure how else to contact you."

"What was wrong with waiting on the sidewalk?" Dino asked, keeping his tone serious but light. He really didn't like this situation, but this was, after all, the vampire who had taken Kaz from her mortal existence...

Jacques's face grew serious, the frivolity of before disappearing. "Touché." He held up his hands in submission. "I am caught. Mais..." He shrugged, "C'est la vie... The truth is that I was not sure how you would react. Or even if you would recognise me." He smiled. "But I can see that both of you know who I am... And that means that ma petite Ecossaise has truly opened her soul to both of you."

"What do you want?" Terry asked.

Jacques looked at him. The man wasn't hostile, simply wary. And under the circumstances he could understand that reaction. It wasn't every day that one walked into one's home to find an uninvited guest sitting patiently waiting for your return... Especially an uninvited vampiric guest. "I am intrigued," he told Terry simply.

Jacques de Lusignan was too sure of himself; too confident and Terry didn't trust it. There was something about this Jacques that he didn't like... now that he met him face to face. He tilted his head slightly, quirked an eyebrow. "Intrigued?"

Jacques sighed. "In five hundred years ma petite Ecossaise has opened her soul to no-one... other than me. She has never trusted anyone enough, other than myself, to do so. I wished to find out more about the two people who had finally broken through her barrier..." He gave them the smile of an indulgent father. "I may have let her find her own path, as all parents must with their offspring, but I never completely abandoned her."

"Really?" Terry countered, taking a step forward, anger flaring at the casual tone in Jacques' voice. "So where were you when the mob were going to burn her?"

Jacques smiled at him. "She is still here isn't she?" The smile faded. "And you are thinking about her as a woman." When he smiled at them again it was feral, sinister. "She's not a woman. She's far stronger, far faster and far more resourceful than a mortal female... She is a vampire. Un Mort Vivant... Never forget that!"

The menace disappeared, replaced by the gracious frivolity once more. "Bien..." He looked enquiringly at Terry. "Dites-moi... tell me, what was it that first drew her to you? The vivacity, the joie de vivre? The red hair...?" His eyes held Terry's, the menace returning as he took another step towards him. "Or was it the thought of lying helpless in her arms as she held you - and fed from you?"

Dino glanced at Terry. The Australian was frozen, helpless against the vampire gaze that stripped his soul away in layers, his eyes wide. The slight flush on Terry's face gave Jacques his answer and he broke eye contact. Terry staggered slightly and Dino reached out, steadying him. Jacques looked back at them, his face full of remorse. "Excusez-moi..." he apologised, his voice almost a whisper. "That was impolite and cruel... Mais..."

Terry swallowed, breathing hard, clutching at Dino. "Fuck you!"

A frown of dismay brushed across Jacques' face. "Your reaction is more than reasonable," the vampire told him quietly. "Mais, comprenez... understand... I had to know."

"I think," Dino told him, "you had better leave." The hardness in his voice belied the terror twisting through his guts. Terry was close to collapse. He could feel the Australian's whole body trembling with the effort of staying upright. If the vampire chose to stay there was no way they could stop him.

To his relief, however, Jacques nodded. Moving almost without a sound, de Lusignan walked passed them. But Dino heard him pause as he opened the door, turning back.

Voice heavy with recrimination, Jacques revealed softly, "I was there when they tried to burn her, Monsieur Thorne. I watched the fear in her eyes and my heart was like ice. But she had to understand the danger, she had to learn to survive." He frowned, his lips drawing into a tight line, his eyes losing focus as his memories slipped back. "Mais vous comprenez ça, I would never have let them harm her."

The softly spoken words slammed at Terry. He heard the door click shut behind him. Then the world tilted and Dino caught him as darkness rushed in, lowering him slowly to the floor.

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Terry stirred sleepily as the dawn approached, his eyes sliding open. He was in his bed, still clothed. Dino was asleep in a chair by the window, a blanket draped round his shoulders. Terry smiled at his friend's obvious concern, turning over onto his back. He

lay in the growing light, eyes open, staring up at the ceiling. The gentle touch of Kaz's mind was still there. He wondered for a moment if she had sensed what had happened the night before, but her presence in his thoughts was unperturbed and she was asleep...

Jacques de Lusignan...

The thought of the vampire searching through his memories wound icy tendrils through his gut: but it was tempered by the remorse he had heard in Jacques voice as the vampire had left... // I saw the fear in her eyes and my heart was like ice...//

Terry frowned, trying hard to get his head round everything that had happened the night before. The Jacques de Lusignan he had met last night was nothing like the man Kaz held in her memories... or was he? Lusignan had broken into his home and held him, helpless to defend himself as he had ripped his way into his soul... And yet the gentleness in the vampire's voice, the sadness with which he had talked about watching Kaz flee the mob had been real. Terry knew that instinctively.

But he still felt somehow dirty... even though Jacques hadn't fed from him... even though he couldn't feel the vampire's touch in his mind.

On one thing, however, he was very clear. He had to get back to Perth. He had to get back to Kaz as soon as he could. And with any luck he would make it to Kaz before Jacques de Lusignan did. Because that, he knew, was where the vampire had been heading when he had left last night.

He pushed the covers back, swinging his legs out of the bed. Dino started awake at the movement, instantly alert and snapping to his feet, only relaxing when he realised that it was simply Terry getting out of bed that had woken him. Terry gave him a tentative smile. "You want some coffee?"

"Please," Dino told him, then frowned, asking, "You okay? I mean... after last night?"

Terry nodded, pushing himself to his feet. "I'm fine." He turned then stopped and looked back at Dino. "I'm going back to Perth."

Dino nodded. "I thought you might be. When?"

"As soon as I can get a flight." He glanced at the clock. "With any luck I'll make the eight twenty London City flight..."

Dino watched his friend walk out of the door and stood for a moment feeling completely helpless. He had no idea what Jacques had done to Terry the night before. He only knew that he had never seen Terry shake so much or use so much effort simply to stand up. And he had a feeling that when Kaz found out about it, she wouldn't be happy...

He suddenly remembered that Jacques wasn't simply another vampire. Jacques de Lusignan was the vampire who had taken Kaz from her mortal existence. He found himself wondering if that might not over-ride the feelings that Kaz had for Terry. His soldier's sixth sense warned him that Terry might possibly be walking into a situation without backup and without a means of retreat... Perhaps Terry going back up to Perth alone wasn't such a good idea...

Dino went after him. "Terry, wait a minute."

The Australian lifted the glass coffee jug from the percolator and turned to look at him, frowning as he saw the concern on Dino's face. "I'm fine," he assured the American, turning to fill the jug with water. "Honestly!"

"I'm not sure that you going back up North is such a good idea..."

Terry switched off the tap and turned to look at him. "Why?"

"What," Dino asked, walking towards him, "if Jacques de Lusignan left here last night and went to Kaz..."

"He did. I know that. That's why I need to..."

"No, wait!" Dino interrupted, shaking his head. "Think about this for just a second..."

Terry heard the concern in his friends' voice and he put the jug down. Instinct was screaming at him to go to Kaz. But something else was telling him to listen to Dino. And he trusted Dino with his life. His training insisted that perhaps he wasn't being as objective about this as he could be, especially after last night. With a great effort he forced himself to take a step back. He nodded slightly, telling Dino, "Go on."

"Jacques is Kaz's..." Dino searched for a word, finishing finally, "sire, for want of a better expression. He's the reason that she's here. And he's obviously far stronger than Kaz, he made that very clear last night. And you'll be walking into a situation you know very little about." He sighed. "I'm just concerned that you're getting yourself into something that you're not going to be able to back out of." He put his hand on his chest. "I have no doubt in my heart that Kaz would defend you from anything. But Jacques might not give her a choice and you have no idea if she's strong enough to fend him off!"

"He didn't mean me any harm," Terry told him softly, surprised by his own realisation. "He was just... protective..."

"I understand that and I accept that," Dino countered. "But what if he's also jealous? What if he wants to have her all to himself? You heard him last night. She hasn't opened up to anyone in five hundred years. And the only reason she opened up to me was because she was desperate to let me see that she didn't intend to hurt me - or you. From what he said, you've got a pretty damned special link with her!"



Dino paused, looking at the Australian. "Terry, I can understand that you want to go to her. But don't forget that he also said that we were thinking about her as a woman, that she wasn't a woman..."

"Un Mort Vivant..." Terry said softly.

"Exactly!" Dino told him. "I've seen the two of you talk to one another without uttering a word. He's bound to have that ability with her as well... Think of how much stronger and faster she is than you. Think what she can do with her eyes and her body. And then think of what Jacques did to you last night..."

Terry turned, gazing out of the kitchen window, deep in thought. Dino watched him for a moment then said softly, "I'm concerned that you are going into an unknown situation, with no backup and possibly no means of extraction. And it's making me nervous...."

But deep in his heart Terry knew that, although Jacques may have been heavy handed, the vampire had not meant to harm him. He had simply needed to know the extent of Terry's feelings for his "petite Ecossaise". Dino, however, had a point. Terry turned, "I won't stay in the toll house if Jacques is there. Kaz can come to me in the hotel. And I'll watch my back, I promise."

Dino nodded, knowing that he had lost the argument before he had even started, but grateful at least that Terry was thinking like a soldier again. "Just so long as you do!" He sighed, shaking his head, knowing that he was almost as worried for Kaz as he was for Terry. "Anything I can do?"

Terry thought for a moment. "See if you can find out anything on de Lusignan. The more information I have, the better prepared I'll be. And get Chris's phone number from Mark. I'll call her to let her know that I'm coming back up."

---

Kaz snuggled deeper into the pillow, drifting up from the depths of sleep as someone gently stroked her cheek. She smiled, murmuring, "Terry..."

"Non, ma petite," a familiar accent told her. "C'est moi..."

Her eyes snapped open, pleasure flaring, even though she couldn't quite bring herself to believe that it was really him. But he was sitting on the edge of the bed, his long dark hair swept back in the familiar pony tail, his blue eyes sparkling even in the semi-darkness of the room. She grinned in delight, launching herself at him and throwing her arms round his neck. "Jacques!"

He caught her, hugging her tightly as she giggled like a child. "Mais, oui, ma cherie," he chortled. "Ca va?"

"Ca va bien!" she laughed. "Tres bien!" She pulled away, grinning like an idiot. "Mais..." She shook her head, dropping back into English, not quite able to remember the French. It had been so long, too long. "When did you get back? Oh... and what was Quebec like? Did you go to New Orleans?"

"Arrêtez!" he pleaded, grinning at her enthusiasm. "Stop! Ah!" he exclaimed, holding up his hands in mock surrender. "So many questions!"

"Trop d'année!" she told him, her mood growing wistful. "So much time to cover..."

He reached out, folding her to him again, caressing her hair. "Je sais, ma petite... But as your Robert Burns wrote, 'The best laid plans of mice and men'." He sighed softly, inhaling the aroma of her hair, memories sweeping back to Paris. "I did not mean for it to be so long."

She hugged him tightly. "Vous j'ai manquez... I've missed you so much!"

"Moi aussie, ma petite. Mais... I have thought of you so many times... And always there was one more place I wished to go before I came back: just one more." He kissed her hair softly. "But it always led to another..."

"Ce n'est pas important!" she told him. "You are here now..."

"Oui."

There was something in the tone of his voice, an inflection of sorrow that told her that he wouldn't be staying for very long. She pulled away, looking at him, "You're not staying, are you...?"

He shook his head. "Non..."

She saw it there in his eyes. Suddenly she knew why he had stayed away from her for so long. She searched his face, reaching out to trace the line of his jaw with her finger. "You found another."

He nodded, his eyes never leaving hers. "Oui. In Los Angeles... She is as Spanish as you are Celtic, dark eyed with raven curls." He smiled sadly, admitting, "But I miss the redheaded spark, even though she does have your joie de vivre."

Kaz tilted her head, looking at him. "So... why did you come back?"

"You have always been here," he told her, tapping his head with his finger. "No matter where I was I could still feel the gentle touch of your mind against mine. For five hundred years that touch has remained unchanged... And then, last week, it altered and I knew that you had found the one you wished to join you, the one you wished to bring

from the mortal existence into the world of the vampire, just as I took you from your mortal confinement."

He smiled. "What I didn't realise was that you had chosen two..."

Kaz looked at him, apprehension growing slowly in the pit of her stomach. "I don't understand," she told him.

He reached out, rubbing his thumb across the sensitive skin of her neck, sending a thrill of sensation through her. "You have found your progeny."

She pulled away from him, shaking her head. "No..."

Jacques looked at her for a long moment then told her softly, "Then perhaps he feels more for you than you do for him..."

Dread vied with a sudden rush of anger and she demanded, "What do you mean?"

He frowned, dropping his hand to his side. "I have left you alone for too long." He stood up, beginning to pace. "This is my fault. I should not have stayed away..."

Kaz pushed herself off the bed, standing up and catching him, turning him. "What are you talking about?"

He looked deeply into her eyes, searching through what was left of the link between them. "Terry and Dino. You have opened your soul to them; you have let them see your inner being. And now they must be brought into our circle... Or they must die."

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## **Part Ten** *(back to top)*

Kaz looked at him, aghast. "What?"

He wanted to reach out and touch her, fold her into his arms again, but he knew that would be the wrong thing to do. His heart went out to her. This was his fault, this was his oversight, he should have told her about this. But after five hundred years he had assumed that she would remain solitary, that she would never find the person she would wish to share her vampire existence with.

Except that she had... She had finally opened her soul. And to two people...

"You have allowed two mortals to reach deep into your soul, to see the vampire within the human facade."

Kaz shook her head, backing away from him, refusing to believe what he was saying. "But Terry has a son! And Dino... It... It wasn't like that with Dino..."

Jacques frowned, not understanding, asking. "Explain."

"I attacked Dino!" she told him, her voice heavy with desperation, her eyes wide with concern. "I hadn't fed, I didn't know what I was doing! And I didn't want him to think that I was dangerous. I showed him the truth when I drank of him only because he... he... he cares for Terry so much!"

Jacques considered this for a long moment. "So there is only Terry Thorne?"

She shook her head. "No! I'd never.... He... he has a son!"

"So did I," Jacques de Lusignan told her.

The admission astounded her. In all the time she had known him he had never talked about a son before. For a long moment she looked at him, trying to understand what that must have done to him, knowing how much Terry loved Henry. But the thought of Terry being ripped away from Henry gave her the strength she needed to push the panic away. She shook her head and her voice, when she spoke, was perfectly calm, the words even and unthreatening, "No! No, Jacques, I won't! I can't! Not now. Not if it means him losing his son!"

Jacques looked back at her, saying nothing. And then he said, simply, "I see..." He stood up, walking to her, quirked an eyebrow. "Then you would rather see them die..."

She stood her ground as he advanced on her. "Why? Who wrote these rules? Who demands that I must take their lives?"

"It has been so since the ancients! It has..."

"And yet you only tell me of this now?" she interrupted, her eyes flashing angrily. "You didn't think to tell me in Paris before you left for the New World? You didn't think to come back and warn me before I lost my heart to a mortal?" Her voice grew quietly dangerous. "And now you feel that you have the right to walk back into my life and demand death?"

"The mortal world is a dangerous place for les mort vivant, ma cherie. Vous jouez avec du feu!"

"\*I'm\* playing with fire?" she laughed. "You waltz back in here after two hundred years and you think \*I'm\* playing with fire?"

The vehemence stopped him dead in his tracks. He said nothing for a long moment, considering her. And then he told her, "Humanity has always wanted to destroy us, as they destroy everything they do not understand. Revealing yourself to these mortals and letting them live without bringing them into our circle is leaving you open to destruction..."

The pain in his voice cut through her anger. She looked at him, sensing that he was only concerned about her safety, realising that he was afraid that she would be betrayed. And the anger melted away as quickly as it had flared. For a brief moment she considered telling him that there was nothing to worry about, that there were other mortals who protected. But something stopped her, some innate feeling that warned her that she might be putting them at risk. Experience, she realised, had given her a different perspective to existence. His concerns were valid, but she had seen the souls of those who protected her and they would not, willingly, give her up.

She took a step towards him. "Terry and Dino will not betray me."

"Can you be sure of that?" he asked softly.

"Can you be sure that they will?" she countered gently.

He shook his head, turning, walking away. Had she learned nothing? Had she still not realised that vampire could only trust vampire? She was wrong. Deep in the essence of his being he knew that she was wrong. Yet he also knew that he would not be unable to convince her of it. And only time would tell which one of them was right. Unless he forced her hand...

But now was not the time...

"I think," he told her, turning back to her. "That we must agree to disagree."

She nodded. "D'accord, mon professeur."

Jacques smiled. "It is a long time since someone has called me teacher."

She walked over to him, hugging him. "It's a long time since I have called anyone that. Plus longtemps."

He caressed her hair, breathing in her scent, admitting. "Terry loves you very much."

She frowned, pulling away. There was something in the way that he said it that made her uncomfortable. Jacques saw the frown and reached out, running the back of his fingers gently down her cheek, tucking her hair back behind her ear. "I must tell you something..."

Dread clutching at her again, she demanded softly, "What have you done...?"

He laughed lightly, accusing. "Paranoïa!" Then the smile faded and he grew serious again. "I think I scared him a little..." He sighed, quirked an eyebrow as she opened her mouth. "Do not worry, ma petite, he is not harmed... I was simply too anxious to meet the one you had chosen, astounded that you had chosen two..."

She looked at him, her face anxious. "What happened?"

He pulled a face. "I was waiting for them in Terry's apartment last night. They were understandably taken aback. And then I pushed too hard..." He frowned. "I do not think he will trust me soon."

"Jacques..." she berated.

"I know it was wrong..." he countered, "but I was concerned for you. I was too eager to meet them..."

Kaz shook her head, sighing, "Oh, Jacques... Why do you always make things so difficult...?"

---

The sun had been shining brightly when he had left London. It had shone brightly until they were on the final approach to Dundee. And then the aircraft had descended into a thick, low layer of cloud and now, as they taxied off the runway towards the terminal building, the mist wrapped itself round everything, turning the hard lines into indistinct shapes.

The gloom matched Terry's mood.

De Lusignan meant him no harm, he was sure of that. The vampire had had the chance the night before to do just about anything he had wanted and yet he had walked quietly away. He had even tried to explain himself...// I saw the fear in her eyes and my heart was like ice...//

But as the aircraft rolled to a stop and the engines wound slowly down it wasn't just the vampire's words that came back to haunt him. Dino's words were also there... //What if he's jealous... I have no doubt in my heart that Kaz would defend you from anything. But Jacques might not give her a choice...//

Had Jacques de Lusignan simply returned because he had been intrigued about Dino and him? Or was there something subtly more sinister... His intuition, normally the one thing Terry could rely on, was giving him mixed signals. On the one hand he knew that he should trust Jacques simply because Kaz trusted him implicitly. Yet on the other he was instinctively wary of anyone who broke into his home and attacked him...

Still deep in thought he followed the other passengers across the apron and into the terminal building. Maybe things would be clearer in his mind after he had talked to Kaz. Maybe once she had told him more about de Lusignan he would be more comfortable. Maybe... But he was still glad that he had asked Dino to arrange some sort of safe house should he have to pull Kaz away from Perth...

He picked up his bag from the conveyor, walking through the door into the main terminal. Chris smiled, waving at him and walking towards him. He grinned back at her, hugging her.

"Didn't expect to see you back just so soon," she commented, quirking an eyebrow.

"I couldn't stay away," he quipped, forcing a smile.

She laughed, turning towards the door. "The car's parked outside. Does Kaz know you're coming?"

"I honestly don't know," he admitted.

She glanced back at him, grinning. "Did things go okay down in London?"

"Kind of..." he told her, not committing himself.

She glanced at him again, sensing that there was something he was keeping to himself. And now that she looked more closely she could see the concern in his eyes, the slight frown that hadn't been there even when he had said goodbye to Kaz. He looked as if he hadn't slept.

Chris waited until he had dumped his bag in the boot and climbed into the passenger seat. Then she asked, "Terry, what's going on?"

"What do you mean?" he tried to stall.

She gave him a long, flat look. "I mean you - coming screaming back up here, looking like you haven't slept in a week?"

He looked back at her, saying nothing for a long moment, wondering if he should tell her about the visit from Jacques. But Perth was only twenty minutes' drive away... So he told her softly, "I'd rather wait until we get to Kaz's."

Chris smiled at him, accepting that. "Okay, soldier." Then she started the car, pushing it into gear and pulled out of the parking space.

He said nothing as they drove along the dual carriageway towards Perth, gazing out of the window, watching the lush, green farmland disappear into the thickening fog as they drove. The tide was high and on one side a cargo vessel ploughed down the river towards Dundee, a dark ghostly shape, so close to the road that Terry felt he could almost reach out and touch it. On the other the dark bulk of the hills rose up in almost sheer cliffs. Chris glanced at him from time to time, increasing anxious about the unreadable expression on his face. What had happened in London that he had come back up to Scotland so fast? What had happened that had so obviously disquieted him?

The drive stretched interminably, but finally they were pulling up the hill towards the city. And there, ahead of them, was the tollhouse. Chris pulled in. Terry opened the car door in silence, getting out as Chris walked round towards him, opening the boot so he could get his bag. Then she locked the doors as he walked towards the house. "I've got a key..." she reminded him as he lifted his hand to knock the door.

Something told him that they shouldn't walk straight in. He shook his head, still saying nothing as he knocked on the door. Chris frowned. Kaz would be asleep... but after a moment she heard the lock turn.

Kaz opened the door. Then she meeped in delight and threw her arms round Terry. He laughed, finally starting to relax, dropping his bag to wrap his arms round her, holding her close, savouring the scent of her hair. Finally she pulled away, grinning over his shoulder at Chris. And the delight turned to apprehension.

Chris saw Kaz's expression change and opened her mouth to ask what was going on. Only Kaz was shaking her head, warning her to keep quiet. Terry saw the tension sweep across Kaz's face and knew that Jacques de Lusignan was here. He was too late. The vampire had reached Kaz before him. He squeezed Kaz's hand and she smiled, turning and drawing him into the house.

Jacques unfolded elegantly from the chair as Kaz and Terry walked into the room... Then his attention was taken by the brunette who followed them inside... He turned his most charming smile on her, asking Kaz, "Well... Who is this beauty?"

Chris blushed, smiling awkwardly, almost forgetting to breathe as his eyes caught her gaze. Then the smile froze on her face as Kaz said, "Oh she's a friend of Terry's. He was up here visiting her when we met."

Chris looked at her, managing somehow to keep smiling. What the hell was going on? Because Terry was laughing lightly, telling this other man, "Well, she's more a friend of Mark's. I just tagged along for the ride."

Recovering quickly, not understanding but willingly following Kaz and Terry's lead, Chris shrugged, telling the other man, "Mark and I are kind of seeing one another..."

His eyes! God his eyes! And suddenly she realised that he was a vampire... Christ, he was a vampire!

"Christine," Kaz was introducing, "this is my very good friend, Jacques de Lusignan."

The breath stopped in Chris's throat. Jacques de... Stunned, she forced herself to act naturally, walking forward, holding out her hand, her smile firmly strapped into place. No wonder Terry was freaked and Kaz was nervous! "Lovely to meet you, Jacques," she told him.



"Enchante, Mademoiselle," he replied softly, taking her hand and bringing it to his lips, kissing it gently.

She giggled, letting him keep a hold of her hand a little longer. Then she turned, wondering if she should go or if Kaz would want her to stay. "Well," she ventured, "I'd better get going..."

"Thank you for helping him surprise me," Kaz told her, giving her a hug and shepherding her towards the door.

"Thanks, Chris," Terry said, giving her a hug and a quick kiss on the cheek. "You're a star!"

"No problem, Terry. Any time." She turned. "Good bye, Jacques."

He gave her a quick bow. "Au revoir, Mademoiselle."

Kaz followed her out of the door, walking her to the car, saying nothing until Chris had unlocked the doors. "Tell Ali and Karen to stay away until I get in touch."

"Kaz..." Chris began.

The vampire shook her head, her voice tinged with desperation. "Please, Chris? Stay away! All of you have to stay away!"

"But..." Chris tried again.

"Christine, it's too long since I last saw him. He may have changed in that time. And I have an awful feeling that you'll be putting yourself in danger if you come back before he's gone. We got away with the deception because vampire powers are weak during daylight. But you saw the effect he had on you..."

Kaz, Chris suddenly realised, was scared. No, not scared, just very apprehensive. And if Kaz was spooked then the last thing she needed was to be worried about her friends... "Terry?" Chris asked.

"Jacques visited him last night... Now, go, please!"

Chris nodded, giving her a quick hug. Then she climbed into the car and drove away. Kaz watched her disappear into the fog then turned and walked back to the house.

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## **Part Eleven** *(back to top)*

Terry kept his gaze even and un-confrontational, but Jacques could feel the tension radiating from him. "You are surprised to see me again so soon, mon ami?" he asked.

"No," Terry told him flatly. "I knew you were coming here. And I'm not your friend."

Jacques however was surprised to see the mortal so soon. But Terry's appearance so quickly was good, because it only reinforced the strength of feeling Jacques had seen the night before... Terry Thorne was so deeply in love with la petite that his soul would be ripped apart if he lost her. And that was all that Jacques needed to know... Because now he knew that things could not be left as they were. A decision now had to be made because it was obvious that Terry would never leave Kaz. And Kaz would never bring him over into a vampire existence while his son still lived...

Jacques smiled sadly, the weight of the problem settling heavily onto his shoulders. "I am truly sorry for last night. I allowed my excitement to get the better of me. I should not have been so rude..."

"No," Terry told him, flatly. "You shouldn't have."

"But you are well now, oui?"

"No thanks to you..."

Jacques forced himself not to sigh at the mortal's understandable stubbornness. Instead he tried, "Kaz tells me that you have a son..."

"Did she really?" Terry replied, in monotone. "Or did you rip it out of her like you ripped the information you wanted out of me?"

Jacques dropped his eyes to the floor, saying nothing. Then he looked back up at the mortal. "I cannot ask you to trust me. I can see that last night I destroyed whatever possibility there was for that... Mais, je voudrais... Non. I ask that you at least tolerate me..."

Terry gave him a cold smile. "And just why the hell should I do that?"

"Because Kaz is my progeny. And despite what you may think, I care for her very, very much..."

Terry heard the sincerity in Jacques' voice, but said nothing, considering the vampire's words. "I tried to protect her as much as I could in the beginning," Jacques continued. "But there comes a time when we must let the fledglings fly from the nest... There comes a time when the only way we can teach them is to let them learn by their own mistakes and be there for them should they need us."

Terry's eyes flashed angrily. "Like you were there for her?"

Kaz stopped just outside the door as she heard the anger in Terry's voice. Then she heard the irritated sound of disgust the Jacques made. "Like you are there for your son!" he flashed back.

Terry Thorne stepped back almost as if de Lusignan had slapped him in the face.

"Merde!" Jacques swore as he saw the look on the mortal's face and realised suddenly that he had overstepped the mark. He shook his head, trying to repair the damage but knowing that he had just destroyed whatever chance he had had of the mortal even tolerating him. "Thierry, pardonez mois..."

Kaz moved, walking into the room, ignoring Jacques as she wrapped her arms round Terry and held him. He was trembling, his hands balled tightly into fists at his side as he tried to get control of himself, his emotions running unchecked through him in waves that left him exhausted. Finally, he turned his head and looked at her, lifting his hand to run it gently down her arm.

His voice, when he spoke, was soft but calm. "Touché."

He broke away from the look of mild surprise in Kaz's eyes, looking at de Lusignan, repeating, "Touché."

---

Terry sat, lost in thought, gazing into the mug of coffee Kaz had poured for him. She sat beside him, her forehead resting gently on his shoulder. They had left Jacques up the stairs in the living room.

Terry turned finally, looking at her and she lifted her head at the movement, looking at him. "I won't trust him, Kaz," he told her softly. "I'll never be able to trust him... not after last night. But what he said, everything he said..."

"Shhh," she admonished, leaning up, kissing him gently on the lips.

He turned in the seat, lifting his hand to run the back of his fingers down her cheek. She caught his hand, turning it, kissing him gently on the palm before laying her cheek against it.

"I watched the fear in her eyes and my heart was like ice..." he said softly.

She frowned. "What?"

"Last night as he left us he told us, 'I watched the fear in her eyes and my heart was like ice. But she had to understand the danger, she had to learn to survive...' His voice, the emotion..." Terry tilted his head, looking at her. "He cares for you very much..."

"Yes..."

"Henry..." he began. Then he broke off, his feelings so strong that for a moment he thought he was going to lose it completely, break down and sob his heart out. But the moment passed. He swallowed down the lump in his throat. "Henry is much closer to his mother than to me... but that's my fault. I've never been there for him when it's been important. Prize-givings, carol concerts, birthdays... Every time I see him he's grown another two, three inches... He's a bloody good scrum half apparently and I've never seen him play... But I'd still die to protect him. I'd still kill anyone who tried to harm him..."

She said nothing, knowing that there was nothing to say, simply letting him talk. His eyes were focussed far away, or deep inside, as he continued. "I understand why Jacques did what he did. But I'll never trust him..."

Kaz moved closer to him, gathering him into her arms, dropping her head against his. She wanted to tell him that she felt the same way. She wanted to tell him about Jacques demanding that he and Dino either be brought over or killed. She wanted to tell him that she wasn't quite sure if the others were safe from Jacques... but she couldn't, not now, not right now...

He put his arms around her, holding onto her. And then he slid forward off of the chair and onto his knees on the floor beside her, lifting his head to find her lips, kissing her gently. She parted her knees, allowing him to move closer, responding to his kiss, letting him probe her mouth gently with his tongue, her hands caressing his hair. She slid forward on the seat, the kiss growing more urgent as his hands trailed up and down her spine.

Putting his arms round her again he pulled her off the edge of the seat, sinking back so that she was sitting on his thighs. Still kissing her, one hand against her back he started undoing the buttons of her blouse with the other. She undid his belt, feeling the hard mound of his arousal beginning to push against her as she undid the buttons of his jeans. Then she sighed, arching back as his hands pushed under her blouse, his thumbs rubbing at her nipples.

He dropped his head, licking her, teasing one nipple with his tongue as his thumb worked the other to hardness. He let her fall back slowly onto the floor, lying on top of her, shoving his hips against hers, the denim rubbing against his manhood. She slid her hands down his back, slipping her fingers beneath the waistband of his jeans. He shifted his weight onto his elbows and knees, lifting his hips, letting her push the jeans down, releasing his arousal. She gripped it, moving her hand slowly and he moaned, deep in the back of his throat.

Grinning, she flipped him over onto his back, moving down him to capture his arousal in her mouth, her tongue running along and around its length, her fingers dancing in a light caress over the soft sacks beneath. He arched his back, trembling as her tongue worked its magic, like her fingers: never still. The pressure inside him grew, expanding through

him and he abandoned himself to it, letting it wipe out the memories and regrets of his life for a time.

Then, letting him go, she pulled off her leggings. He lay, watching her, reaching for her as she turned and straddled him, his hands finding her nipples again. She sighed in delight. And then he dropped one of his hands, resting it on her thigh, pushing his thumb between the lips of her sex to find the hardening mound of her clitoris. She gasped, arching back again. Then, leaning forward slightly, she lifted herself, moaning as his thumb continued its work, grasping hold of his arousal to guide it as she lowered herself slowly down onto him.

His breath caught in his throat, his thumb moving faster. She growled softly, her fangs extending and moving slowly down as she began to ride him, the movements growing more and more brutal as they pounded together, driving each other towards ecstasy, his hips thrusting up to meet hers. She leant back, stretching her spine and letting him fill her more deeply, her muscles clenching around him. She ground against him, riding him faster and harder; the tension in his groin growing with excruciating slowness to an unbearable level and drawing a whimper to his lips. For an eternity he teetered on the edge of orgasm. And then it exploded, crashing through him, ripping a scream of release from his throat.

And still her hips moved against his. She came only seconds after him, the orgasm smashing through her in waves that brought her finally to a weak and trembling stop. Slowly she sank forward to lie on top of him. He lifted his hand, wrapping his fingers in her hair and drawing her mouth towards his neck. The scent of the blood pounded through his veins, intoxicating her, his hands in her hair, holding her down, restraining her, sending an unexpected thrill through her. Growling deeply in the back of her throat, she bit down.

The small cry, the catch of his breath in his throat electrified her and she revelled in the taste and the tang of the blood against her tongue as she drew the first mouthful from his veins.

She drew a second, trembling in delight as the breath caught in his throat again. And then she pushed against him, forcing her mouth up to his, kissing him deeply.

Exhausted mentally, physically and emotionally, Terry's strength finally gave out and he collapsed. Kaz sensed the darkness rushing in and reacted, using the strength of her own mind to stave it off, panic sending icy tendrils through her. Breaking away from his lips, fighting to stay calm, she whispered softly, "Let's go to bed..."

He mumbled something, only half aware. She pushed herself to her knees, dragging him off the floor and helping him get to his feet. Draping his arm over her shoulder she took his weight and helped him to the door. But the darkness was stronger than she was and as they reached the stairs his legs gave out.

Giving up any pretence she swept him into her arms, cradling him against her. His head on her shoulder, talking to him silently, she carried him up to the bedroom. Unable to keep his defences in place, his heart and soul completely open to her, she saw the memories of what Jacques had done. She stood with him in London, helpless to defend himself as Jacques had searched through his soul, leaving him emotionally wrecked and drained of energy.

She felt Dino's arms around him, supporting him, quietly lending him the strength to stay conscious until the door had clicked shut behind Jacques. She heard Jacques' voice, heard the stark pain as he told them, 'I was there when they tried to burn her, Monsieur Thorne. I watched the fear in her eyes and my heart was like ice. But she had to understand the danger, she had to learn to survive. Mais vous comprenez ça, I would never have let them harm her.'

She laid Terry gently down on the bed and sat beside him, caressing his face. "Oh, Jacques, you fool... You complete and utter fool..." If you had only asked, he would have told you...

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Jacques sat, fingers resting against his lips, eyes unfocussed, lost in thought. What to do...? What to do...?

Kaz had found her progeny. The link between her and Terry Thorne was one of the strongest that he had ever seen. Stronger than his bond with his sire, stronger than his bond with any of his own progeny...

He hadn't lied to Kaz about the girl in Los Angeles... not exactly. Only she wasn't in Los Angeles. Lana was waiting for him in Paris. They hadn't lived in the United States since the great earthquake that had levelled San Francisco almost to the ground at the beginning of the last century. It hadn't been the earthquake that had scared Jacques into abandoning the city he had watched grow from a small town, the place he had come to call home...

No, it hadn't been the earthquake, it had been the firestorm afterwards, reminiscent of the Great Fire of London that had sent him, and Kaz, back to Paris...

So he had persuaded Lana that she wished to explore her Spanish roots and they had travelled back to Europe. They had stayed in Madrid, watching the human events of the twentieth century unfold across Europe - reading the newspaper reports of the Great War: the war to end all wars; listening to the radio reports of the second Great War; watching the footage of Vietnam; of the Falklands; of the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans...

And now Lana was getting bored of Spain, she wanted to travel, she wanted to go to Russia and the Far East... Only, just as they had been finalising the arrangements, Jacques had sensed Kaz opening her soul to the two soldiers.

He understood her reasons for refusing to embrace Terry Thorne and his friend Dino. She had come from nothing and been given everything. He, on the other hand, had been given no choice. He had been chosen and taken and had had to leave behind his family- his son and daughter and wife. He had been forced to leave them behind or watch them die...

And now Kaz loved Terry Thorne too deeply to rip him away from his son...

Human involvement in vampire society was not to be nurtured. Humanity would willingly pay a high price for the secrets they believed the vampire held. Terry and Dino may be true to Kaz, but there were others who were not, others who would willingly track her down, killing Terry and Dino if necessary to get to her. And once the existence of one vampire had been proven to society, the bloodbath would be unimaginable.

His choices were limited, but a decision had to be made and made soon. He could bring Terry and Dino into the fold. Or he could kill them. Or he could simply kill Kaz...

So... what to do?

---

"What do you mean, we've to stay away?" Ali demanded.

"It's perfectly simple," Chris told him. "Kaz has asked us to stay away from her and the house until she gets back in touch with us."

Ali surged to his feet, eyes flashing anger. "I knew that bloody soldier would cause trouble!"

"It's not Terry..." Chris tried.

But Ali wasn't listening. He stormed towards the door. "If she thinks I'm going to stand back and let her do this, she has another thing coming!"

"Ali!" Chris shouted, running after him. She caught him by the arm, pulling him to a stop.

He jerked his arm free, turning on her. "Just cause you've got the hots for the other one!"

"It's nothing to do with that, Ali! Please just listen!"

"I'm not listening to anything else until I find out what the hell is going on!" Ali yelled at her, spinning on his heel and reaching for the jacket hanging on the peg by the door.

"Jacques de Lusignan is here."

Chris had spoken almost too quietly for Ali to hear, but the name stopped him dead in his tracks. Jacket in his hand he turned. "What...?"

"Jacques de Lusignan is here. He's at the tollhouse now."

Ali looked at her for a long moment, his eyes wide. "Bloody hell," he breathed.

"Kaz doesn't want us around for a while. It's too long since she's seen him, she's not sure of him. And he paid a visit to Terry last night. Terry didn't say anything, but I think that's why he came back up here so soon."

Ali shook his head, deep in thought. "I don't like this. I don't like this one little bit..."

His anger had dissolved, replaced by a nagging unease. First Kaz had gone all love struck over Thorne, so much so that she had starved herself. And now her sire had turned up... Deep in his gut he knew that the two incidents were connected, even though he wasn't sure how. But he also knew Kaz well enough to realise that she was only trying to protect Chris, Karen and him.

Ali walked across, hugging Chris, telling her softly, "I'm sorry."

She returned the hug, assuring him, "It's okay. You were only worried."

He pulled away, asking, "Are you?"

Chris nodded slowly, her eyes telling him everything he needed to know as she admitted, "Yes. I'm worried."

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## **Part Twelve** *(back to top)*

Terry sat at the kitchen table, nursing a mug of coffee. Jacques de. Lusignan confused him... And even more confusing now, that he had had. time to consider it, was the fact that Kaz had lied to Jacques. He. had meant to ask her why. He had meant to discuss the whole. situation with her earlier, but things had taken another direction...

He smiled, remembering the cool touch of her hands on his skin, the. exquisite pain that drove deep into his neck as she bit down to draw. the first mouthful of his blood. They were bound together in a way. that he couldn't understand, but had no wish to break. He realised. now that he had never been in love with his wife. He had cared for. her deeply, loved her, still respected her, but he had not been \*in\*. love with her.

Not like Kaz... There again, he had never met anyone quite like Kaz. before. He laughed softly. Was that any wonder? She was a. vampire. How many people could remember having met a vampire? And. here he was having met two...

Which brought him back to the question that had been troubling him. since he had woken to find Kaz snuggled against him. Why had she. lied to Jacques? What had happened



before he and Chris arrived that. had made Kaz tell Jacques that Chris was a friend of Mark's?

The kitchen door opened and he turned.

Jacques de Lusignan smiled at him. "The coffee smells good."

"There's loads in the pot," Terry told him, looking back down into. his mug.

Jacques walked across to the percolator, pulling a mug from the. stand. Then he told Terry quietly, "I must go soon."

"Oh," Terry replied flatly, mustering as much disinterest in his. voice as he could.

Jacques turned, watching the human soldier for a moment. "I have a. desire to see Moscow..." he said softly, padding slowly and silently. towards him.

Terry lifted the mug, thinking of the last time he had been in the. capitol of the former Soviet Union. "Nice place," he quipped,. quirked an eyebrow. "There are some fabulous buildings."

Jacques stopped behind him, looking at the graceful curve of the. human's neck where the hair had been cropped short. Kaz had fed from. him not long ago. The marks on his neck were only partially healed.. And he had washed, the perfume of the soap, almost as fragrant as the. tang of the blood that pulsed through his veins...

Jacques reached out, murmuring softly, "Je suis désolé..."

Instinct warned Terry Thorne too late of the danger. He reacted a. heartbeat too slowly, the chair falling over backwards as he shot out. of it. The mug overturned, beginning to spread coffee across the. table as he started to run. But Jacques caught him, fingers wrapping. like steel around the tops of Terry's arms, dragging the human back. against his chest. Terry struggled to break free, helpless against. the enormous strength of the vampire as Jacques bent his head. The. aroma of the human's fear filled his nostrils, pounding with the. fragrance of his blood.

Terry fought him, kicking out. Then agony exploded as de Lusignan's. fangs sank deep into his neck. He gasped, starting to scream, to try. to warn Kaz what was happening as the vampire drew the first mouthful. of blood. But de Lusignan changed his grip, wrapping an arm round. his chest, crushing the human to him as he covered Terry's mouth with. his other hand.

The human still struggled, terror weaving with ecstasy as the vampire. held him, drawing deep drafts of blood from his veins. Terry's legs. gave way, the strength finally deserting him and he collapsed into de. Lusignan's grip. Darkness began to flutter at the edge of

his. consciousness... and still the vampire continued to drink. With a wave. of gut-wrenching panic, Terry realised that the vampire intended to. drain him completely.

He began to fight again. Desperation clawing at him, he fought for. his life, struggling against the iron grip of the vampire. But de. Lusignan was too strong... As the darkness took hold of him, ready to. drag him down into oblivion, Terry Thorne gathered the last reserves. of his strength. And screamed.

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Kaz slammed awake, sitting bolt upright in the bed, terror washing. through her. She looked round frantically, trying to locate the. source of whatever it was that had scared her so badly in her. dreams. And then, through the link, she heard Terry scream again.

She flew out of bed, wrenching the bedroom door open, terror. clutching at her as she ran down the stairs towards the kitchen,. towards where she knew he was fighting for his life. She barrelled. through the door, skittering to a stop in numb disbelief...

Jacques lifted his head, smiling at her. Then he let Terry Thorne. go, stepping backwards. Kaz watched as, almost in slow motion, the. soldier's body crumpled to the floor. With a scream of denial Kaz. rushed across, gathering him into her arms. "Terry!"

From far away Terry Thorne heard her voice calling his name. He. wanted to open his eyes, he wanted to look at her... but he was so. tired, he felt so heavy... Darkness beckoned him, promising him comfort. from the chill that was beginning to spread through his body. He. fought against it, knowing that once he succumbed he would never. return... And he didn't want to leave... not now... He couldn't leave now....

"Cold..." he murmured, beginning to shiver.

Kaz looked up at Jacques, anger and hatred flashing in her eyes. De. Lusignan stepped back, unprepared for the vehemence he saw there,. realising suddenly that he had miscalculated, that he had made a very. grave mistake. But it was too late now; there was nothing he could. do. In a few more moments Terry Thorne's heart would finally give up. the struggle to pump what was left of the life giving liquid through. his body. Nothing could help the human now. His mortal life was. coming to and end.

"Get out!" Kaz told Jacques, her voice dangerously quiet, the anger. in her eyes replaced by a cold, dark loathing that threatened a. violence that de Lusignan knew he would be unable to protect himself. against. "Get out now. While you still can!"

Jacques de Lusignan bowed formally, acknowledging the threat,. acknowledging the sudden changed in their status. She was still his. progeny... but he was now her enemy.

He closed his eyes for a brief moment, remorse welling to the. surface. Then he walked past Kaz and Terry, closing the door quietly. behind him.

Kaz looked back down at Terry, caressing the human's face, holding him, rocking him gently, sensing the last, vibrant spark of life. beginning to fade. He was so pale, his breathing shallow and. laboured. For the first time in two hundred years she felt tears. course slowly down her cheeks.

//Kaz...?//

His voice through the link was almost a whisper. She cradled him in. her arms, dropping her head to kiss him gently on the lips. //Hush,. my love... I am here...//

//Don't leave me... Don't let me go...//

Joy vied with terror. She understood what he was asking of her. The. meaning behind his words was crystal clear. But she had to be. sure... //Terry?//

The darkness was pulling at him, dragging him down. He fought. against it, struggling to stay above it. But it was too strong, he. was too weak... //Kaz?// he pleaded, //Help me...//

"Always!" she murmured softly.

Lifting his wrist she bit down, hearing the catch in his breath,. drawing what little was left of his blood. Then she bit her own. wrist, holding it to his mouth, letting the vampire blood drip slowly. onto his lips and into his mouth. Then she drew him up, kissing him. deeply. She felt his body go rigid in her grip and pulled away,. laying him gently on the tile floor of the kitchen.

Terry Thorne took his last mortal breath. And let it go in a burning. scream of agony. His body collapsed, his head lolling to the side.

Kaz waited, panic slowly beginning to clutch at her as the seconds. dragged towards minutes and he remained still and lifeless on the. floor. It wasn't working... God, it wasn't working... What had she done. wrong? What had she forgotten? Was there something that Jacques. hadn't told her about bringing a mortal over into the vampire. existence?

She crawled over to him, gently caressing his face, reaching down. through the link, //Terry? Terry?//

But there was nothing, no movement, no spark of life, only darkness...

She looked at him, shaking her head in horror, unable to believe that. he wasn't going to move, that he wasn't going to open his eyes... She. gathered him up into her arms, rocking him gently, talking to him,. searching for him, coaxing him to come awake. But the minutes drew. slowly out and still he lay lifelessly in her arms.

The pain began in her chest, slowly expanding through her, driving up. her throat into a howl of denial that ripped out of her. She rocked. him, screaming his name, clutching his

body to her as if willpower. alone would bring this man, who had so much life, back from the death. that Jacques had brought to him.

At some point she collapsed. Lying beside him, her mind numb to. everything but him, she traced the lines of his face with her. fingers, feeling his skin grow cold as the sun climbed higher into. the sky.

---

Kaz listened to the buzz of the ringer on the other end of the. telephone, still not quite sure what she was going to say. But she. needed help. She couldn't think clearly. Instinct alone had brought. her this far. She sank to the floor as she heard the American. accent, "Hello?"

"Dino?"

The voice was soft, devoid of life. Dino sat forward, knowing. immediately that something was wrong. "Kaz?"

"Dino..." The words wouldn't come. She couldn't find the words to tell. him.

"Kaz?" Panic flickered briefly in the pit of his stomach. "What is. it? What's wrong?"

"Terry..." Her voice broke, "Oh, God, it's Terry..."

Dino's training kicked in, taking over. "Kaz," he ordered calmly and. softly, "take it slow. Tell me what's wrong."

There was a long pause and then her voice whispered, "He's dead..."

An image flashed in Dino's mind of Jacques holding Terry, fangs. driven deep into the Australian's neck. And then another of Terry. lying sprawled on the floor of the kitchen at the tollhouse. With the. images came a wash of grief that slammed him back against the chair.. Only his training held him together, helped him to remain detached. enough to function. He had a situation to deal with. Once it was. resolved he could grieve for Terry. Blindly he reached for the. timetable to check flight times, asking, "Is Jacques still there?"

"No..."

The word was almost a moan, full of pain. He had no idea what she was. going through, but from the images in his mind he knew that she had. almost certainly seen Jacques kill Terry. And that meant she had to. be very close to the edge. "Kaz, listen to me," he told her. "I'll be. in Dundee by five! Stay where you are! Do you understand?"

"Yes..."

But her voice sounded vague and distracted. "Kaz, do you understand?". he asked more forcibly.

"Yes," she told him.

"Good girl. Now I need to go. Someone will be with you soon, okay?"

"Yes."

"Good. Stay put!" He rang off, searching through his numbers for Chris's mobile. He punched in the number, hoping that she hadn't. turned it off, but it rang and her voice answered. "Hello?"

"Chris! It's Dino, I need you to go to Kaz. And I need someone to. pick me up at Dundee airport at five."

On the other end of the phone Chris frowned. "Um... sure..." she told. him, "but Kaz asked us not to go to the house..."

Not having the time to argue the point, Dino told her. bluntly, "Chris, Terry's dead. Kaz needs you."

Chris felt the blood draining from her face and for a moment the. world swam. Then it righted itself and she found herself already. thinking about what she was going to do. "Someone will pick you up,". she assured him. "And I'll go to Kaz now."

She put the phone down and pushed herself to her feet, walking. through to the senior partner's office. "Bill, I have to go. They. think my friend's boyfriend has just been killed. She has no-one. else..."

Bill Patrick stood up, walking round the desk towards her, concerned. by how pale she was. "Do you need someone to take you?" he asked. gently.

She shook her head, "No... I'll be fine. I'll phone you and let you. know what's happening."

"All right, Chris."

She turned, walking back to her office, her mind beginning to run.... Terry was dead. Terry was dead... Had it been Jacques de Lusignan?. Was that why he had suddenly appeared after all this time? She lifted. her jacket and briefcase, walking out of the office and down to the. car. Was that why Kaz had asked them to stay away? Was that what she. had meant about Jacques having changed?

Another thought swam suddenly to the surface. Kaz hadn't known that. Terry was coming back up to Perth. Something had happened down in. London that had made Terry rush up

here, unannounced, to be with Kaz.. And now that she thought about it, Terry hadn't seemed surprised to see Jacques there... And Kaz had lied about how she had met Terry.

She opened the car door, sliding into the driver's seat and dropped her phone into the hands-free holder. She closed the door, turned the engine on then hit the recall button on her phone to call Ali. What the hell was going on? Why had Kaz lied? What had happened in London?

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### **Part Thirteen** *(back to top)*

By the time Chris reached the tollhouse the clouds that had been gathering during the afternoon finally opened, the rain drumming on the windshield as she drew to a halt and switched off the engine. Pulling her collar up she opened the door, slamming it shut as she ran for the kitchen door. As usual, it was unlocked.

She stopped dead, standing in the open doorway, the rain battering off the ground behind her. Kaz was curled asleep on the floor in the corner of the kitchen, telephone still clutched to her chest. Terry was lying on his back close to the kitchen table beside an overturned chair. Coffee had spilled into the floor to lie in dark puddles.

Chris closed the door.

Leaving Kaz as she was, Chris walked slowly towards Terry, kneeling beside him. She knew that it was futile, but she still checked his wrist and his neck for a pulse. His skin was cold beneath her fingers, his skin pale. There were blemishes on his face, as if a hand had been clamped over his mouth. And the unhealed bite marks on his neck told her that someone had fed from him and he had died before the marks had had a chance to heal.

He had been drained...

The realisation shocked through her. Until now she had been able to hope that it had been an accident, that some terrible misfortune had cost Terry Thorne his life... But now, with the evidence there before her, there was no other conclusion she could come to. But who? Jacques? Kaz?

Chris looked across at the curled body of the vampire who had befriended her almost a decade ago when she had been ready to climb onto the railings of the Queen's Bridge and throw herself into the freezing winter waters of the River Tay. The soft voice at her side had startled her. "Bit final wouldn't you say?"

She had turned, looking into the most amazing pair of eyes she had ever seen. Then the redheaded woman had looked away, leaning over to gaze down into the black movement of the river, "Not to mention bloody cold..."

She had said nothing, captivated by this woman who had the audacity to tell her how she should end her own life, wanting nothing more than to gaze back into the depths of the redhead's eyes again... Then the woman had turned, capturing her soul in the predatory gaze that Chris had come to know so well, "Wouldn't you rather be lying in a nice warm bath? Cutting your wrists would have the same effect. But at least you'd be warm."

Chris had found herself unable to answer as she fell deeper and deeper into the redhead's eyes. The woman had smiled at her. "Or if you really want to do away with yourself, I can think of another, more pleasurable way." The woman's eyes had changed colour, drawing Chris further down, trapping her in her own body. The voice, when the woman spoke again, was slow and hypnotic, "Now normally I prefer a nice young man, but if you're serious about giving up that life of yours, then throwing it into a freezing river or letting it flow away in a nice, warm bath would be a terrible waste of a valuable resource..."

"What..." Chris had managed, finally, "What do you mean...?"

Then, for the first time, she had seen the fangs, sharp, deadly and hypnotic and the woman's voice when she spoke was low, almost a growl, "Do you really want to die, lassie?"

The eyes had searched Chris's soul, seeking out the truth. And even the flash of surprise on the woman's face when she saw the answer hadn't stopped Chris from answering truthfully and sincerely, "Yes."

That was the first night she had ever spent in this tollhouse. Kaz had filled her full of wine and listened as she sobbed her heart out. Then she had taken her wrist, bitten down harshly and drunk from her until the darkness had fluttered at the edge of her vision. Only then had Kaz pulled away, covered her with a blanket. "If you still want to die in the morning, lassie," she had told her, "then I'll oblige."

Then she had been left alone to fall asleep in front of a roaring fire.

Was it possible that the woman who had shown her such kindness, the woman she had come to know so well over the next nine years had done this to the only man Chris had ever seen Kaz fall for? In the back of her mind a niggling doubt pushed up to be heard, fuelled by the night not so long ago when Kaz had attacked Dino...

But that had been because she was so weak! Hadn't it?

Was it possible that even after so long away from her, Jacques de Lusignan had still had such a hold over Kaz that he could goad her into draining Terry...?

Something had been going on... Otherwise why had Kaz lied to him...?

Chris climbed slowly to her feet. There was no point in all this supposition. And it had, after all, been Dino who asked her to come here, to be with Kaz. If he had believed that Kaz had killed Terry he wouldn't have been so worried about the redheaded vampire... With his contacts he would probably have called in some specialist team to burn the place down...

With a heavy heart, Chris climbed the stairs to the next floor. Cautiously, she checked the bedroom, but it was empty. Then she walked up the half flight of stairs to the living room. Of Jacques de Lusignan there was no sign.

Going back down to the bedroom she pulled a blanket from Kaz's bed and walked slowly down to the kitchen. Nothing had changed. Kaz and Terry still lay as they had when she had arrived. Tears flowing down her cheeks she dropped to her knees beside Terry and carefully covered his body. His skin was pale and as cold as marble

Someone knocked on the kitchen door and she looked up, sighing in relief as Ali pushed his head round the opening door. He stood, holding the door, stunned by what he saw, the silence broken only by the hiss of rain. Then he moved across to her, dropping to his knees beside her, hugging her. His eyes locked on Kaz, he asked Chris, "You okay?"

"I'll be fine," she assured him, hugging him back.

"How is she?"

Chris shook her head, "I don't know. She was like that when I found her. All I did was cover... cover Terry."

Ali held her tightly then gently suggested, "We should maybe take him out of here, get him up to the bed or something..."

Chris pulled away, nodding, dashing away the tears, "Yes..."

They stood up, gently pulling Terry into a sitting position. "I'll take him over my shoulder," Ali told her.

Chris didn't answer him. The blanket had fallen off and she gazed at Terry's neck, convinced that the bite marks had healed slightly... Then she dismissed the idea, telling herself that it was ridiculous, that Terry was dead and no amount of hoping would bring him back.

As carefully as they could, they slung Terry across Ali's shoulder. Then Chris followed the big Scotsman up the stairs as he carried Terry slowly to Kaz's bedroom. They laid the Australian soldier on the canopy bed, covering him with the blanket. Chris surreptitiously checked the marks on Terry's neck, but there was no change that she could see and she shook her head, cursing herself silently. Terry was dead.



Turning she followed Ali down the stairs. There was nothing they could do now but wait. Wait for Dino to get here. And wait until Kaz woke and could tell them what had happened.

---

Dino and Mark walked across the tarmac into the terminal building. The only luggage they had with them were the small bags they had taken into the aircraft. They walked straight through the arrivals lounge. The Scot that Dino remembered from Kaz's home was waiting in the foyer, his face drawn. Dino nodded to him and he dropped into step beside the two soldiers, leading them out towards the car. "How is she?" Dino asked softly.

"We couldn't wake her," Ali told him. "She was lying on the floor of the kitchen, clutching the phone. We couldn't get that out of her hands so we left her."

"And Terry?"

Ali glanced at him, waiting until they were outside the terminal before telling him quietly, "He'd been drained. Chris found him lying on the floor of the kitchen. We moved him up to the bedroom."

Dino nodded, saying nothing more until they got into the car. Then he asked, "Were there marks on his neck?"

"Yes," Ali confirmed, starting the car. Dino glanced over his shoulder at Mark who looked back at him, grim faced.

They drove to Perth in silence. The clouds were beginning to break up from the West. The setting sun streamed through the gaps as it disappear behind the hills ahead of them but Dino didn't notice, lost in thought. Faking the circumstances of someone's death wasn't too difficult when you know how. And fire tended to hide a lot of incriminating evidence, like a body having no blood in it...

He refused to acknowledge that it was Terry Thorne he was thinking about. That could come later when he had time to grieve properly, after the funeral when the ex-wife had comforted the son. Then he and Mark could get royally drunk... before they starting laying plans to hunt down Jacques de Lusignan.

He had filled Mark in on everything he knew, knowing that he would need help to clear things up in Perth. Mark had listened in numb disbelief then dropped into his same, calm, matter-of-fact attitude.

Finally they pulled up the hill towards Perth, turning left into the tollhouse drive.

Chris heard the car and ran down the stairs, pulling the kitchen door open. Mark saw her, opening the car door before Ali had even stopped. Chris saw him and ran to him, hugging him tightly as he wrapped his arms around her. He held her as Dino and Ali got out of the car then let her go. She looked at Dino, telling him, "Kaz is with Terry. I couldn't stop her!"

Ali swore, starting for the door. Dino reached out, catching hold of his arm, stopping him. Ali yanked his arm out of Dino's grip, his eyes flashing but Dino simply shook his head, telling the younger man calmly, "You and Chris have had to deal with this on your own all afternoon. We're here to help now. Will you give me five minutes with her?"

Ali looked at him. Then he looked past him to Chris. Dino turned, looking from her back to Ali. "Five minutes, that's all I ask."

Ali nodded reluctantly. Dino turned, walking into the kitchen. He climbed the stairs, knocking softly on the open bedroom door before stepping inside. "Kaz?"

The heavy curtains were drawn across the window, the room in darkness. In the light from the door he walked across to a bureau, switching on the lamp. Then he turned, looking back at the bed. She was lying, unmoving, beside Terry's blanket-covered body, curled into his side. Dino walked over, sitting on the bed beside her, touching her arm, "Kaz?"

She didn't move and for a moment Dino wondered if she could hear him. "Kaz?"

"I tried," she said softly, her voice as flat and as devoid of emotion as it had been on the phone. "I tried to save him... He wanted me to save him, he asked me to..."

"I know..." he told her.

But she went on as if she'd never heard him, "I tried, I really did... but it didn't work..." She clutched at the blanket, "I don't know why... I did everything... But he still left me..."

Dino looked at her, wondering if he was understanding her correctly. But she didn't mean...? She couldn't mean...? He moved closer to her, taking her arm, "Kaz? How did you try to save him?"

But she said nothing, as if she hadn't heard him. "Kaz?" He pulled her up. The blanket, still clutched in her hands, came with her, uncovering Terry's face. "Kaz? What do mean? How did you try to save him?"

She looked through him, frowning, "He'd taken everything... there was nothing left... he was dying..."

Dino shook her gently, demanding, "Kaz?"

She finally looked him, "Dino...?"

"Kaz," he pushed, "How did you try to save Terry? I don't understand!"

She looked at him, her eyes wide. "Jacques had left him nothing..." she told him.  
"Nothing... And Terry didn't want to go. I tried, I let him drink... but it didn't work..."

"Let him drink?" Dino asked. "You made him a vampire?"

She shook her head, "I tried... but it didn't work... he didn't wake up..." She groaned, clutching at him, "Oh, God, it didn't work..."

Dino folded her in his arms, looking across at Terry. His skin was pale but it looked as if he was simply asleep, as if he would sit up at any moment with that cheeky smile and yell, "Ha! Fooled ya, mate!"

Movement at the door pulled his attention away from Terry. Ali and Chris were standing at the door. Chris walked over, resting her hand on Kaz's head in the only gesture of comfort she could think of, looking at Terry. Her stomach flipped, her eyes going wide. "Ali?" she called softly.

He moved toward her, standing behind her, looking at Terry. Then he too saw it and swore. Dino looked up at them, "What?"

"His neck..." Ali began as Chris walked quickly round to the other side of the bed. "The bite marks have gone..."

Dino turned, looking at Terry again, demanding, "What do you mean, they've gone?"

Chris was running her fingers gently over the skin of Terry's neck, "They've healed..."

Kaz lifted her head, "What...?"

"The bite marks on Terry's neck! They've healed!"

Kaz looked at Terry, not quite believing it. But they were right: the marks had healed. She glanced round at the draped window, allowing her grief dampened senses to open again, realising that the sun had gone down, that darkness was beginning to close in. Was it possible? Could it simply have been that Jacques had omitted to tell her that you had to wait until the next sunset?

"Out!" she ordered. "All of you. Get out!"

"Kaz?" Dino tried.

She looked at him, "Dino, if he wakes up, he's going to be weak and hungry. He may not know what he's doing..."

Snatches of memory, of the night that Kaz had attacked him, flashed through Dino's mind. Without another word he let her go, getting to his feet. "We'll be right outside," Ali assured her.

She smiled at him, taking his hand, squeezing it in thanks. Chris smiled at her, following Ali and Dino out of the room, closing the door quietly.

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**Part Fourteen** *(back to top)*

Kaz had pulled the curtains open and put out the light. The clouds had broken up completely, scudding across a moon that draped a slow block of silver across the carpet towards the bed. Eyes closed, mind open, Kaz sat beneath the window and waited. Finally, deep in the back of her mind, she felt the first stirrings in the link that bound her to Terry Thorne.

Smiling widely, despite the apprehension deep in her heart, she opened her eyes. Pushing herself off of the floor, she walked across, standing for a moment and looking down at the lines of his face, the strength of his body... Then she lay down on the bed beside him, resting her head on his chest. She missed the strong, rhythmic thud of his heart, missed the scent of the blood flowing through his veins. But that was all in the past. Now there was nothing but the future...

She closed her eyes again, holding him, letting him sense her presence as the link grew slowly stronger and he surfaced from death.

He snapped awake with a small cry, eyes flying open, memories slamming into clarity. "Shh," Kaz comforted, lying still, letting him come to terms with who he now was, what he now was.

"Kaz?" he whispered desperately, unprepared for the intricacies of light and shadow that his vampire sight gave him.

"Hush, love, I'm here..."

Dread clutched at him, "Jacques...?"

"He's gone," she assured him. "I sent him away... But we'll find him again."

He heard the vengeance in her voice and lifted his hand, running his fingers up her back, feeling the softness of her hair. There was a gnawing ache, deep in the pit of his belly. His arm tightened round her. Kaz clung to him, saying nothing, remembering how she had reacted when she had first woken to a vampire existence.

He would be weak. And he would be vulnerable to extremes of light until he had fed... "You are hungry," she whispered.

It wasn't a question. He turned his head, laying his cheek against the top of her head. "It hurts..."

"It's the hunger," she smiled. "You need to feed."

She tried to push herself up but he held on to her, "Kaz..."

There was desperation in his voice, almost like a child who was being forced to do something they were terrified to do. She lay back beside him, letting him hold her. Then, finally, she pushed herself gently away from him again. "You must feed..." she told him softly. "But I'll be here, I promise."

He nodded. She smiled, kissing him gently on the lips. He moaned softly, returning the kiss, holding her. He pushed his tongue between her teeth and she let him plunder her mouth, running her hand down his chest. He could smell the scent of her perfume, but there was something else, a heavier scent that he could also taste in her mouth. He wrapped his arms round her, holding her, the kiss growing more desperate as he tried to taste more of the aroma.

She heard him growl, deep in the back of his throat and tried to pull away. He wouldn't let her go. But she was stronger than he was... for the moment. She pushed herself on top of him, straddling him, bracing her hands on his shoulders, holding him down.

He moaned in dismay, trying to get to her, the fangs sliding slowly down into place, as he looked at her, eyes wild. She held him, waiting for the mild frenzy to pass, waiting for him to calm down. Then she dipped her head, brushing her lips against his once more. Voice light, almost laughing, she murmured, "I told you that you needed to feed..."

"You smell so good..." he growled.

She smiled. Then she grew serious once more. "Terry, you need to feed, but you have to do exactly as I tell, when I tell you."

"Okay..."

"It's important that you do," she pushed gently. "If you don't, you might harm Dino or Mark..."

The last residue of the frenzy was swept aside by her words. Eyes suddenly clear and focussed, he asked, "Dino...?" Then he broke off, feeling the sharp vampire fangs in his mouth for the first time. He ran his tongue over them, looking at her open mouthed.

She grinned at his reaction to feeling the fangs for the first time and nodded, "Dino and Mark are here. So are Chris and Ali. And I won't allow them to be harmed. You must do exactly as I say."

"I understand..."

She looked at him, then grinned and moved off of him, helping him to stand up. His legs wouldn't hold his weight and he dropped back down onto the bed. Apprehension flared in his eyes and she kissed him, assuring him, "You're only weak because you need to feed."

He nodded, swallowing hard, accepting her help as he tried to stand, letting her hold him and support his weight as they moved towards the door.

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Dino surged to his feet as he heard the bedroom door open. Ali glanced at him. Mark's grip on Chris's hand tightened. All of them looked towards the living room door. They heard the slow steps up the stairs. Then Kaz led Terry in. The aroma he had smelled before on Kaz was thick in the room. Terry staggered slightly under the weight of it, suddenly recognising it for what it was... Blood. Human blood...

The hunger ripped through him and he dug his fingers into Kaz's shoulder, feeling his legs begin to buckle. But she held him close, steadying him, keeping him upright until he found the strength to stand. Dino was whooping in delight, rushing across to hug his Aussie friend tightly. Mark stood up, grinning but not letting go of Chris's hand. Dino pulled away then gasped as he saw his friend's eyes... Pale, azure green...

For a long moment they looked at one another, Terry light-headed from the overpowering perfume of blood, unsure of how to deal with Dino's reaction, Dino almost mesmerised by the changes he began to see in Terry. It wasn't just the eyes, or the fangs: there was something different, something almost predatory about him now. Then Dino shook his head, stepping back in and folding Terry in another hug. "God it's good to see you. We thought we'd lost you."

Terry smiled, "And you always told me that I was too mean to die, mate..."

He looked across at Mark as Dino pulled away. The British soldier had also seen the differences. And he was still grinning. "You look good, buddy," Mark quipped.

"You too," Terry assured him.

"He needs to feed," Kaz interrupted, softly but insistently, feeling Terry beginning to sway against her again.

They all looked at her. She smiled back at them and led Terry over to sit on the sofa. Only then did the others see how weak he seemed, his steps slow and careful, leaning on

Kaz for support. Mark's grip on Chris's hand tightened. She held his in both of hers, trying to reassure him.

Dino was already pushing the sleeve of his sweater up, unbuttoning the shirt cuff. "Christ," he muttered good-naturedly as he sat down beside Terry and offered his wrist. "The things I find myself doing for friends..."

Terry looked at the soft skin that Dino was holding in front of him, the blood flowing so strongly that its aroma pulsed over him in waves with every beat of the American's heart. The world narrowed to the perfume of it, calling to him, beckoning him, promising release from the pain that was almost engulfing him. He reached out, taking hold of Dino's arm...

Then the soft touch of Kaz's hand on his shoulder dragged him back from the bloodlust... He stayed still, eyes fixed on the pulse in Dino's wrist, but his attention on Kaz.

"Gently," she murmured.

He was aware that Mark had moved to stand protectively above Dino, that Chris and Ali had also moved closer so that they could pull Terry away from Dino if things got out of hand. A thought, ridiculous in its frivolity swam into his mind and he smiled.

Dino looked at him and he shot the American a smile, explaining, "First Blood..."

Dino laughed softly, "Yeh, okay Rambo! You gonna drink or what?"

Slowly, Terry bent towards Dino's wrist, turning his arm slightly, instinct pushing him to exactly the right spot. He opened his mouth. And bit down.

He heard Dino gasp and a flutter of panic raced through him. Then the first rush of blood was pouring into his mouth and he moaned, the tang of the thick, warm liquid driving everything else from his mind... except the soft touch of link with Kaz and the gentle grip of her hand on his shoulder.

He forced himself to concentrate, relishing the taste and the aroma, savouring it as he swallowed and felt the warmth slid down his throat into his belly. He took another slow mouthful, then a third...

The hunger dulled to a nagging ache...

And then Kaz was telling him to let go, her grip tightening on his shoulder. //Enough, my love!//

He let go of Dino with a gasp of delight and frustration. But then Mark was helping Dino to his feet and Chris was taking the American's place, offering her wrist...

He forced himself to take her slowly, tasting the slight difference in her blood, the small increase in the metallic tang...

And then Mark had taken her place...

Terry bit down, tasting yet another difference... The warmth spread through him, expanding from his gut as his body adjusted to the intake of the precious liquid, feeling the strength returning to his muscles...

Then Kaz was calling to him again, warning him to pull away. He let Mark go, leaning back against the sofa, lost in the warmth pulsing through him, the tang of the blood in his mouth and the aroma of it in his nostrils. He knew that Kaz was pulling him to his feet and guiding him carefully towards the door. She was talking to him, her mind caressing his, their thoughts intermingled.

He opened his eyes as she helped him sit down on the bed. The perfume of human blood was gone, banished with the closing of the door. He looked deeply into her eyes, smelling the vampire blood in her veins, the musky scent of her perfume and the fragrance of her hair. She stood in front of him, her mind open to him.

He reached up, drawing her down on top of him as he lay back on the bed. Her hair fell around their faces, a curtain of scent as she held herself above him. Lifting his hand, he cupped the back of her head, pulling her down to kiss her, his tongue pushing into her mouth, devouring her.

She let him roll her over to lie beneath him, her fingers undoing the buttons of his jeans. He lifted himself off her, letting her slide the jeans over his hips to free his hardening manhood. Then she was flipping him back over onto his back, pulling away from him. He growled, reaching out to catch hold of her.

She laughed, lightly, hauling the jeans down his legs and discarding them on the floor. Then she pulled the shift over her head. He gasped, watching her skin shining silver in the light from the moon. Then she was crawling up him, straddling his legs to unbutton his shirt. He sat up, letting her slide it down his arms and discard it on the floor by the edge of the bed.

He reached for her again, but she stopped him getting to her, shoving him back down onto the bed, kissing him soundly on the mouth. He responded, holding her, plundering her with his tongue as she ravished him with hers.

Then she was pulling away, trailing kisses down his jaw towards his neck, licking and suckling at the tender flesh. He growled again, deep in his throat, winding his hands in her hair and holding her tightly to him. When she moved the kiss towards his collarbone he cried out in frustration. Only to have his protests smothered by her mouth once more.



And then she moved again, running her tongue and fingers down his chest, pulling a gasp of delight from him. Her fingers and tongue continued to move, exploring his body, letting him revel in the vampire senses, her mind telling him exactly what she wanted to do with him - until he was moaning in a wave of sensation.

Then, and only then, did she let him take control again.

He sensed her submission. Wrapping his arms around her he kissed her brutally, revelling in the scent of her, the smell of her hair, the aroma of the vampire blood that pulsed through her veins, tantalizing him. He rolled her over, pinning her down, suckling her neck then moving lower to capture one breast in his mouth, hearing her gasp in delight. He ran his tongue around the bud, feeling it harden beneath his touch. She moaned, writhing against him...

Growling softly, he pushed himself away, looking into the depths of her eyes. Azure green met emerald. He let go of one of her arms, running his hand down her thigh and smiling wickedly as he felt the tremble; not just through her body, but also through the link... She trailed her hand down his back and he let her other arm go, bracing himself above her and guiding himself to the lips of her sex.

Her fingers traced his back. Then, roughly, he thrust himself inside her, burying himself to the hilt. They both gasped, her nails digging into his skin as his senses almost overloaded. For a long moment, they simply looked at one another. Then he began to move, each thrust sending ecstasy through his core until he pounded against her with a desperation that he had never felt before, driving himself further into the agony of pleasure, losing himself completely.

She tilted her hips, rising to meet him, her nails digging into the skin of his back, her head flung back as she abandoned herself to the pleasure of his touch and the caress of his mind against hers...

The climax took them both at the same time. But something pushed Terry on, an instinctive need that Kaz answered with previous memories. As he shuddered to a stop inside her, the wave crashing down on him, he dragged her up, his fangs finding her neck as her head dropped back and she moaned in his grip.

Then another wave smashed through them both as he bit down and drew the first mouthful of vampire blood. He swallowed and threw his head back, hissing in delight. The taste was exquisite... the metallic tang more muted and less sharp against his tongue than the human blood he had tasted before, like the difference between a dry and a full-bodied wine... Holding her more tightly he dropped his head again and sank his fangs into her neck a second time.

She moaned, clutching at him and he drew a third mouthful, then a fourth...

Then as she collapsed in his grip he lifted his head away, licking the wounds, running his tongue up her neck to her mouth, kissing her gently but deeply. She trembled in his arms and, exhausted, he smiled. He moved off of her, to lie at her side; one arm holding her close; his head nestled against her shoulder. She moved her head to lay it gently on top of his, her other hand stroking his hair.

"Kaz...?" he murmured.

"Hush, love," she told him. "Sleep..."

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### **Part Fifteen** *(back to top)*

When Terry's presence through the link had faded into sleep, she gently extricated herself from his grip, climbing out of the bed and walking round towards the door. She paused at the foot of the bed, scooping up the discarded shift. Turning, smiling at the glow of his skin in the moonlight, she pulled the shift over her head and moved quietly to the door.

Someone had put music on and the soft tones covered her footfall as she padded up the few steps to the living room. They were all still there, talking in hushed voices. She smiled, standing at the door listening to the gently conversation for a moment before asking, "If you're talking about me, it had better all be bad..."

They all jumped. Chris gave a small cry of surprise, her hand flying to her mouth. Dino grinned, "Christ, Kaz! Are you trying to kill us?" Then his grin faded, "How is he?"

"Asleep," she told them, walking over to sink onto the sofa beside Ali, resting against him when he put his arms round her.

"He seemed so weak..." Mark ventured.

"Aye," she confirmed, then assured him, "as we all are at first. He'll grow stronger over the next few days. Although he'll need to feed more regularly than me..."

"We'll be here when he..." Dino began. Then he stopped, smiling again, amending, "when you both need us."

She saw the look that Mark gave Dino and asked gently, "What's going on?"

"We were thinking," Mark began, Chris curling into him, holding his arm, "about the other night, when you first met Dino..."

"The danger of a mob at your back," the American reminded her, "intent on destroying you because the priests had damned you as an animal to be torn apart and sent back to hell..."

Ali's arm tightened around her and she leant her head on his shoulder, more to give him comfort than to take comfort from him as Mark continued, ""We promised you that night that the mob would have to get through us first..." He sighed, looking away, "Then we failed you."

Kaz looked from him to Dino, "Failed me?"

"And Terry," Dino confirmed.

"But," she asked, touched by their remorse but not understanding the reason for their guilt, "how?"

"We should never have let Terry come back up here alone after de Lusignan showed up in London," Dino told her. "We shouldn't have allowed either of you to be alone with him..."

"You weren't comfortable at him being here," Chris pointed out. "Why else would you have asked us all to stay away?"

"So we've come to a decision..." Mark told her.

"We know that our being here probably wouldn't have stopped de Lusignan attacking Terry..." Dino admitted, "but at least you wouldn't have had to deal with it alone."

"And we wouldn't have felt so damned helpless," Ali put in softly.

"We know that these guys have been looking out for you and that they've done a damned good job," Dino went on, "but things have gotten a little more sinister..."

"And we're assuming that you might want to go after de Lusignan..." Mark added. "But even if you don't, you need a lot more protection now than you have done."

She smiled at them, asking simply, "So what do you suggest?"

"That you feed regularly from at least one of us," Ali told her. "So that at least one of us is linked to you almost all the time."

"Then we at least have a fighting chance of protecting you," Dino finished.

"And when Terry's strong enough, he can feed from us too," Chris added.

"When you've fed from us," Ali reminded her, "we've stayed with you longer each time."

She looked at them then took Ali's hand. "I can't accept..."

"Why the hell not?" Dino asked

"I cannot accept you giving your lives over completely to protecting us..."

"Kaz," Mark told her, "I'm a soldier, I'm in the protection business!"

Dino held up his hand, announcing, "Ditto!"

"Kaz we've been looking out for you for so long now that it's become an integral part of our lives," Ali told her.

"You have no idea how dull it gets when you're not in our heads..." Chris laughed. "We've all become Vamp-in-the-head junkies!" Then her face grew serious, her eyes sparkling with unshed tears, "Kaz, Teo would have found you again. Jacques would have come after him. And if you had never befriended us, you would have gone through it all alone... You would have had no-one to turn to when you thought he was dead..."

More importantly, Kaz thought, I would have been unprepared for him waking...

And that would have been disastrous. She remembered her own awakening, the hunger that tore at her, the two young men that Jacques had arranged to be sent to their room so that she could feed without the danger of taking her hunting. Trying to cope with a newborn in frenzy would be impossible on a hunt... The only thing that had truly staved off Terry's frenzy had been the thought of hurting his friends. But she knew how much the concentration had cost him in strength...

Mark was putting his arm round Chris. The tears were escaping from her eyes, slipping slowly down her cheeks. Chris let them fall, looking into Kaz's eyes and reminding her softly, "And without you befriending me, I would be lying at the bottom of the river..."

Kaz smiled, her memories sliding back to the image of the young woman clambering over the edge of the bridge. "Bit final wouldn't you say..." she murmured.

Chris laughed, "Not to mention bloody cold..."

Mark's grip had tightened round Chris's shoulders. He looked at Kaz. "We promised to protect you from the mob. Will you make us break our word?"

Ali held his free wrist out to her, asking, "Well?"

She looked at them for a long moment. Then, gently, she took Ali's wrist, turning it slightly and biting down, hearing his small cry of pleasure as she drew the first, perfumed, mouthful of blood from his veins...

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The girl in Jacques de Lusignan's arms gasped, clutching at him as he shuddered to a stop inside her. She tilted her head, offering her neck, but he rolled off of her, lying beside her. Miffed, she turned onto her side, reaching for him and pouting, "Jacques..."

"Oui...?"

He had come back, hoping to lose himself in Lana, hoping to drive away the memory of red hair and green eyes in Lana's dark curls and deep brown pools, the sinister emptiness where Kaz's gentle touch had once been, gnawing at him... He should have known better. Of all his progeny, Kaz's had been the strongest link, the one he had stayed with longer than any other, the only one he had allowed to live when he had left them.

Lana trailed a finger across his chest, "You were away so long!" She moved closer, her hair falling over his chest as she licked delicately at a nipple, murmuring, "I missed you."

"Je sais, ma petite...I missed you also..."

But his voice told her a different story. She lifted her head, looking at him, her eyes flashing. With a grunt of disgust she pushed herself onto her knees and climbed over him, out of the bed. "Fine!"

He closed his eyes, no longer amused by her mood swings and the petulance. "What is it now...?"

"Nothing!" she drawled sarcastically, dragging on a pair of slacks. "Absolutely nothing! You drop everything and go running off to some backwater in the middle of nowhere and then when you do come back your mind is still on her! What happened? Wouldn't she let you sleep with her?"

"Lana," he warned softly.

She either ignored him or didn't hear him. "Did you come crawling back to me because she wouldn't let you fuck her?"

His temper snapped. Launching himself off of the bed, he caught her by the throat, slamming her against the wall. "I am your Sire, Childe!" he hissed at her. "And I will have your respect!"

The terror in her eyes disgusted him because he knew that he was the cause... And that only fuelled the anger that had erupted inside him, anger at Lana's pettiness: anger at Kaz's stubbornness: anger at the depth of the bond between Thorne and Kazlyn that had driven the idiocy of his own actions: anger at his own stupidity. He forced Lana's head to the side, sinking his fangs into her neck, drawing deeply on her blood as she struggled against him. Only when she collapsed in his arms, her blood almost drained, did horror stab a disgusted sanity through him.

Crying out softly in revulsion, he swept Lana into his arms, murmuring soft apologies to her as carried her across to the bed. He laid her down gently, lying beside her, gathering her in his arms and caressing her hair.

The sanity brought with it a clarity that had eluded him since he had first sensed Kaz opening her soul to Terry and Dino...

He bit his wrist, letting Lana lap weakly from the wound. Only when he saw her strength returning did he allow himself to consider his actions and the reactions over the previous few days. Remorse flowed silently in to replace the anger. There was nothing else he could do but admit that he had acted rashly, without thinking things through, letting his excitement control his behaviour. He had made a grave, possibly irreparable, mistake. And then he had compounded it by deserting them.

The fault had been his and, in truth, he had never meant to leave her for so long. She had been the first progeny he had allowed to go free... because he could not destroy the vivacity or the joie de vivre that sang through her vampire veins. He had roamed the whole of Europe and had found no other vampire presence in the lush, bleak beauty of Scotland, so he had known it would be safe for him to let her live.

He had shadowed her to begin with, letting her believe she was on her own, letting her make her own mistakes under his watchful eye, knowing that it was time to let her make her own way. Then he had only meant to leave her for a short time...

But the lure of the New World had proven to be stronger than he anticipated. There was so much that was new, so much to explore, so much that piqued his thirst for knowledge that the decades had turned to a century almost before he was aware of it. Then another century had passed in Europe with Lana...

And in all that time Kaz had shown no interest in progeny, shown no interest in being other than by herself. And he had always assumed that he had time...

So the fault had been his. Yet he had made Terry pay for it... quite possibly with his life, because he had no idea what Kaz had done after he had left the toll house. From the moment, Terry Thorne's body had hit the floor of the kitchen of the house in Perth he had been unable to sense her in his mind. And the emptiness where she had once existed weighed heavily on him.

Her words echoed in his memory. //You didn't think to come back and warn me...?//

Kaz...

The truth was that he had been scared of the implications of telling her - because it was going to cause more problems than it solved. She would ask questions that he either had no answer for or was not yet prepared to answer. Deep down he knew that... but he wasn't ready to admit it. Not yet...

Sighing, holding Lana closer, he told her softly, "I can not go to Moscow with you just now, ma petite amour..."

She opened her eyes, looking up at him, her irises a pale, iridescent gold. He bent his head, kissing her gently on the forehead, explaining, "I must got back to Scotland." Pulling away slightly, he looked down at her, "Come with me...? Please?"

She closed her eyes, snuggling her head against his chest, asking simply, "When do we leave?"

"Now..." he told her. "We leave now..."

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## **Part Sixteen**

Ali and Karen were dancing in each other's arms to the lilting beat of a slow love song. Mark and Chris were also on the dance floor, his hand resting gently on her hip as she smiled and gazed up at him. Dino glanced at them, shaking his head, then turned his attention back to the job at hand, scanning the crowd with alert nonchalance, his arm around Kaz.

The vampire had her eyes closed, her senses attuned to Terry, as he hunted for the first time without her help. He was sitting behind them in the semi-darkness of a secluded corner, his tongue probing the delicate, vodka sweetness of a young blonde's mouth. He could sense Kaz's presence in his mind, watching, but not interfering, as he wove the trap around the mortal female.

He had enjoyed it more when he and Kaz hunted together, both of them communicating silently, operating almost as a single entity as they closed in on their prey and went for the kill... but being younger, he needed to feed more often than Kaz. And he also needed to learn how to hunt alone.

The floral scent of the blonde's perfume suited her, weaving an intricate pattern with the scent of the blood that pulsed beneath her skin, tantalising him with its promise. She moaned softly in dismay as the tall, muscled, Aussie soldier pulled away from her. She opened her eyes to look at him. And lost herself in the azure depths of the vampire gaze. Her breath caught in her throat, her heart beating loudly in her chest, as he smiled at her and dropped his lips to her mouth, trailing a burning path of kisses along her jaw and down onto her neck.

She gasped at the sensation as he nipped at her skin, slipping her arms round his back as he licked her neck, his hand moving up her thigh from her knees to her hip. Then she cried out as a sharp stab of ecstasy knifed through her, the suckling movement of his mouth expanding a pleasure through her from her groin, that she had only known before under the loving fingers of her husband.

Linked to Terry's hunt, Kaz clutched at Dino, dropping her head onto his shoulder, moaning softly. The perfume of Dino's blood pounded through his veins as he pulled her closer, wrapping his other arm around her and laying his head gently against hers, in a wave of protectiveness that almost left her giddy.

In the secluded semi-darkness, the Aussie's mouth moved in time to the beat of the blonde woman's heart, drawing her bliss further towards fulfilment with each movement of his tongue against her neck. She clutched at him, lost. Then, too soon, he was lifting his lips away. She trembled in his grip, exhausted, but desperate for him not to stop as he licked her neck gently before kissing her deeply on the mouth, covering her moan of dismay.

A word, a single word, erupted in her head, pulling the darkness in from around the edges of her consciousness. "Forget..."

Terry held her for a moment longer as she collapsed against him, the sleep taking her. Then he pulled away gently, letting her head drop softly against the wall. The overpowering lust for blood was gone, the perfume no longer slamming at him, his fangs slowly retracting and his eyes returning to their natural colour. He stood up, scanning the nightclub for the blonde woman's friend. Moving past Dino and Kaz, he walked across to the friend, telling her, "Think your mate's had too much to drink. She's passed out in the corner!"

Kaz opened her eyes, kissing Dino gently on the cheek, a slow smile pulling at her lips as Terry turned and walked back towards them. He stopped in front of her, holding out his hand and asked, "Shall we go?"

Dino rolled his eyes, shaking his head as Kaz took Terry's hand and pulled him to her, kissing him, relishing the taste of the blood that lingered in his mouth. He wrapped his arms around her, kissing her deeply, his tongue plundering her mouth, his fingers trailing along the length of her spine. He was warm now that he had fed, his touch almost burning her through the flimsy silk of her blouse. She pulled away, looking up at him, emerald eyes framed by the black make-up, "Dance with me..."

He grinned and let her go, taking her hand and leading her down onto the dance floor. The heavy guitar and drum beat of a German rock group pounded through the speakers. He found a space and pulled her to him, wrapping his arms around her, gently this time, as she slipped her hands behind his back. Looking at one another, they hardly moved, simply swaying slightly as the crowd around them jumped to the pounding beat. He dropped his head, kissing her lightly, running his tongue gently along her lips, seeking permission to kiss her more deeply.

She opened her mouth, letting him taste her, her tongue probing his. He lifted his hand to her head, caressing her hair, moving his kiss down her jaw and onto her neck, hearing the small sound she made deep in her throat, her hands clutching at him. Then he returned to her lips, searching her mouth more deeply as she matched his fervour.



Karen grinned, nudging Ali and indicating Kaz and Terry with a nod of her head. Ali glanced across, then grinned back at her, grabbing her and bouncing over to where the two vampires were intent on only one another. "That," Ali yelled at them, "is disgusting!"

They broke away from each other, looking at him. Then Terry grinned, wickedly. Ali saw the look and yelped, moving away. However, he didn't move quickly enough to prevent Terry catching him and planting a wet kiss on his forehead. Kaz and Karen dissolved into giggles, then started dancing with one another as the music changed to a deep, sexy, Latino beat.

Terry stepped up behind Kaz, dropping his hands onto her waist and dancing close to her; memories flowing back to the first night he had ever seen her, when she, Karen and Chris had twisted their hands in the air, pretending to be Spanish dancers. Kaz caught the image and smiled, turning to him, lifting her arms above her head, twisting her hands in the same way she had done that first night. He held her lightly, swaying with her as her hips moved against his, her breasts brushing against his chest, her lips almost touching his.

"Thought you didn't dance?" she asked softly.

"There's a lot I didn't do until I met you..." he told her. He bent his head to kiss her.

A scent reached her, different from anything she had experienced before. It was gone almost as soon as she sensed it, but the underlying core was blood. Vampire blood... Vampire blood that was neither Terry's nor Jacques'. Or was it possible that it was de Lusignan... that she didn't recognise him because she had purged the link that bound her to him?

The sudden, wary look in Kaz's eyes made Terry draw back, but she dropped her arms around his neck, pulling him to her, concentrating hard, reaching out to try and identify what she had sensed, closing the link between her and Terry. He slipped his hands round her back, asking, "What?"

She tilted her head up, scenting the air. Then she turned her head, nibbling at his ear to cover her words as she told him, "You need to get out of here."

"Kaz?"

"There's another vampire..." she told him bluntly.

Dread and hatred clutched at him, "Jacques?"

"Maybe..." she told him. Of the little group who had sheltered her for so long, Jacques had met only Chris. If they moved quickly, there was a slim chance of them getting away. Sending Terry with them was reducing that chance, because if Jacques was here, then the chances of him not having seen Terry and recognising him were slim - but she had to get him away from her Sire. She wouldn't leave Terry to Jacques, when it was entirely

possible that he had returned to destroy his child and grand-child. And Chris was the only one who knew of the other safe house.

"Take the others and leave," she told him. "There's another place, a farmhouse, near here. Get Chris to take you all there and wait."

Terry held her more tightly, telling her, "I won't leave you alone with him!"

But she wasn't going to be alone, because there was one other person here that Jacques would have recognised almost immediately. "I'll have Dino," she assured Terry, kissing him deeply on the mouth. Then she pulled away, "Go!"

She turned, not waiting for his answer, stalking towards the redheaded American with a predatory grin. Dino knew instinctively that something was wrong and pushed his way through the press of people towards her. She slipped her hands round his back, looking up at him as he asked simply, "Kaz?"

The vampire shook her head slightly, telling him only, "We need to give them time to leave..." She kissed him on the mouth then dropped the kisses along his jaw and down onto his neck. He scanned the club as she nuzzled at his neck, tension pumping adrenalin through him. Then he clutched at her, senses exploding, ecstasy slamming through him as she bit down deeply and drew his blood into her mouth, opening her thoughts to him, letting him see and sense what she could. And he knew they were being watched.

Concern over-rode the pleasure, pulling him back to clarity, his soldier's instincts taking over. Through half closed eyes as he clung to her, he searched the dark corners, looking for anyone paying them more than the usual attention. Then she was pulling away, licking the wound, murmuring softly to him, "Anything?"

He turned his head, kissing her cheek, bringing his mouth to her ear, telling her, "We're being watched, but I don't see them."

"Have they gone?"

"Terry, Chris and Mark have," he confirmed. "Ali and Karen are just leaving now."

---

Mark walked down the stairs beside Terry, alert for trouble. Chris moving ahead of them to get the coats. The two soldiers waited as she stood in line. Then, suddenly claustrophobic, Terry turned and walked out of the club to stand in the cool night air. Mark glanced at Chris and then followed Terry out of the door.

Terry paced uncomfortably, glancing at the door, wanting to be back inside with Kaz. He should have known that Jacques de Lusignan would never leave them alone? They were

fated always to live in the shadow of his existence. He should have realised that after the first night in London, when de Lusignan forced his way into the flat...

//Forced his way into my mind...//

A long, black limousine had drawn up, the chauffeur getting out and walking back to open the door. Mark saw it and disregarded it, his attention taken by the man walking up behind Terry. Instinct screamed vampire. Was this de Lusignan...?

Terry saw the look on Mark's face and turned. The vampire smiled with amethyst eyes... He took a step back, but that vampire caught him, holding him fast as he began to struggle. Fangs drove deep into his neck. Agony exploded, robbing him of the strength to fight... No pleasure, simply nerve-numbing pain as the amethyst-eyed vampire drew deep draughts of blood from him...

Mark moved as the man grabbed Terry, only his soldier's training keeping the panic at bay, but the limousine door had opened. A cold hand wrapped round Mark's wrist, pulling him back. The soldier turned: ready to fight. And found himself trapped in the gold eyes of one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen.

She smiled, drawing him towards the limousine door. Caught in her thrall, he followed her, sliding into the car with her. She ran the back of her fingers down his cheek, kissing him gently on the lips, trailing her kiss down towards his neck. He sighed, his hands on her waist. Then he cried out, lost in ecstasy as she bit down and drew the first mouthful of his blood.

He wasn't aware of the half-conscious Terry being bundled in through the door and thrown onto the floor of the limousine. He wasn't aware of the manacles snapping round Terry's wrist, securing his hands behind his back. He wasn't aware that the vehicle was moving. He wasn't aware of anything other than the woman who held him, her mouth working at his neck and driving waves of pleasure through him.

He cried out in dismay as she pulled away. She smiled at him, caressing his cheek again, murmuring, "Sleep."

Mark's eyes rolled back in his head and he collapsed against her.

---

Chris turned and froze; watching as Mark was drawn into the limousine. She opened her mouth to alert the bouncers, but their attention was inside the club on a commotion at the top of the stairs. Then she saw Terry, carried in the arms of another man and thrown into the limousine. Panic swept ice through her veins. There was nothing she could do. The door was being closed and the limousine was pulling away...

"Chris?"

She yelped, snapping round, terror slamming at her. Then she threw her arms around Ali, holding him tightly. Ali held her, glancing across at Karen whose eyes were wide as she saw the terror on Chris's face. Dread turning in his gut he asked gently, "Chris? What happened?"

"Mark!" she told him in a trembling whisper. "They've got Teo and Mark!"

"Everything all right here, pal?" a voice asked.

Ali turned to the bouncer, lying easily, "Just seen her bloke with another girl."

Karen looked at Ali, telling him, "Stay here! I'll let Dino know."

"Karen..." Ali began but she shook her head, kissing him gently on the cheek, telling him, "They need to know! This changes everything!"

She turned, moving back up the stairs towards the thump of the music. She searched through the crowded floor, pushing through the throng of people, looking for the two redheads... but they were no-where to be found. Giving up finally, she turned, heading back down to Ali and Chris. Chris was white and shaking badly.

"They've gone..." Karen told them.

Ali swore. "So what do we do? Go to the safe house like she asked? Or should we go to the toll house and wait for her?"

"She... she needs to know..." Chris tried, then dissolved into tears again.

Karen nodded. "We go to the toll house..."

---

Terry was only half aware... his existence now defined by the cold and the hunger. He was colder than he could ever remember being before, so cold that his bones ached. The hunger gnawed at him, tightening him into the fetal position, his eyes closed against the blinding UV light that bathed the cell where he'd been thrown.

They needn't have bothered with the manacles, but he knew he was chained to the wall.

He latched onto the pain, letting it drag him towards conscious thought, all his hostage training flooding back to him. Keep you mind active, he thought drowsily. First rule of surviving solitary confinement and the fear of the unknown - keep your mind active. Okay, so what did he know...?

That he hurt like fuck.

Not constructive, mate! What else?

The vampire outside the club wasn't de Lusignan... And he had an idea that he'd only been fed from because it was the fastest and easiest way to keep him under control... He'd been aware but unable to do anything in the limo, so he knew that they hadn't gone far, they must still be in the Perth area... Mark had also been in the limo, but he had no idea what had happened to his friend once they'd reached... where?

Think! Where are you? Where did the limo stop?

The memories eluded him. He remembered the crunch of gravel; the sound of stone steps... and that was it...

And now he was here, blinded and freezing with his insides cramping in ways he'd never realised were possible.

He heard the sound of a key in a door and stayed still. The door swung open almost silently. Then his heart flipped as he heard Dino's voice, "Terry?"

If they had Dino then they had Kaz. He moaned softly, grief expanding through him as the door thumped shut and was locked.

Warm hands touched his face, "Terry? Jesus, Terry talk to me?"

"Dino..." The sound of his own voice appalled him, thin and reedy. "Kaz?"

"Teo, I'm sorry," Dino told him, helping him to sit up and settling him against the wall. "We didn't stand a chance..."

Dino could tell by Terry's voice and the way that he held himself that he was weak and in pain. His skin was icy and his face looked hollow and drawn. "You okay?" he asked, searching Teo's neck and finding the mark of fangs.

"The light's blinding me mate... What have they done with Kaz?"

"Forget Kaz for the moment, soldier. You need to feed," Dino told him.

"No..." Terry pleaded, remembering how difficult it had been to pull away from Kaz the night they had found her on the floor. The hunger burned so badly inside of him now that he knew he wouldn't be able to let go of Dino if he started feeding...

"You need to feed!" Dino repeated, folding the sleeve of his shirt up.

"Dino, no... I..."

The American heard the desperation in his friend's voice and he understood why Terry was worried, but the Aussie looked hellish and Dino wasn't going to let up on him until he fed. "Look, you're conscious..." he told Terry in his I'm-not-taking-no-for-an-answer voice, "We'll take it a little at a time, okay?"

Terry was too tired, too cold and too hungry to put up any more objections. Dino slid closer, letting Teo take hold of his wrist. Terry bit down, moaning as the warm liquid flowed into his mouth, burning down through him as he swallowed. He took another mouthful and then Dino was gently pulling his wrist away.

It took all of his strength of will, but Teo relinquished his hold on Dino's arm, licking at the wound to stop the flow of blood. The warmth suffused through him, taking the ache out of his chilled bones. "Thank you."

"Any time, Rambo," Dino grinned, climbing to his feet and starting to inspect the cell in the pale UV light, giving Terry a running commentary. "Sandstone walls, low ceiling with a window that's not much more than a grating... Looks like it's a basement of some sort. No sign of cameras or microphones, but that don't mean shit."

He made a small sound of disgust, "And talking of shit there's not even a bucket for me to piss in... What the hell sort of kidnappers," he yelled just in case someone could hear him, "don't even give you a damned bucket to piss in?"

Teo heard him running his hands over metal, knocking on it gently, "Door's pretty solid... but the only way out of here is through it... Unless you've been holding out on me and you can do all that Dracula changing into mist and rats hocus-pocus?"

Terry smiled, "Sorry, mate..."

"In that case," Dino told him in mock condescension, "isn't it a good job that I brought my lock-picks and they didn't search me!" He grinned, walking back towards Terry, asking, "Would Sir like his jewellery removed?"

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## **Part Seventeen**

Kaz had stayed silent during the car journey. Two men, she had never seen before, had stopped them as she and Dino tried to disappear out of the side exit of the nightclub. She'd seen the knife flash briefly and knew from the defiance on Dino's face that it was resting against his ribs or his spine. Not knowing how many more of them there were in the nightclub Dino had shaken his head slightly and she had nodded agreement. They'd gone quietly.

She hadn't even flinched when they'd wrapped the manacles around her wrists. Drawing strength from Dino's contemptuous compliance with their captors, she had treated it all

with dignified disdain, not allowing herself to entertain the idea that the others might not be safe.

Now, however, her resolve was beginning to crumble. She had been "escorted" along a corridor and left in a not-uncomfortable room - except for the UV light that had blinded her, leaving her in almost sensory deprivation... Now the guards had returned for her, conducting her into a large, opulent room, dark except for a single pool of UV tainted light in the centre. She knew there were other figures, other vampires, in the room ~ the hostility washed towards her in waves ~ but her attention was drawn to the crumpled figure lying in the pool of light.

She pulled free of her escorts and, rushing over to Mark, gathered the soldier into her arms as best she could, hampered by the manacles. He looked up at her through half-closed eyes, murmuring, "Sorry..."

"Shh," she admonished gently, shaking her head, holding him. If they had Mark, then in all probability they had Teo and the others...

Her thoughts drifted back to Jacques' words of just over a week before...<<Humanity has always wanted to destroy us, as they destroy everything they do not understand. Revealing yourself to these mortals and letting them live without bringing them into our circle is leaving you open to destruction...>>

Was that why they were here? Were they here to punish her and Teo for not killing their human allies? Were they here to punish her for turning her back on her Sire?

Until tonight she'd had no idea that so many existed... Jacques had alluded to it, but had always avoided any of her direct questions... She closed her eyes, pulling herself together. She was damned if she was going to ask them. If they wanted anything they could ask her!

Mark relaxed against her, unconscious. She opened her eyes, looking down at him, bending to kiss him gently on the forehead before lowering him to the floor. Then, pushing herself to her feet, she glared defiantly into the glowing darkness. From the shadows she heard the whisper of conversation and then a cold, cultured voice asked, "Where is Jacques de Lusignan?"

Kaz smiled sweetly, asking, "Is this the face of someone who looks as if they care?"

"Your position is tenuous enough as it is without your flippancy, Childe!" another voice, traced with the hint of a French accent informed her.

"Jacques de Lusignan's position will be more than tenuous," Kaz shot back, "if he ever dares darken my doorstep again!"

"We will have your respect, Childe!" the cultured voice informed her.

"Respect," Kaz replied sweetly, "has to be earned. And so far you've done nothing that would make me consider giving you my respect!"

In the shadows, watching the redhead, another vampire grinned, glancing around at the gentleman beside her. He met her look, hiding a smirk of approval behind his hand. They were going to have fun watching the others dealing with this tenacious redhead. The woman looked back at the redhead. "What is your name?" she asked gently.

Kaz's eyes flashed, "You drag us here, bind us and don't even know who we are?"

"She has a fair point," the gentleman put in sweetly, glancing at the others along the table. They glared back at him. Hiding another grin, he turned back to the redhead. "We seek Jacques de Lusignan," he explained. "Instead we have found you. We have our reasons for treating you this way, which I will explain in due course, but I refuse to keep calling you Childe or Young Woman... Will you not give us your name?"

For a long moment, the redhead glared into the darkness towards him, then supplied softly, "Kazlyn."

"Simply Kazlyn?" the voice asked again.

"I had no need of another name," she informed him, "even when I was mortal."

"How old are you, Kazlyn?" the woman's voice asked again.

"Five hundred and twenty..."

Kaz frowned slightly, picking up the change in mood. The hostility had gone, replaced by shocked disbelief... Then a deep, resonant voice was asking again, "Kazlyn... this is very important. You must answer truthfully and as fully as you can. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she replied flatly.

"Who is your Sire?"

"Jacques de Lusignan," Kaz confirmed.

"And when were you Sired?"

"Fifteen oh one."

This time the whispering went on for longer. Finally, her nerves frayed and her patience tested to breaking point, Kaz strode towards the whisper of voices demanded, "Will one of you cackling old biddies please tell me what the fuck is going on!"



The escorts rushed in, dragging her back. She let them take her, shouting at the others, "I have been brought here against my will! You have attacked my friends and my protectors! You demand my respect while hiding in shadows and then whisper about me like bairns in a school yard! Damn you! I will have YOUR respect! You WILL get my friend medical attention! You WILL free my other human companions! You WILL free the other vampire and you WILL tell me what the hell is going on!"

"Silence!" the cultured voice commanded.

"Like hell!" Kaz shot back, fighting and clawing at the vampires who held her.

---

Teo glanced at Dino, who nodded once, then slowly turned the handle, easing the huge door open. Kaz's yelling and struggling masked the sound and covered the movement, letting them slip inside un-noticed, Dino covering the room with the small handgun he always kept in a holster next to his "crown jewels"... The weapon had only ever been found once, by a huge gorilla who had pawed his way up Dino's legs, telling the "Gringo" that he liked redheads...

Fortunately the quiet click of another handgun being cocked against his head had stopped the gorilla short of unzipping Dino's jeans. The man had turned - slowly - to find Terry Thorne grinning at him. "Don't touch what isn't yours, mate," the Aussie had quipped, blowing the man a kiss before slamming him backhanded across the face...

Dino took aim and blew a hole in the jacket of one of the heavies holding Kaz as Terry searched the wall behind him for a light switch. The sudden noise, almost deafening to the vampires as it ricocheted off the walls, slammed surprise through everyone in the room.

"Lights!" Terry warned.

Dino closed his eyes as the chandeliers burst into brilliance, flooding the room. All but one of the heavies dropped Kaz, rounding on the two newcomers. "I wouldn't advise it," Dino smiled sweetly, blinking into the light. "I don't have to kill you, only wing you. And the bets are that I can hit you faster than even you can hit me..."

Kaz sat up slowly, looking back around at the five figures sitting behind the long table - four men and one woman. "How's Mark, Kaz?" Terry asked. Dino reached into his pocket and tossed the lock-picking kit at Terry as Kaz clambered to her feet.

"Breathing, but they've drugged him..."

Behind the table, the woman glanced at her companion then back at the small group in the middle of the floor. The man with the handgun was taking small, deliberate steps forward, motioning the guards back with small flicks of his head, confidence washing off

of him. This, she realised, was a man who knew he was in complete control of the situation. And he was right. Even with their superior speed, he could take down almost all the vampires in the room before they were even half way towards him...

A smashed kneecap was just as immediately debilitating to a vampire as it was to a human - vampires simply healed faster.

She turned her attention back to Kazlyn, who met her gaze as the dark-headed vampire unlocked the manacles from around her wrist. Terry dropped to his knees beside Mark, checking on the other soldier.

"Perhaps, gentlemen," Radu quipped acidly to his other three colleagues, "you should have listened to our caution!"

"It is of no matter," the one with the French accent informed him. "She may escape now, but she WILL die! As will the other Childe!"

"On the contrary," the dark-haired woman interrupted, turning her sweetest smile on him, "She is older than I am, which means that she is NOT illegitimate! And as she is of my Clan, I as Regent, have the final say in what happens! And if she claims the Right of Protection for the other Childe then you cannot touch him either!"

The man grunted in disgust, "As Radu did for you?"

"What," Kaz demanded, before the woman could answer, "the hell are you fishwives talking about?"

"And I think you're on the wrong side of the gun to talk of killing?" Dino informed them sweetly.

The woman turned, perfect make-up and long dark curls framing deep, brown eyes that bored into Kaz's soul. The redhead took a step back. Teo glanced up to gauge what was happening, Dino frowning and coiling to move if needed. "You," the woman told Kaz, "are of Clan Predatos, as is Jacques de Lusignan. We had no idea of your existence, or of your companion's... And despite my colleagues' protestations on the matter, you will not be killed. I am your Clan Regent and for all intents and purposes, you are my cousin."

Kaz looked at her, not quite sure she had heard her correctly, "Do what?"

"You are my cousin, Kazlyn. My GrandSire was also your GrandSire..."

"If this is the way you treat family," Terry said quietly, rising to his feet, Mark cradled in his arms, "I doubt the lady will want anything to do with..."

"This," the woman interrupted, "is neither the time nor the place for such discussion!"

Kaz opened her mouth to disagree but something in the look the woman gave her stopped the defiance in her throat. Terry saw it too, glancing at Kaz as the woman turned again towards the others at the table. The little control they had had over the situation had suddenly been lost but the hostage negotiator's sixth sense was telling him to let the situation run... That little voice had saved his life more than once and he wasn't about to stop listening to it now. He glanced around at Dino who quirked an eyebrow, saying nothing, the handgun still held ready but his stance more relaxed.

"We thank thee for thy presence here, gentlemen," the woman was saying, "but thy council, it appears, is un-needed. Rooms have been prepared for you and I will advise you in the morning of my decision. Until then, my Uncle and I have a great deal to discuss with my cousin and her companions."

Kaz watched the rigid stance of the three men who had just been politely dismissed, instantly disliking them. They weren't happy and she had an uncomfortable feeling, deep in her belly that they were trouble. They all rose, however, giving the woman short bows. She smiled at them, "Alasdair, have our guests shown to their rooms..."

"My Lady," the tall blond, now with a bullet hole in his jacket, answered, moving towards the door with his two colleagues.

The woman waited until the door had closed behind the small entourage. Then she moved around the table, walking towards Kaz and the others, the man they had called Radu following her. "I understand that this must be very confusing for you," she began, stopping in front of Kaz, her eyes taking in every little detail of her newfound cousin. "And your welcome was far less cordial than I would have wished. Unfortunately I am bound by Law and..."

She stopped, sighing softly before continuing, "Forgive me. Let me take you somewhere a little more comfortable then I will explain everything and answer any questions you have."

She turned, looking at Terry and then Dino, "Your friend is sedated, nothing more. He should wake very soon."

---

Mark was sleeping peacefully on a long, plush sofa, a blanket draped across him. Kaz sat on another sofa, watching the play of flames in the huge fire. Terry and Dino sat at her side, watching the woman as she poured wine. The other male vampire sat in an easy chair, one leg crossed elegantly over the other, his hands resting lightly on the arms of the chair.

The woman turned towards them, a glass in each hand. She walked across the floor, handing a glass to Terry and Dino, glancing at Kaz. "Fire faeries..."

The words were so soft that they hardly heard them, but Kaz knew that the comment was directed at her. She lifted her gaze, looking at the woman who smiled and turned away, explaining, "We have no need for a fire... but the flames comfort me..."

"And you have such great need of comfort," Kaz shot back sarcastically.

For a moment she thought the woman was going to ignore her, but as she lifted a glass, handing it to Radu, the dark brown gaze caught and held Kaz's. "I do..." she replied calmly, "because what was done tonight was not of my choosing and I had to fight to have you all tried rather than summarily killed..."

Jacques' warning about not killing the humans shot through Kaz's mind again and almost as if she had sensed Kaz's thoughts the woman asked, "What did he tell you?"

Kaz countered the question with another, "Are we prisoners?"

The woman shook her head, walking towards Kaz and handing her the glass of wine before turning towards an empty seat. "No," she told Kaz finally, "You are not prisoners..."

"Then we are free to go," the redhead stated, standing up.

"You are free to go..." Radu confirmed softly, "But I'd advise that you change your mind and at least listen to what we have to say. Your companion's only hope of continued existence may rest with your link to the Predatos."

"We are free to go," Terry put in, rising slowly to his feet, "Yet you continue to threaten us?"

"We threaten nothing," Radu told him, "We simply state the truth..."

"And unless you stay and listen," the woman continued for him, "you will never know that truth..." She sighed, shaking her head, then looked back at Kaz, "At least stay until your friend is fit to walk under his own power... Listen to what we have to say. Then, if you still wish to leave, at least you will be armed with knowledge. We found you only because we were looking for Jacques de Lusignan, but now that the Council know of your existence, without our protection, they will hunt you down..."

"Why?"

"Predatos history is a violent one..." the woman began. "My Sire was killed." She looked at Kaz, "Our Grandsire was exiled. Jacques was forbidden to Sire a Childe..."

Terry looked at Kaz who dragged her eyes away from the woman to look at him. "But..." Kaz frowned, looking back at the dark brown eyes, "He Sired me..."

The woman gave her a broad smile, pushing lightly, "If your going to stay and listen, you'd be more comfortable sitting down. It's a long story..."

"Personally," Dino put in, "I hate talking to someone when I don't know their name... Makes it seem a little..." He paused, flashing the woman a smile before finishing, "...unfriendly. So, Kaz, when are you going to remember your manners and introduce these characters?"

The woman smiled, "Forgive me. I am Lady, Regent of the Predatos. And this gentleman is my uncle, Radu, Regent of the Dragos..."

---

"So," Kaz tried, running through all the information Lady and Radu had just given them as Lady poured more wine, "Jacques was prevented from Siring a Childe... So what would happen if he ignored that and Sired anyway?"

"The Childe would be destroyed," Radu answered softly.

"Which is why they want to kill Kaz and I..." Terry put in.

"We had no idea that either of you existed, Terry," Lady started to explain. "We were here looking for Jacques because the Council had suddenly become aware that he had Sired a Childe in France. We believed he had fled back here with her... to the ancient home of the Clan. Instead," she continued, filling his glass, "we found you and Kaz..."

"And correctly assumed that they were his... offspring," Dino interrupted.

"Except that the situation has changed..." Lady said softly.

Kaz looked at her, "Why?"

"I was the catalyst that pushed the Council into action against our GrandSire... You are almost a century older than I am. So you are not the Childe we're looking for. You were Sired before Jacques was denied the Right of Progeny..."

"Over two hundred years before Jacques was denied progeny..." Radu confirmed. "Which means that you are not illegal..." He trailed off, sighing heavily, "Terry, on the other hand, is a different matter..."

"Kaz is my Sire," Terry told them, "Jacques simply drained me and left me to die..."

Lady looked at him, stunned, then glanced at Radu, "That changes things..."

Radu nodded, deep in thought, "Perhaps... but we won't know until we present the facts to the Council..."

Kaz looked at the two Regents, "Perhaps? What do you mean, perhaps?"

The sadness visible in his green eyes, Radu told her, "The Council may rule that you too would have been denied the Right of Progeny..."

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## Part Eighteen

Dawn broke in a crimson tide beyond the rooftops of Perth, reflecting on the clouds that were once again moving in, threatening rain. True to Lady's word, Rob had regained consciousness unharmed and, although a little confused, was now tucking into a hearty breakfast in the mansion's kitchen. Terry was asleep in one of the beds, in the suite of rooms Lady had provided for them all. Exhausted by the night's events, he had been asleep almost before his head had touched the pillows.

Kaz was wide-awake. Curtains drawn back, she stood at the window, watching the sky lighten and burst into colour. The clouds glowed fiery red and then faded to pink as the sun inched towards the horizon.

Dino and Radu had arrived back from the farmhouse where they had gone to explain the situation to Chris, Ali and Karen. Only the three friends hadn't been at the farmhouse. On a hunch, Dino had taken Radu across to Kaz's tollhouse, where they'd found the three friends shaken and growing more distraught at Kaz's continued absence. Their initial distrust of Radu had flowed slowly into numb acceptance of their position and what they would have to do from now on.

Both Radu and Lady had agreed that, at least for the moment, it was best that the Council knew only of Rob and Dino. The two Clan Sires had extended their protection to the human soldiers. While Dino and Rob were in Predatos and Dragos safekeeping, no harm would come to them. To keep her other mortal friends safe, however, Kaz knew that she would never be able to see them again.

Ali. Karen. And sweet Chris, whom she had found devoid of hope and who was now so in love with Rob...

<<Jacques was denied the Right of Progeny... The Council may rule that you too would have been denied the Right of Progeny...>>

Kaz closed her eyes, letting her head sink against the coolness of the glass. Lady had talked about a Right of Protection that could possibly save Terry from being killed. Possibly. She had also admitted that a case such as this had never been known in Council history, and that the crimes of Kaz's and her GrandSire had been so appalling the Council might veto that Right, simply in order to protect themselves and the rest of the vampire community.

What Lady had refused to explain to her was the nature of the crimes their GrandSire, Markus, had committed... Instead she had evaded with a simple, "He caused the death of many mortals."

Jacques, she had however assured Kaz, had not been involved. The Council had included him in their ruling simply because he was Markus' progeny. Sins of the Sire visited upon the Childe...

Kaz hugged herself, searching for a clarity that eluded her. She had been offered a family. In five hundred years she had known only one other vampire and now she was being offered a place among more vampires than she could ever have imagined in her wildest dreams. Lady was giving her a home...

Yet what would that home be to her if the Council decided against Terry?

He had swept into her life and turned it on its head. He had given up everything for her... even life. Alone together, she knew, they had a chance of evading the Council. If they ran from here now it would be a risk... but would it be any more risky than putting Terry's fate in the hands of strangers she had never met and who cursed the name of her GrandSire?

And there was another matter - a woman as Spanish as Kaz was Celtic, dark eyed with raven curls. Jacques had sired her too... Only he had sired her against the ruling of the all-powerful Council. Now her existence was in danger. Jacques de Lusignan could burn at the stake for all Kaz cared, but she couldn't stand back and let another innocent suffer because of him...

"Damn you..." she whispered softly. "Damn you and your games, Jacques..."

Lost in memories and thoughts, she wasn't aware of Terry waking until gentle hands drew her away from the weak sunlight. He folded his arms around her, dropping his forehead against her head and breathing in the rich scent of her hair. "Penny for them..."

She turned in his arms, the stress of the past hours finally hitting her, silent tears beginning to flow down her cheeks. She looked up into his startled, azure green eyes. He lifted his hand, brushing away the ruby tinged droplets that flowed down her face from kohl-framed eyes. Then, gently at first, he kissed her.

Kaz sobbed a moan, sinking against him...clutching at him, her fingers clinging to his shirt as she kissed him desperately, latching onto him - an anchor against all the insanity. He sensed her distress, sensed her desperation and lifted her, sweeping her into his arms without breaking the kiss and carrying her to the bed. She tugged at his shirt frantically, pulling it free of his trousers.

Terry dropped her gently onto the bed, his hands running up her legs and pushing her skirt up past her thighs as she ripped open his shirt.

Her fangs were in place, her emerald eyes bright in the growing daylight, drawing his gaze into the depths of her soul. Growling deep in the back of his throat he dropped on top of her, kissing her hard on the mouth, his hands tightening on her shoulders. She kissed him back, probing his mouth deeply with her tongue, sucking on his lower lip and letting her fangs graze the skin.

The taste of his blood exploded in her mouth.

Still kissing her, he pushed himself up, undoing the button and fly on his trousers, his manhood already hard and straining against the material. She trailed her fingers down his back, tucking her hands into his trousers and pushing them down across his hips. He wriggled up her body, leaving the trousers behind, his hard length pushing against her as she trailed her tongue down his chest, capturing a nipple in her mouth.

Shoving him onto his back and straddling him, she bit down, hearing him cry out in pleasure. He tangled his fingers in her hair as she drew an agonisingly slow mouthful of blood then lapped gently at the wound to close it. Sitting up, she peeled off her blouse and her bra, arching back as he caressed up across her ribs, his fingers finding the hard buds of her nipples and gently teasing them.

She rolled off of him, standing up to drop her skirt and panties to the floor. He reached for her, dragging her back across him, steadying her with his hands on her hips as she straddled him. Holding his hardness in her hand she guided him to the lips of her sex. Then she gasped as his grip on her waist tightened and he held her, not allowing her to sink down onto him, taking control and forcing her to move slowly.

Without warning, he thrust up, pulling her down into him. She cried out as he filled her, trembling slightly before dropping forward to capture his lips with hers, sucking gently. For a long moment they simply kissed, and then he began to move in long, powerful strokes, driving himself deep inside her, then lifting her off him until he was almost free before ramming himself back inside. She sat up, arching back to take him more deeply, riding him, losing herself in the reality that was him: here and now.

The ache began deep within her, driving her harder and faster. With agonising slowness the bubble built inside her and expanded, torturing her with its elusiveness. She dropped forward onto her hands, capturing his eyes with hers. His fangs were in place, waiting to take her. The thought of them, buried deep in her neck, his mouth moving against skin, almost tipped her over the edge.

Terry flipped her over, pinning her beneath him, hammering into her as her legs tightened round his waist, her nails digging into the skin of his back. The pressure inside him was almost unbearable, teetering against the edge of an abyss as he ground against her, her muscles clenching round him, dragging him towards release.



She came moments before he did, the wave smashing through her, driving her down towards the edge of darkness and tearing a scream from her throat, her muscles convulsing, milking him and sending him crashing with her into an abyss of ecstasy.

Trembling, he collapsed on top of her, his fangs finding her neck as she dragged his wrist to her mouth. They both bit down, the sharp pain sending each other into a tumbling whirl of frenzy. They fed from each other, whimpering softly, drinking deep of each other's blood...

Aeons later, they broke away, lapping at each other's wounds. She looked at him, drinking in every curve of his face, the colour of his eyes, the long lashes that fluttered against his cheek. Despair swept through her, tearing at her soul. She clung to him, trembling in terror, no longer sure if she could continue her existence if he was taken from her.

Sensing her thoughts, instinct pushed Terry to murmur words of solace, tell her that everything would be fine, that they would both be safe... but he couldn't summon the lies. Exhausted and helpless, he turned onto his back, pulling her to him, folding his arms round her and simply holding her as the sobs tore through her.

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Dino sat drinking coffee with Rob in the kitchen of the manor house.

"She's okay?" Rob asked again, softly.

Dino smiled at him indulgently. "Yes, buddy, she's okay... for the fifteenth time..."

The American couldn't blame his British friend. The younger soldier was head-over-heels for the sassy Scot. Rob had wanted to go with Dino and Radu to see Chris and the others, but Radu and Lady had both cautioned against it. Rob, still groggy, had agreed to stay. He'd all but pounced on Dino the moment he returned though. Then he'd sat, drinking in every word of Dino and Radu's brief about what had happened.

"She got spooked when she saw you being hustled into the limo," Dino went on. "And I ain't gonna lie to you, she was still hyped when we got to the tollhouse." He gave Rob a knowing smile, "She was worried for you, buddy... I mean us," he amended wickedly. "But the moment we explained that you were okay and that Kaz and Tel were safe she calmed down... right as rain."

Dino grinned, "She even gave as good as she got about them going to the tollhouse and not the farm like they were supposed to..."

Rob nodded, lost in thought.

Dino stared into his mug for a long moment then broke the silence softly. "We could ask this bunch to bring Chris under their protection, like you and me..."

Rob shook his head, "No... Lady's right. The only way we can keep her and the others safe is... not to see them again..." He sighed heavily and downed the remains of his coffee, thumping the mug on the table in exasperation. "Jacques de sodding Lusignan..."

"Back up that train of thought before it goes anywhere, my friend..." Dino cautioned, trailing off as he saw the look of horror that slowly spread across Rob's face. "What?"

Rob looked at him, "Chris met de Lusignan..."

"She what?"

Closing his eyes, Rob searched for the memories... "When we came back here, after Tel had been drained, and you went in to the house, Chris told me that she had met him... She picked Tel up from the airport and de Lusignan was at the tollhouse. She told me that she had known something was up because Kaz had warned her then not to go near the house and to keep Ali and Karen away..."

He opened his eyes, looking at Dino, pushing himself to his feet, "Chris knows de Lusignan... She's not safe, is she? Ali and Karen, yes... but not Chris..."

Dino reached across the table, catching Rob's wrist before he could move, "Woh, soldier! Wait up!"

Rob ripped his wrist free, heading for the door, telling Dino, "Chris isn't safe!"

Dino went after him, grasping his arm and pulling him to a halt, "Rob! Think! Stop and Think! You going off half-cocked isn't going to help!"

Rob looked at him, almost pulling out of his grasp again before the truth of his friend's words sank in. He visibly deflated. "So what do we do?" he pleaded. "I can't leave her out there on her own..."

"First, she's not on her own, she's with Ali and Karen," Dino soothed, calmly. "At Ali's flat! And no one but Kaz, Ali and Karen know where that is... Second, we talk this through with Kaz, Tel and the Clan Sires before we do anything. I know that Chris's life may be at stake, but Tel's life is definitely at stake here..." He let go of Rob's arm, "This isn't our culture, my friend, this is something we have no knowledge of and we've got to tread real careful or it could all blow up in our faces..."

Rob nodded, his shoulders sagging further. Dino put his arm round him, "Look... Let's go see if Kaz and Tel are still awake..."

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Lana wrinkled her nose in displeasure as she stepped delicately out of the taxi and looked at the tollhouse Jacques hadn't stopped talking about since they had left Paris. Years of dirt and smoke had turned the once beautiful golden stone to dark, filthy brown. The intricate carvings were inlaid with moss and the whole place looked like a mausoleum that had been forgotten for centuries...

And to crown it all it was raining. Again. All it had done in this god-forsaken country was rain since they had left London...

This surely couldn't be the place that Jacques had been talking about? It was grubby and small... not at all what Jacques had led her to believe...

She turned, looking out across the excuse for a city that was Perth, the distant hills that Jacques had assured her were the Scottish Highlands, obscured by grey cloud and mist.

Jacques gathered her into his arms, kissing her hair gently.

Lana pulled away, looking at him in awe. For the first time in her un-life her Sire was nervous... The anxiety leached out of him, wrapping around him like a cloak and chilling her when he touched her. She frowned, "Jacques...? You're nervous!"

He flashed her a smile. "I've never introduced one Childe to another..." he lied easily.

Lana knew that it wasn't simply that, although this Kaz had a lot to do with his apprehension. She returned his smile, though, taking his hand. She had never had reason to doubt him before...

Jacques turned, leading her to the door. This was folly... his gut feeling screamed at him that this was madness. Kaz would rip him apart before he had a chance to explain.

Another instinct, however, was over-riding his fear. The instinctive need of a Sire for his Childe pushed him towards the dark, wooden door of the house - the need to fill the empty weight in the depths of his perception with her presence again.

She would hate him even more for what he was going to have to admit to her. Being her Sire would count for little now... but he had to try. The void where her mind had once touched his was too much for him after all these years. Only when he had lost her did he truly understand what she had meant to him and why he had protected her, even from afar, for so long...

He opened the door, drawing Lana inside with him. The place was cold, not simply empty but chill and desolate. Frowning, he stepped further into the living room, turning slowly; senses alert for a threat that he instinctively knew was here.

And then he identified it. Another vampire... Not Kaz. Not Terry Thorne...

Letting go of Lana's hand he abandoned his caution, terror for Kaz's safety ripping at him. Yelling her name he raced down the stairs to the bedroom, then down to the kitchen, tearing open doors, searching for her. The house remained resolutely empty.

They had found her... They had found her and they had taken her...

Sinking to the floor Jacques let his head fall back, taking a deep breath and letting it go in a scream of despair...