



BLOOD VENGEANCE

Deathless Night Series

L.E. WILSON

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DEATHLESS NIGHT SERIES #2



L.E. WILSON

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This book is dedicated to my sister, Nikki. She's been my encouragement, my cheerleader, my beta reader, my idea bouncer-offer, and all around person I couldn't live without. You may be my "half" sister, but I love you with my whole heart! Thank you, Coley!

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CHAPTER 1



LUUKAS

Luukas was jolted back to consciousness as a searing pain tore through his abdomen. His eyes shot open to see a long silver blade carving through the layers of skin and muscle, splitting him open like a gutted deer. Hanging by the wrists as he was, he could do nothing but watch in horror as warm blood gushed down the front of his dirty jeans, soaking through the material to stick to the bare skin beneath.

His fangs punched down in defense, a loud hiss escaping him as he threw his head back, gritting his teeth against the pain. Half a second later, fire burned through the same path as the blade before it, the stench of his own burning skin making his stomach heave. He struggled not to scream, but the hoarse sound ripped from his raw throat against his will, the agony too much for him to bear in silence. The flames sizzled inch by slow inch across his stomach, cauterizing the wound.

His dislocated shoulders jutted grotesquely through his skin as he twisted his torso back and forth, trying to escape the flames, but the

silver manacles around his wrists held fast to the wall above his head. Just when he thought he was going to pass out again, it stopped, leaving behind a dull throbbing ache from his ribcage to his hip. He sagged on his chains, sucking in ragged breaths, praying to all the gods that he would pass out again.

Or better yet, that he would just die already. Die a vampire's true death.

"He's awake *now*, mistress."

At the sound of that sniveling voice, Luukas struggled to lift his heavy head. He detested that voice. Peering through the slits of his swollen eyes, he attempted to locate the source of it, and found it directly in front of him in the form of a young, dark-skinned, male vampire: young in both human *and* vampire years.

Their eyes met and held, and the young one's own grew wide at what he saw. The piece of shit stumbled backwards, the flaming torch he'd pulled off of the wall and used on Luukas falling from his hand to land with a soft thump on the dirt floor. The long, bloody knife he held in the other hand joined it with a clatter a moment later.

Maybe he was surprised that Luukas could still focus on him. Maybe he saw his imminent death in the soulless, black eyes that now had him on their radar. Whatever it was, it caused him to impatiently ask the person on his left, "May I please leave now, mistress?"

He must have been granted permission, for he hightailed it out of the room, practically running for the open door and heading towards the stone stairway across the way.

Luukas' vehement stare followed him across the room, his lip curling up in a sneer when the coward dared to peek back at him over his shoulder. He paled beneath his dark skin when he saw that Luukas was still tracking him, and he kicked it into vamp speed, disappearing up the stairs.

Luuk's eyes skittered back across the room after he was gone, coming to rest on someone else huddled in the corner, as far away from him as they could get. He winced as he blinked his raw eyes, trying to focus through the sweat running into them, but he couldn't

get a clear view, there were too many shadows from the flickering light of the torches on the walls.

He had a vague feeling that he should know that cowering form, but he was so tired. His head fell forward onto his chest, only to jerk upright again almost immediately. Something pulled his attention to that corner, no matter how he tried to ignore it.

He studied the person again. He could just barely make out a small form with long, dark hair, but little else, as she kept her head down. And it was definitely a she. He could see that even through the blanket she held wrapped tightly around herself.

Did he know her? He tried to remember, but his thoughts were so disordered, jumping around randomly in his head. He couldn't seem to concentrate on any one thing for more than a few seconds at a time.

Gradually, through the haze of his pain, he began to notice other things.

He was in a large, dimly lit room dug from the earth; a cell of sorts, with no windows. The smell of wet earth was heavy in the air, coating the back of his throat, and a consistent *drip, drip, drip* off to his right tantalized him with the promise of water. He tried to wet his cracked lips with his sandpaper tongue. He was so thirsty.

Where the fuck was he? What was he doing here? His head pounded as he tried hard to remember.

Suddenly, he sensed a darker entity in the room. He could practically feel the evil oozing through the air towards him. Tearing his eyes from the girl in the corner, he rolled his head to the other side until he was able to focus on the female slithering towards him from the opposite direction.

Her blood-red eyes flashed as she met his gaze, a pleased smile curving her lips.

"Leeha," he rasped.

Memories crashed mercilessly into his head, banging around his skull until he groaned from the impact.

He remembered now.

HE'D LEFT his apartment in Seattle to go meet with Leeha, alone, a female vampire who'd been adopted into his colony, and who'd decided to leave of her own accord to form one of her own, after he'd rejected her amorous overtures.

She'd continued her propositions towards him even after she'd left, doing everything she could think of to try to convince him to do the unheard of - mate with another vampire. It was a ludicrous idea. Vampires couldn't sustain one another. One half of the couple always needed to be a human. There was no other acceptable match for their kind. Whenever two vampires tried to mate, the fighting and jealousy that ensued from the need to feed on others, on humans, inevitably tore them apart, often violently. Vampires were way too territorial to share their significant other, and feeding was way too intertwined with the need for sex.

They were also too possessive to share their hard-won territory, even with a prized mate.

He'd agreed to meet with her because he'd wanted to convince her once and for all that although she was free to form her own settlement if she so chose, he was never going to combine hers with his and rule alongside of her. A harsh reality she was having trouble accepting.

His brother, Nikulas, had tried to make him stay, or at least to take someone with him, but he'd stubbornly...stupidly...refused, insisting on going alone.

Driving north to the Canadian border, he'd easily "persuaded" the officials there that his passport was legit, and passed through without a problem. Less than thirty minutes later, he'd pulled off the main road towards Leeha's mountain fortress.

It'd never crossed his mind that he'd be driving into a trap, or at least not one that would ever actually work. He was one of the most powerful vampires of his time, and was, therefore, invincible.

Or so he'd believed.

Foolishly, he'd underestimated the danger he'd been in. Never in a million years would he have thought that Leeha would manage to find a way to harness *him*, a Master vampire. *Her* Master, until she'd banished herself, taking every young, besotted male in his colony along with her.

But not only had she managed to harness his power, with a little help, she'd managed to keep him in this hellhole against his will for... he had no idea how long now. Days? Months? Years?

In the beginning, she'd kept him confined to an opulent room directly next door to hers. He'd tried every mental and physical power he possessed to escape, all to no avail. It was like he'd become human again.

She'd laughed at his efforts, and tried to convince him, both with her words and her body, to see things her way. He'd refused over and over, rejecting both her ideas and her offering of herself, adamantly demanding that she release him. Even with the evidence proving otherwise, he'd arrogantly refused to believe that anyone could get the best of him. She'd responded to his stubbornness by refusing him blood to drink, starving him and debilitating him even more. He hadn't worried overmuch, even then, as he knew his brother would come looking for him when he didn't return home.

Then had come the day she'd finally lost her patience with him. Barging into his room, she'd charged over to where he sat on the floor in the corner, arms resting on his drawn-up knees, head down. She'd appeared quite remorseful, even as she'd given him one last chance to redeem himself and agree to be with her, before he forced her to take more drastic measures.

He'd slowly raked his eyes up her body, taking in her delicate high heels, her long legs and full breasts barely concealed in a black, gossamer gown, her graceful arms and long, thick, red hair. Her haunted, blood red eyes had been luminous with unshed tears, but were steady in her conviction of what she must do if he refused her.

Luukas had smiled at her warmly, and watched her expression turn to one of tentative relief.

Hope had shone from her eyes, and the corners of her full lips had

turned up into a hesitant smile. Claspings her hands together in front of her with joy, she'd stepped closer, holding them out to him.

Ignoring her outstretched hands, Luukas had pushed himself up off of the floor, slowly straightening up to his full height.

As he'd towered over her, uncertainty had flashed briefly across her face before her smile reappeared full force. "Have you finally changed your mind then, my love?"

"Leeha," he'd purred, "I would sink my dick into a stinking, rotting corpse before I would fuck *you*."

The sound of her slap had echoed through the room, merging with her screech of rage. "You bastard!" Visibly fighting for control, she'd taken a deep breath. "You will regret this, Luukas Kreek. I am about to make your life so excruciatingly painful; you'll wish *you* were a rotting corpse. But have no doubts, you *will* be with me, one way or the other, even if I have to forcibly keep you here. Forever."

Luukas had smiled as she'd screamed for her freakish guards, and continued to smile as they'd lurched into the room, their putrid smell making him gag as their long, yellow claws dug into his arms and they'd dragged him from the room.

His brother would appear any moment, he was certain.

CURRENT DAY

A SLITHERY TOUCH on his cheek brought him reeling back to the present, his skin crawling at the contact. He jerked his face away in disgust.

"Still so stubborn," Leeha sighed. "How long must we do this, Luukas?" Her richly accented voice placed the emphasis on the last syllable of his name, as it was pronounced in her home country.

He kept his head turned away, struggling to stay conscious, refusing to speak to her, or to so much as look at her. He was so tired, the endless agony he was being forced to endure draining the life from him.

"Luukas, look at me," she demanded. "Luukas!"

Another heavy sigh escaped her when he stubbornly wouldn't heed her order; this battle of wills the only power he still had.

"Keira! Come here," she called impatiently.

Keira?

Why did that name sound so familiar? He heard a shuffling from the corner, as the girl there took a few steps forward, then stopped.

"Please," she whispered. "Don't make me do this."

Her voice...it was like that of an angel, and a wave of calmness washed over him, the blackness threatening again within the unexpected peace.

He fought it back, needing to stay alert. He wanted to hear the angel speak again.

"I said, COME!" Leeha's shrill shriek rang harshly through the small cell, making him wince.

He heard a quiet sob as the girl inched her way towards them, finally coming to stand next to Leeha. An urgent feeling of protectiveness hit him suddenly, and he frowned, confused.

"Now," Leeha ordered. "*Make him look at me.*"

"I don't want to do this," the girl insisted.

Seconds ticked by. He heard the girl swallow hard, and then his head was moving against his will. He ground his teeth together and tried to keep it where it was, but nothing he did kept it from turning, until he was facing Leeha and the girl next to her.

Not the girl. The *witch*.

She stood before him, one hand raised, effortlessly directing the movement of his head. Her large, hazel eyes filled with tears as they met his.

At the sight of that lovely face, Luukas lunged forward, fangs bared in a loud hiss. Ignoring his screaming muscles, he threw himself at her, snapping his teeth within inches of her pale skin.

With a startled cry, she threw up her other hand to join the first, palms out.

Luukas let out a roar as he was slammed back into the wall by an invisible force. He desperately tried to break her hold, the sight of *her*

alone succeeding at doing what the knife and torch hadn't; made him want to fight.

"Please stop!" she cried out. "You're only hurting yourself more!"

"You fucking bitch!" he bellowed.

Madness threatened as he roared at his own helplessness. *She* was the reason he was here. *She* was the one keeping him here. It was *her* fucking spells making him so weak, allowing them to starve him, beat him, slice him open...even burn him without incinerating him.

He was going to rip her apart, piece by bloody piece, if it was the last thing he ever did.

CHAPTER 2



KEIRA

Tears rolled freely down Keira's face, her heart breaking inside her chest as she held the vampire immobile against his will. She despised her abilities, despised her magic. Hated that it enabled the evil female at her side to force her to emasculate this strong, beautiful male: this male that she now loved.

She held him there against the stones as he raged, until he finally passed out again, his blood-covered, emaciated body hanging lifeless from his chains.

Gritting her teeth and dropping her arms, she tried again to plead with the demented female standing at her side. "Please, Leeha. He's weak enough now from not feeding. It's been years. You don't need me here anymore! Please, let me go." So she could figure out a way to come back and save him.

Leeha approached her prisoner, running her hand lightly down his hard chest. Strips of his shirt fell in tatters around his lean waist from countless whippings and knifings, the waistband of his jeans and the strip around his neck the only things really holding it up. A tremor

ran through him and he let out a soft groan, as though he cringed from her touch even in his unconscious state.

Keira winced at the sound, wanting to knock the bitch's hand away from him. "I won't do this anymore, Leeha. Do you hear me? I refuse to be a part of your sick plan any longer!"

"Oh, stop with all of the dramatics." Leeha scoffed. "He'll be fine, just as soon as he stops being so damn self-sacrificing." She sighed heavily. "He's only trying to protect his creations." One corner of her lips turned up in a smirk. "Little does he know, it's already too late for that."

Her eyes roved lovingly over his masculine physique, and Keira tensed, hating the possessive way she looked at him.

"I do care about him, you know." Leeha's voice was wistful. "I always have. He cares about me too," she insisted to her. "He told me so once, right after he burned my father alive. He just refuses to admit it."

She smiled strangely at Keira. It made her nervous. "Funny, how he reacts so violently to you. If I didn't know better, I'd almost be jealous." Her head jerked to the side like a bird as she eyed the other woman. "I can't quite figure it out. After all, I'm the one who brought him here. I'm the one who orders these sessions. Why do you bring out more emotion in him than I?"

She shrugged delicately, making a dismissive noise. "I'll sway him over to my side eventually."

Keira couldn't blame him for acting the way he did towards her. If it weren't for her, he wouldn't be here.

"Let me go, Leeha."

"I can't do that, witch. I need you."

"No, you don't!" Keira maintained.

Leeha smiled benignly. "Stupid, stupid girl. Did you really believe I would just let you go? Allow you to go back to your boring life? With you here, I have more power than I ever dreamed possible." She giggled with delight, gesturing to Luukas. "Even a powerful Master vampire is naught but putty in my hands."

Keira stared at her in disbelief. "You can't just keep me here forever."

Leeha bared her fangs without warning, nightmares swirling in her eyes until Keira had to look away, lest she get sucked into them, until she was as mad as her vampire. "Oh, but I can. And if you think to defy me...well, I'll just have to pay a quick visit to your home, and a certain naive little sister of yours." Sheathing her fangs, she hid a mischievous giggle behind her hand. "Well, maybe not so naive anymore."

Keira's hands fisted at her sides as her head snapped up, her eyes shooting fire at the threat to her sister. "You stay the hell away from Emma."

Leeha wagged a finger in her face. "Temper, temper, witch. Remember, I have a contingency plan. If anything happens to me, you'll never reach her in time. There won't be a thing you can do to save her."

Breathing heavily, Keira forced herself to look away, and kept her mouth shut and her magic dormant.

Leeha studied her thoughtfully for a moment. "Since you're such a bleeding heart, I think I'll just leave you in here, instead of returning you to your cell. Maybe your presence will 'comfort' him some more." She giggled again, sweeping her gown aside dramatically to leave, crossing the cell so fast she seemed to disappear and reappear in the doorway.

"What? NO! Leeha...Leeha!" Keira rushed after her, but the thick wooden door was slammed in her face. Yanking on the handle, she threw her shoulder into it and tried to knock it loose, but it wouldn't budge.

Narrowing her eyes rebelliously, she began to speak the words of an unlocking spell through gritted teeth, when Leeha called from the other side in a singsong voice, "I wouldn't do that if I were you, witch."

Keira paused mid-verse, reigning in her temper, and dropped her hands.

Tiredly closing her eyes, she listened to Leeha order one of the

“normal” guards to stay there and watch the door. She pulled her threadbare blanket closer around herself, covering her bare arms and legs, unsuccessfully trying to keep the damp chill at bay. Taking a fortifying breath, she resisted the urge to cough, and tried to ignore the way the musty air burned her lungs. She didn’t know if it would be enough to rouse the vampire again, but she didn’t want to take the chance.

Quietly as she could, she shuffled back to her corner in the shadows and sank down onto the cold dirt. Her belly growled loudly and she placed a hand over it. They’d probably forget to feed her again.

Her eyes misted over. How had she gotten herself into this mess?

She missed her sister, and prayed that she was ok. The last time she’d seen Emma, they’d been leaving a carnival near their hometown. It was the first time they’d really had fun since their parents had died months before. After riding every ride and eating millions of calories worth of carnival food, they’d chased each other across the field towards their car, and had wandered into a nightmare, to find creatures of hell waiting for them.

Tall and thin, yet strangely muscular, their grey skin was rotting off of their bare bodies, yet they were alive. Blood oozed from their bulging eyes as they observed the girls, and then their leader had pushed its hairless head towards them and hissed loudly, bloody saliva dripping from its mouthful of fangs...

They’d come for *her*, one of them scooping her up onto its bony shoulder and running off into the trees. Its claws had dug into the backs of her legs to keep her still, and it had lapped at the bleeding wounds disgustingly as it carried her through the woods.

She’d screamed at her sister to "RUN!" but it was too late. As she’d watched helplessly, the remaining creatures had closed in on Emma, cutting her off from her sight. Keira had no idea what had happened to her, other than what Lecha had told her: That she was released safe and sound once Keira had been taken far enough away.

Problem was, there was no way in hell she trusted that bitch. Had they attacked her sister? Fed from her? Let her go? Was she home safe,

or locked up in a dirty cell like this one? Was she even still alive, or had they killed her?

A single tear escaped her tightly closed eyes, leaving a wet trail down her dirt-streaked cheek. She wiped it away with a shaky sigh. Feeling sorry for herself wouldn't get her anywhere. What she needed to do was figure out a way to get them all out of this mess: Emma, herself, and the vampire.

As though he sensed her attention on him, she heard his chains rattle as he moaned, the pitiful sound bringing a fresh bout of tears to her eyes. Sliding one booted foot in towards himself, he tried to get his leg under him to relieve his disjointed shoulders of some of his weight, but he was too weak, and he collapsed again with a jerk and a hiss of pain as his foot slipped back out from under him. His head lolled on his chest as he, thankfully, blacked out again.

Keira let her eyes roam over him as he hung there. Even dirty, starved, and covered in his own drying blood, he was a beautiful specimen of a male.

His thick, dark hair brushed the bottom of his neck and hung in his face, hiding his broad forehead, prominent cheekbones, and strong jaw. His eyes, when open, were deep set and intense, and inexplicably, had darkened to a depthless ebony a year or so after he'd been brought down here.

What was left of his t-shirt did nothing to hide the ropes of muscle straining against the confinement of the chains. His olive-toned skin was ashen and slightly loose on his bones from the lack of feedings, but she remembered the rich coloring he'd had, and would have again, if she had anything to say about it.

SEVEN YEARS AGO

THE MOMENT she'd first caught sight of him, Keira's heart had stopped beating, only to resume pounding hard and fast in her chest a moment later.

The notorious Luukas Kreek: the Master vampire who'd crossed an entire ocean and built up his own colony of vampires in a brand new land; a risk that had been unheard of before he came along.

Her breath had caught in her throat when he'd stepped from his vehicle outside the front entrance of Leeha's main fortress and confidently strolled towards them. Wearing only jeans, combat boots, and a casual black t-shirt, he nonetheless had a commanding presence which demanded her attention.

She couldn't take her eyes off of him.

His power coiled around him like a living essence, preceding him as he strode their way. It slithered over her skin when it reached her, feeling her out. Though she'd stood behind and slightly to the left of the female vampire who'd called him there, silver-grey eyes had honed in on her immediately, shining through the inky night like beacons. He'd smiled at her, and she'd returned the smile, powerless to do otherwise, until she'd remembered the reason she was there.

He'd frowned slightly as her smile had faltered, his eyes narrowing in suspicion as he'd quickly glanced at Leeha, and then towards the thick trees on either side of the creek that flowed directly into the mountain in front of him.

He'd known then. He'd known that something was up. Pausing briefly where he was, he'd raised an eyebrow, a question in his eyes.

She'd never met him before, had only heard stories, but something inside of her had balked at being a part of what Leeha had planned. Mindful of the threat to her sister, she'd tried to warn him without drawing attention to herself, looking pointedly at his Hummer and then back at him, trying to tell him to run for it.

But he'd just cocked his head and grinned arrogantly, fearlessly. She'd known why he wasn't afraid. There weren't many threats to a Master vampire as powerful as he was. Actually, there were only two: killing all of his created children, his power draining with each death, and a witch. A powerful witch...like Keira. And she, under Leeha's orders, had been very careful to keep her magic concealed so he wouldn't sense it.

Approaching the two females, Luukas had come to a halt directly

in front of Leeha, finally dragging his eyes from Keira long enough to greet her. Bending at the waist, he'd taken her proffered hand, briefly kissing the back of it before letting it drop back to her side.

"Leeha."

His voice was deep and as smooth as a fine cognac. He'd spoken in low tones, and Keira had felt chills whisper over her skin as he'd bowed again and introduced himself to her, boldly raking his eyes over her small form. "My name is Luukas Kreek, originally from Estonia."

She'd opened her mouth to tell him her name, but was interrupted by Leeha before she could say anything.

"She is not important," she'd sneered. "I trust you had no troubles finding my home?"

Luukas had stared intensely at Keira a moment longer before turning his attention back to his hostess. "No trouble at all. Shall we go in? Or are we going to do this out here?"

Leeha had smiled at him sweetly, looking up at him through lowered lashes. "Follow me." Shooting a warning look Keira's way, she'd grabbed her roughly by the arm and pushed her out in front, while she herself fell into step with Luukas.

"Do you have a new pet?" she'd heard him ask.

Leeha had chuckled. "You could say that."

"Does she not have any warmer clothes?"

Keira had still been wearing the rolled-up cargo shorts, slip-on Keds, and white, short-sleeved printed T-shirt she'd worn to the carnival.

Leeha had been silent for a moment. "I suppose I could find her something," she'd said offhandedly.

She hadn't. Keira still wore the same clothes today, but she *had* been given something of a blanket.

Following the rambling creek into the cave at the base of the mountain, Keira had felt the tiny hairs rise on the back of her neck as she felt the weight of his eyes on her. She tried to ignore him, leading them over to the tunnel that would take them into the interior. Torches lined the walls, lighting the way through the narrow space,

until it gradually opened into a gaping cavern, and Luukas had whistled with appreciation as he'd taken it all in. "Wow. Quite a place you have here."

The main room they'd entered had been gouged out of the mountain interior until it resembled a great cathedral of old, including mosaic floor tiles, massive columns, and a soaring ceiling of pointed arches. At the far end of the center aisle were smooth stone steps leading up to a large platform, upon which sat an impressive throne made of the same glossy, black stone that lined the walls, with threads of glittering gold interspersed throughout. Plush red cushions covered the seat and back, completing the royal effect.

Luukas had turned in a circle, taking in the full effect. "Impressive."

Leeha had preened like a peacock under his praise. "It took my vampires a full six months to construct it to my specifications. There is no electricity, but I prefer it that way. We do have running water, however," Leeha had told him proudly. "I think they did quite well."

"Where *are* all of your little minions?" Luukas had asked.

"Oh, they're around. There are many rooms here in my home, many more than meets the eye," Leeha had alluded.

Luukas smiled. "I would expect nothing less." With another quick glance at Keira, he'd proposed, "Shall we get down to business?"

Giving him a regal nod, Leeha had glided down the aisle and climbed the stairs to take her place upon the throne, over-exaggerating the sway of her hips in her sheer gown like a canine in heat.

Keira had barely resisted the urge to roll her eyes, and placed herself over to the side of the platform as instructed beforehand.

Luukas had only looked amused at Leeha's display as he took his place on the main floor directly in front of, and below, her.

Sitting regally upon her chair, she'd indicated that he was allowed to speak.

Clasping his hands behind him, he'd presented his case, his deep voice carrying across the vast space easily. "I agreed to meet you here today to end this misunderstanding between us, once and for all. I am aware that your adopted father raised you to believe in

what can only be called a fantasy, and I am truly sorry for that. But that's all it is, a fantasy. I have been lenient with you up until now, because I know it's hard for you to come to terms with the fact that he lied to you. But enough is enough. You have created your own colony by taking a group of my own vampires, and I will allow you to keep them and have your little home up here. In return, you need to stay within your boundaries, and give up this silly idea of yours. There has never been a time when two vampires have ruled together as equals and that's not going to change. Find yourself a nice, little human male to play with and make him your mate, if it pleases you."

Here he'd paused, and his eyes had begun to glow an eerie grey-green as his voice had taken on a menacing timbre. "However, if I hear anything more of you disregarding the rules and threatening our existence with your careless hunting of humans, you will have the same fate as your father. And I will come here again and carry it out myself."

Gathering the force of his power tightly around himself again, his eyes had dimmed back to grey, and he'd given her a patronizing smile. "I think I'm being more than fair about this. Other Masters would have killed you long ago for your impertinence."

Leeha's expression hadn't changed while he'd made his speech, and she'd continued to look at him impassively as she'd appeared to think on what he had just said. Finally, she'd sighed with disappointment.

"I'm afraid you still don't take me seriously, Luukas, and I'm beginning to wonder if you ever will. But you must believe that I do care about you, and I know you care about me. What do I have to do to convince you that we belong together?"

"There is *nothing* you can do," he'd asserted, "that would ever convince me. I'm sorry to be so blunt, but I don't have feelings for you Leeha. Not like that."

"But you do," she purred, "and you will come to realize this, Luukas. Eventually."

Keira had kept her eyes down and tried not to fidget as the tension in the room had grown to an uncomfortable level. It had gone on for

so long that she'd nearly jumped out of her skin when Leeha had suddenly ordered, "Keira! Do it! Now!"

Keira had cast a frantic look her way. She was really going to make her do this?

Leeha had slowly stood, daggers shooting from her blood-red eyes. In a menacing tone, she'd spoken just one word: "Sister."

She'd known Luukas had been studying her, trying to figure out what was going on, but she hadn't been able to bring herself to look at him.

She'd had no choice.

Closing her eyes and lifting her arms towards him, Keira had drawn on all of the powers of the earth's energy, pulling them into herself and releasing her magic. She'd heard Luukas gasp as her spell reached towards him, swirling around him to draw on his power.

"What are you doing?!" he'd roared.

Tears filling her eyes, she'd squeezed them tight as she'd spoken the incantation that would harness the power of a Master vampire and allow him to be captured, drawing it into herself.

Her chants rose louder and louder, and she'd opened her eyes to see him fall onto his knees, his back arched and his muscles pulled taut as he'd fought the magic. But he was no match for her, and he'd collapsed onto the floor as she'd finished the spell and lowered her hands.

"Guards!" Leeha had shrieked gleefully. "Take him to the room next to mine, and lock him in."

A foul smell had filled the room as half a dozen of Leeha's morbid creations had lurched through a hidden doorway, hissing at Keira as they'd passed.

She'd recoiled from them, the night they'd stolen her from the carnival grounds, just a few days before, still fresh in her mind. Her wounds had still been healing.

Two of them had hauled Luukas off, and Leeha had ordered the remaining ones to "Take her down to one of the cells."

Keira had had no time to react before they'd had her by the arms and were dragging her away. As they'd reached the doorway of the

tunnel leading down to the underground, she'd heard Leeha call out after them, "Remember our deal, witch!"

CURRENT DAY

SHE'D BEEN DOWN HERE EVER since. She still wondered how Leeha had found out about her. Her family had gone above and beyond to keep her existence and her practicing a secret, to prevent something just like this from happening.

They'd brought Luukas down to the cell next to hers a few months after he'd arrived. How long ago was that now? Three years? Five? Keira had lost track.

She'd cringed under her blanket in the corner of her cell as they'd passed by, praying he wouldn't see her, and relieved beyond measure when he hadn't looked her way.

That relief was short-lived, however, for Leeha had soon grown tired of his continued resistance and had started calling Keira into his cell to participate in his "emotional rehabilitation".

Forcing her to use her magic, she'd pushed his limits to new heights, torturing him in ways that were so horrendous it made Keira gag, and gave her nightmares whenever she managed to sleep. Luckily, that wasn't very often.

If she started feeling rebellious and refused Leeha's wishes, all it took was a reminder of the threat to Emma to bring her back in line.

Keira hated herself for what she was doing to him, and that hatred grew more every day. For the gods were cruel - even crueler than Leeha - because somehow, over the years, in the midst of this nightmare, she had fallen for her vampire.

But she didn't see any way to get out of her part in all of this; at least not until she could get them out of there, and saw for herself that her sister was safe.

However, now that she was in the same cell, maybe there was something she could do to relieve his suffering, if only a little.

Pushing herself up off the floor, she walked over to the door and stood on her tiptoes until she could see out of the small window. A dirty-blond head was on the other side, and Keira sent up a silent thanks. She knew this guard. He liked to leer at her through the door of her cell whenever she tried to wash herself with what little water they allowed her. Not that it helped much, without a change of clothes.

She'd been embarrassed at first, but eventually, she'd gotten over it. Let him look. Leeha wouldn't let anyone touch her. She needed Keira's magic to enable her to take out her sick frustrations on Luukas.

"Hey," she whispered. She knew he'd hear her. Vamps had excellent hearing.

He didn't turn around, but the slight tilt of his head told her that he was listening. Keeping her voice down, she made her play. "I have an offer for you, Blondie. Have they brought your dinner yet?" He turned his head slightly to the right and back to the left. "Ok. Good. I'll make you a deal. If you let me have your dinner, no questions asked, I'll provide you with a better one. Something from a real, live human, if you get what I mean." Lifting her arm, she waved her bare wrist back and forth in front of the small opening, smiling bitterly as his head whipped towards it and he inhaled deeply.

The guards were fed blood bags shortly after nightfall. Keira knew this because she'd heard them talking about it. She also knew that they detested bagged blood by the way they bitched about it. "Do we have a deal?"

She could practically hear him salivating as he gave a sharp nod.

She nodded back, even though he couldn't see her. Ok then. "Good."

As she headed back to her corner, she hoped like hell that this particular vampire had some semblance of self-control, and wouldn't get carried away with his meal. At least he seemed somewhat sane, unlike her new cellmate.

CHAPTER 3



LEEHA

After leaving Luukas' cell, Leeha went straight to her private chambers. Closing the door, she locked it securely behind her. She needed a good soak in a nice hot bath. This business with Luukas was making her entirely too tense. He was just so stubborn. Most males would have broken years ago, but the fact that he hadn't only made her want him more. A lot of males looked good, but inner strength like that was so hard to find these days.

A delicious shiver ran down her spine as she envisioned that strength moving above her in her bed. She'd never had sex with the Master vampire, but she fantasized about it all the time when she was alone, and when she was fucking someone else. Imagining she was with Luukas was the only way she could get her pleasure.

Strolling over to her dressing table, she sat down to take off her ruby necklace. She rubbed her fingers over the stone lovingly. It was her favorite piece of jewelry. Her father had given it to her shortly before he was put to death for creating her.

It matched her eyes.

She missed him, her creator. He'd taken her from a life of neglect

and starvation with the humans and adopted her into his family, protecting her and caring for her like she was his very own child.

In return, all he'd asked of her was a *tiny* little sip of her blood when he tucked her in at night.

A child's blood, he'd told her, was the best blood of all. It was fresh and innocent and pure, unlike an adult's blood, which had been muddied up with evil thoughts and deeds.

The first few nights after her arrival, she'd been frightened when he'd snuggled up behind her in her new bed, but he'd been so very gentle with her, just as a real father would. Pulling her hair back off of her neck, he'd inhale deeply, and tell her how very sweet she smelled.

She'd barely felt his fangs sliding into the tender skin of her neck, and when he'd start to drink, pulling on the vein, it had actually felt kind of ...good.

Over time, as she'd matured, he'd spent more and more time with her while "tucking her in". After he'd taken his nightly drink, he would pull her in close to him, whispering things in her ear; wicked things that made her skin burn and her body tense up with apprehension. He would pet her as he talked to her, running his hand down her arm and up her thigh, calming her.

He would tell her that she was beautiful, and that she was destined for greatness. He'd tell her that she was going to be queen someday, and lead beside their Master. He'd tell her he needed to prepare her for that day, so that by the time she was of age, Lukas wouldn't be able to resist her.

His petting had become more and more aggressive, his words more urgent until finally, one night, he'd taken her innocence and made her a woman.

She'd liked the idea of being queen.

When she was twenty-five in human years, her father had turned her into what he was, without Luukas' permission: Illegally, as it turned out. She had woken up as a vampire, half mad with thirst, and her father had been there with someone for her to drink.

They had shared the young girl's blood, and when she'd had her fill, Leeha had watched as her father had raped the human before

draining her dry. He wasn't loving with the girl like he was with her. She was only a human, he'd explained. Not special like Leeha.

When he'd brought her a new meal the next night, she'd joined in on the rape.

A month later, her father had proclaimed her ready to approach Luukas. *He will not be able to resist you!* he'd announced.

But he'd been wrong.

Luukas had stared at her like she had grown two heads when she'd finally gained an audience with him, demanding to know where she had come from, and who had turned her.

Taking off her dress, she'd offered him her body, explaining to him how her father had prepared her to rule by his side, and to please him in bed. Swiftly getting over his shock, Luukas had ordered her to dress herself, and gently but sternly told her that her father was horribly misguided.

He'd apologized for her suffering, and told her he would have removed her from the household if he had known what had been happening there.

He'd called a female vampire who lived in his building, and had her take Leeha to her home to live until he'd dealt with her father.

A week later, he'd burned her father to death in the mountains outside of Seattle.

Grabbing her hairbrush, she brushed her hair up off of her neck with angry strokes, securing it with a clip. Admiring her reflection in the mirror, a small smile suddenly turned up the corners of her lips.

"If you're going to spy on me," she chided, "you may as well come over here and help me get out of this gown."

After a moment, Josiah, her young apprentice, crept out from where he'd been lurking in the bathroom. "I'm sorry, mistress. I was only in here checking that you have everything you need when you walked in. You surprised me is all, and it seemed like you wanted to be alone."

She followed his movements in the mirror as he came up behind her and unzipped her gown. If his skin hadn't been so dark, she would've sworn he was blushing.

"It's all right, Josiah. You can help me with my bath."

His eyes flew up to meet hers in the mirror, before he quickly dropped them again. But not before she'd seen his complete adoration for her.

"Anything you need."

Kicking off her heels, she stood and sashayed into the bath, the bare skin of her back tingling under his scorching gaze. Josiah was her greatest admirer, she knew, and he was often useful. However, he still had so much to learn.

Turning on the water, she added some lavender to her oversized tub, inhaling the calming scent before dealing with his actions earlier.

"What I need," she told him, as she came back into the room, "is someone who doesn't flee in fear from a hateful look."

Josiah hung his head in shame. "You're right, of course. I don't know why I let him get to me. It's not like he can hurt me."

She caressed his cheek with her cold fingers. "No, he can't. I wouldn't let him. You are too important to me."

Clenching his jaw, he lifted his head, a challenge in his brown eyes. "If I'm so important, what do you need him for? We should remove the witch's protection of fire and just leave him in the sun to burn. It's been seven *years*, Leeha. He's not going to change his mind. *I* can rule alongside you. No one will ever be more loyal or love you more than I do."

"We've discussed this, Josiah," she told him curtly. "I need him. He's over six hundred years old, and is the most powerful Master vampire of our time. Whatever example he leads, the rest of our kind will follow."

She looked him up and down, "Do you really think anyone would follow *you*? You're nothing as far as vampires go. You're barely ten years old. What good is that to me and my plans?"

Josiah looked away, the muscle in his jaw jumping in anger.

With a burdened sigh, she softened her tone. "Don't be cross with me. I'll let you burn him again tomorrow if it will make you feel better."

"Can I whip him too?" he asked petulantly.

She smiled, "Of course. He'll heal. A little more slowly these days, but he will." She left him then to go turn off the bath water. "Come, my love. I'll let you wash my back. And afterwards, we can discuss the building of our legion."

When he didn't follow right away, she put her hands on her hips, her head tilting jerkily to the side. "Don't pout, Josiah. It's not attractive."

Dropping his arms to his sides, he heaved a great sigh, unable to resist her. His tongue darted out to lick his lips as Leeha slid her gown off of her pale shoulders and let it drop carelessly to the floor. She wore absolutely nothing underneath.

"Come, Josiah." She entreated huskily, holding out her hand to him.

He ran his hungry eyes from the top of her red hair to her small toes. With a moan of defeat, he pulled off his shirt and followed her into the bathroom to wash her back and anything else she desired him to.

CHAPTER 4



LUUKAS

Luukas fought his way up through the blackness, driven by an urgency he couldn't name. But as he faded in and out of consciousness, the throbbing agony that comprised his physical form tried to pull him back down into the sweet depths of nothingness.

He wanted to let it take him, so badly, but no...he needed to stay awake.

Bit by bit, he became aware of a soft slurping sound that seemed out of place in this, his own personal hell. Attempting to quiet his ragged breathing, he listened closer.

He heard the consistent *drip, drip, drip* of the water he could never taste, and he heard the light pitter-patter of the rats as they scurried down the hall outside his cell.

His stomach clenched. Ah, gods...were they eating him again?

It wouldn't be the first time he'd awoken to find them chewing on his wounds as he hung there, their soft squeaks clawing at his sanity... but no, that wasn't what he heard this time. This was more of a sucking sound.

His eyes cracked open as another sound came to his ears, a voice: the angel's voice.

"Stop," she whispered. "You need to stop now."

Luukas squeezed his eyes shut again in disbelief. He had to be hallucinating.

The dark-haired angel was still in his cell, pressed up against the wall by the door, her ragged blanket falling from one shoulder.

She was in the arms of a man. He was hunched over her, and he was kissing her neck.

He heard her whimper and his eyes popped open again. They were still there. He wasn't hallucinating.

As he watched, his angel began to struggle in the blonde man's arms, and her voice got sharper and more frantic.

"Stop! You have to stop!"

The man didn't stop. A low growl reverberated from deep within Luukas' throat. His fangs slid down with aggression as he restlessly shifted his weight on his chains. But still, the man didn't stop kissing her.

No. Not kissing. Feeding.

That was no man, but a vampire—and he was feeding from his angel.

Rage surged through him. A rage such as he'd never felt before.

She started pounding on the vampire's head and shoulders with her small fists, trying to break his hold.

He ignored her like she was nothing more than an annoying gnat, tightening his hold on her as she struggled.

Luukas strained against his chains, the sounds erupting from deep within his chest becoming animalistic in nature as he fought to get to her.

All of the noise must have finally disturbed the feeding vampire. His head jerked up from her neck, leaving ragged gashes where he had bitten her. He released her from his hold and stepped back, not bothering to heal the torn flesh.

Luukas roared with fury at the sight, lurching towards the other vampire with bared fangs and mad, wild eyes. The chains clanged

loudly as they pulled him up short, but the pain of his shoulders and body didn't even register past his overwhelming need to kill the other vampire.

MINE!

The bastard smiled at him as he casually wiped the blood from his mouth with the back of his hand, then sauntered out of the cell, pulling the door shut behind him and locking it again with a clank.

Yanking impatiently on his chains, Luukas lunged towards the door, his fangs aching painfully with the need to rip into the fucking bastard.

His roar of frustration echoed through the cell when the chains still wouldn't give. After a minute or so, he finally gave up and fell back against the rock wall, chest heaving with exhaustion, shoulders throbbing.

A small movement out of the corner of his eye caught his attention. He whipped his head around to the girl, who was trying to staunch the flow of blood from her neck with an edge of the threadbare blanket. She didn't look at him as she ripped off long strips of it, wadding one up to apply pressure and tying the other around her throat to hold it there.

His top lip pulled back off of his fangs in a snarl as the smell of her blood permeated the small room; the overwhelming need of his thirst so intense, he nearly passed out again.

She must have sensed the change in him, for her hazel eyes flashed up to his, widening slightly as she took him in. Quickly, she crouched down and picked something up off of the floor.

She eyed him warily for a moment, seeming to gather up her nerve, before cautiously coming toward him, staying just out of his reach.

Closing his eyes, he inhaled her scent, groaning aloud at the unbelievable smell of her. Ah. Gods. She was torturing him.

Then she spoke. "I have something for you, and I know it will be hard, but you have to try to keep it under control."

His eyes snapped open in confusion, to find her fiddling with a blood bag.

A fucking plastic blood bag.

He nearly laughed out loud. After all the shit he gave his brother, Nikulas, for drinking those things, and here he was, thinking nothing had ever looked better to him.

Except for the female tampering with the seal.

Finally managing to get it open, she glanced up at him with an apologetic look. "I'm sorry. I know these things taste like crap, or so I hear, but I couldn't take the risk of letting you drink from me with the condition you're in." She started to raise it to his mouth, pausing midair as she begged him once more, "Please. Control yourself, Luukas. Don't make me force you to. I promise I'll get you more blood as soon as I can." With that, she raised the bag the rest of the way up to his mouth.

Luukas' eyes rolled back in his head as the first drops hit his parched tongue. Sucking hard, he swallowed greedily as she poured the nasty stuff down his throat, and fought the urge to spit it back out.

Immediately, he felt the life giving fluid flooding his desiccated cells, the pain of his broken body flaring temporarily before it began to heal him.

But it wasn't enough...wasn't nearly enough. He needed more.

He desperately clamped his teeth down on the bag when she tried to pull it away.

"It's all gone," she told him firmly. "Let go."

But he couldn't let go.

She yanked it away from him, and he went into full survival mode, fighting for his meal, only to find himself thrown back against the wall and unable to move.

He smashed his head back into the wall with a loud roar of frustration, muscles pulled taut as he strained against her hold.

"Luukas! Stop it!" she ordered. "I won't let you hurt yourself more!"

Chest heaving with harsh breaths, he closed his eyes. He could still feel the blood working its way throughout his system. He tried to concentrate on that, and not on his lingering thirst, but it was impossible.

"More," he rasped out.

"I don't have any more, but I'll get you some at next meal," she promised. "Just hang in there, big guy."

Luukas could feel his body continuing to heal, not much, but just enough to close the worst of his wounds. It wouldn't last long, he knew. That sniveling little pet of Leeha's would be back soon to add some more. He never stayed away for long.

The angel was talking again. He focused on her words. She was insisting she'd bring more, that it wouldn't be long.

He calmed as he listened to her, opening his eyes to find her watching him guardedly.

"Why are they doing this to me?" He sounded pitiful even to himself, and he looked away from her, ashamed for the angel to see him like this.

She lowered her hand, and he felt the force that held him gradually ease up until he was free to move again.

Ah, yes. Not an angel. No, she was a fucking witch.

His eyes burned with hatred as he glared at her.

"Why are you *helping* them?" he gritted through his teeth before she could answer.

She turned away from him and his anger, taking the empty blood bag over to the corner she normally huddled in. Squatting down, she used her fingers to dig down into the dirt floor. When the hole was deep enough, she crumpled the bag and placed it inside, scooping the loose dirt back over the top, burying it. Once she was done, she stood and scuffed the top of it with her shoe, then walked over it a few times, until there was no sign that the earth had been disturbed there.

He watched her while she hid the evidence, his brows pulled down in puzzlement. He was so confused. Why was she helping him now?

"I don't understand. Please," he begged, "Please, talk to me."

When she finally turned back to him, her large eyes were brimming with tears.

"Listen to me," she implored him. "I don't want to do this! I don't want to help her hurt you! But I have no choice!" Her voice shook with emotion. "I can't stand what that bitch does to you, what she's

been doing to you all these years, but there's nothing I can do about it. At least not yet."

"Years..." he repeated. "How long have I been here?" he asked.

She gave him a sad smile. "A long time."

He tried to gather his scattered wits together into coherent thoughts, tried to think of the questions he wanted to ask, but they stayed just out of his grasp. He felt as if he was losing his sanity, and it terrified him.

The angel/witch appeared in front of him. "Shhhh. It's alright, vampire. It will be all right. Sleep now."

She raised her hand, and he felt the weight of his body ease up, providing welcome relief to his mangled shoulders. He groaned aloud at the respite, his head falling forward with exhaustion as he let the blackness take him again.

CHAPTER 5



SHEA

Shea screamed in agony as the hands wrapped around her wrists and ankles and tossed her into the back of a van, where more hands joined them to hold her down as the vehicle took off. She was thrown to and fro as the van veered around a corner, but the hands held her in place.

Their touch caused excruciating pain to shoot through every nerve in her body, blasting down her spine and out her limbs. Her arms and legs flopped around like a fish, in spite of the strength of the vampires restraining her. She had no control over her body anymore.

Mindlessly, she screamed with the pain.

A hand smacked down hard over her mouth to shut her up. Shea convulsed harder, her eyes rolling back into her head, her fangs slicing into the male's palm. She couldn't see. Couldn't breathe.

"What the fuck is with her?" A wheezy voice asked.

"Who the hell knows?" The answering voice was gruff. "Let's just get her to the boss lady. She can deal with her."

What felt like an eternity later, tires squealed, and the smell of burning rubber rose up from the pavement as the back doors of the

van were flung open wide. Shea was lifted out of the van and hustled up a set of stairs.

At least the hand was off of her mouth now so she could scream again.

"Shut the door! Shut the door! Let's go!"

She was dropped onto a hard floor, and the hands were removed. Oh, sweet relief.

Shea sucked in air as she blinked open her eyes. Lights flickered above her head. The floor vibrated, and she felt wheels rolling underneath her again. They were moving.

A disembodied voice came over the speakers. "We're cleared for takeoff. Everybody sit down and buckle up."

Shea rolled her head to her right and then to her left, breathing hard, getting a feel for where she was. She was lying in the middle aisle of a small airplane.

"Should we buckle her up?" Wheezy asked.

"Nah, fuck 'er. Let 'er bounce around in the turbulence. Maybe it'll knock 'er the hell out, and she'll quit with all the caterwauling."

Wannabe gangster dude appeared to be the leader of her group of kidnappers.

She wondered if they also had Christian and Dante, Luukas' other two Hunters. She'd been looking for them when she'd been swiped right off of the street in front of their apartments, right before they were to leave to go meet Nikulas and Aiden.

She should've called Aiden, told him what was going on, before she just ran out looking for them.

Stupid, stupid! They'll have no idea what happened to the three Hunters who were supposed to meet them up north and help them get Luukas away from that bitch, Leeha.

A nervous voice from the front of the plane spoke up, "She's a Hunter, man. We should chain her up."

"Doesn't look like she's gonna be huntin' nothin' at the moment."

"But what if it's a trick?" the nervous one asked.

A swift kick landed in her ribcage, knocking the air out of her.

Shea curled in on herself, moaning, pulling her knees up to protect her middle.

"It ain't a trick. Relax, idiot."

Conversation stopped as the plane hurtled down the runway. A few seconds later, Shea's stomach lurched as they became airborne.

"Where are you taking me?" she demanded weakly.

"She speaks, instead of screaming," Gangster wannabe-man announced. "Don't worry, honey. You'll find out soon enough."

Shea flopped over onto her back. Her body felt like it'd been through an electrocution. Maybe it had. She'd never been able to find out why the hell she'd started reacting this way whenever a male touched her, but it had started right after Luukas had disappeared.

If it would keep their hands off of her, she'd be more than happy to lay here and not cause any trouble. Besides, where would she go? Even if she somehow managed to subdue them all, she'd be stuck on this plane until it landed. She didn't know how to fly a plane, so she'd have to leave the pilot alive. That would be a sticky situation.

No, better to wait until they landed and she could regain her strength and find a weapon. Until then, she could play the weak, subdued female.

The flight was short, with relatively little turbulence, and they were landing again much sooner than Shea would've liked. She wished she'd had more time to recover, but she'd have to make do. She'd never had so many men touch her at once, or had a reaction this strong; it'd completely incapacitated her. And for a vampire, that was really saying something.

She pushed herself up into a sitting position as the four vampires who'd kidnapped her right off of the streets of Seattle unbuckled their seatbelts and prepared to disembark.

"Stay right where ya are, honey," Gangster-dude told her. "Skip, go get the chains from the front there."

The whiney one scurried to the front of the plane to do as he was told, returning with an armful of chains with cuffs on the ends. The big one grabbed her around the arm, and she let out a grunt of pain as

he yanked her to her feet. As soon as she was steady, she tore her arm from his grasp.

"Don't. Touch. Me." she hissed at him.

He eyeballed her, a thoughtful expression on his bulbous features. "I'll tell ya what, girlie. You come along nice with us, and we won't touch you. But you try anything, and you'll be at the bottom of a man-pile again before you can blink, and I don't care how much ya scream. Got it?"

"Yeah, I got it." She held out her wrists like a good girl, and Gangster-dude clamped the cuffs on them, smirking when his fingers brushed her skin and she winced. He then took the other chain from Whiney and clamped those cuffs onto her ankles.

Dammit. They were silver. Not as lethal to vampires as the movies made it out to be, but not good either. Something about the metal weakened a vampire enough to where she actually began to worry about whether or not she'd be able to get herself out of this mess.

With Gangster-dude and Whiney leading the way, she shuffled off of the plane restrained by her chains, the other two big and silent types bringing up the rear.

They loaded her up into the bed of a pickup truck. Gangster-dude and Whiney got in the front, while the other two big talkers hopped into the back with her. Sitting up on the sides of the bed, they watched her with exposed fangs, paying particular attention to the dangerous area of her boobs as they bounced along the rutted roads. She glared back at them, but they weren't to be deterred.

They obviously took their jobs of prisoner-watcher very seriously.

After a while, Shea gave up and let them stare as she watched the scenery go by through the misty rain, and tried to figure out where she was. If the snow-capped mountains were any indicator, they had flown north. They must be in Canada, and she was pretty sure she knew where they were taking her now.

They'd driven for about forty minutes when they pulled off of the main road onto a barely-there sidetrack. Bumping along on the dirt road, Shea gripped the side to keep herself from bouncing out of the truck bed.

Ten minutes later, they pulled up outside of an old barn that appeared to be on the verge of collapse. About half of the roof was lying on the floor towards the back, and as they entered the debilitated building, an owl flew gracefully down from the rafters, swooped out the hole in the roof, and into the night.

Gangster-dude shoved her down into a corner. "Sit. We're just gonna hang out here for a bit until we get the OK to bring you to Leeha."

"So you *are* Leeha's bitches." Shea sank to the rotted, wooden floor gratefully.

Gangster-dude squatted down in front of her. "That deal we made includes keeping that smart mouth shut. You wouldn't want me to have to keep a hand over it to shut ya up, now would ya?"

Shea gave him a stony stare, and wisely kept her mouth shut.

"Yeah, I didn't think so." With a snort, he stood and hitched up his jeans, then walked over to join the rest of his crew.

Shea settled back against the wall behind her with a sigh. Looking out the hole in the roof, she tried to determine how long they had until dawn. They'd all be huddled in the corner if they didn't hear from Leeha before the sun came up.

* * *

THREE HOURS PASSED since Shea had been grabbed off the street and shuttled up to Canada, and they were still waiting it out in the barn. All four of her captors kept eyeing the sky with trepidation, worried about the oncoming dawn.

Really, couldn't they have found a nice cave or something to hang out in? Idiots.

She was beginning to wonder if they were ever going to get that call when Gangster-dude's phone went off.

"Mistress! Oh, Josiah. Yes, we have her. Yes." He was silent for a few minutes, his eyes growing wide as he listened and he looked at the others with alarm. "Yes. Right away. We're coming." Hanging up, he ordered the others to prepare to leave.

"Let's go, honey." Grabbing her arm, he pulled Shea to her feet, and gave her a push to get her moving.

"Let's go!" he yelled to the others. "We gotta go. We gotta go right now."

Hustling them all out the door, they loaded back up into the pickup and took off, back out to the main road.

"What's going on?" Whiney asked him from the passenger seat.

Shea scooted back in the truck bed until she was up against the back windshield, turning her head to listen through the glass.

"There's other vamps in the area. Leeha wants us to get back to the mountain pronto, and hide this one so they don't see her."

"What vamps?"

"Luukas' brother, and another Hunter. They've got a human girl with them too."

Nikulas! And Aiden! And they must've found Emma.

Shea smiled with glee at the two thugs occupying the back with her again. They didn't notice. Their eyes were trained on her cleavage, amply displayed by her low-cut cotton shirt. One of them kept running his tongue over the tip of his fang.

Perv.

Shea rolled her eyes. Honestly, not to brag or anything, but she was used to it. Men usually found her hard to resist for some reason, women too actually. She was always getting hit on with cheesy pick-up lines, usually something about her mossy-green eyes being hypnotizing, her pale skin flawless, her dark, wavy hair luxurious...blah, blah, blah.

One guy had even asked to paint her.

Right now, the only thing her "luxurious" hair was doing was blowing into her face so she couldn't see. Lifting her chained hands, she pushed it out of her face, ignoring the two idiots with the staring problems.

Let them look. It might be the last chance they'd ever get.

She watched the scenery pass by. It was dark, and there wasn't much of a moon to light the way, but she could see just fine. Before

long, she started recognizing the mountain range they were approaching.

They were heading straight towards Leeha's fortress, which meant Nik and Aiden were most likely in their secret hideout, scoping things out. She could only pray that they were out watching and would see her.

They didn't pull up to the front, but circumvented the base of the snow-capped peak to head around to the hidden side entrance. The truck skidded to a stop amongst the pine trees, the vampires jumping out before the engine was turned off.

Shea stood up and leapt over the side also, not waiting for anyone to "assist" her.

Once inside, they took a sharp right, and walked single-file through a narrow tunnel.

One of her watchdogs hesitated, "We're not going to see the mistress?"

"No," Wannabe gangster-man told him. "I was ordered to take her straight to the altar room."

"We're going to the altar room?" Whiney sounded even whinier than usual.

"That's what I was told."

Wow. Even gangster-dude didn't sound like his usual macho self. What the hell was in this altar room?

"What's in the altar room? Besides an altar, I assume," Shea asked.

Whiney, who was directly in front of her, glanced back over his shoulder with worried eyes, but didn't deign to answer her.

This couldn't be good.

Other than the clanking of Shea's chains, they traversed the tunnels in relative silence, turning down so many different side passageways, Shea knew she'd never find her way back out of there. The place was like a creepy garden maze gone awry, and the air became colder and mustier as they descended further and further into the bowels of the mountain.

She was nearly convinced they were just going to keep walking straight down into the Christian's Hell when the tunnel they were in

finally ended, opening into a spacious room lit with the flickering firelight of numerous torches hung at intervals along the walls. And right smack in the middle was, you guessed it, an altar.

It was large and made completely of stone, unadorned except for a brownish stain coloring the flat surface, with streaks of that same color running in rivulets down the sides.

She stopped just inside the doorway, not wanting to go any further inside. An evil presence suffused this room, floating through the air like an invisible fog. It was so heavy, she could practically taste it on the back of her tongue.

The altar caught her attention again, as it was the only thing in the room, and she looked closer, trying to decipher what it was used for. Then she realized what the stain was; it was blood. That slab of rock was a sacrificial altar.

Not good.

“What is this place?” she whispered urgently to Gangster-dude.

He smiled at her, some of his old macho charm showing, “It’s Hell, girlie.”

One of the others snickered nervously behind her.

Shea’s heart began to pound rapidly as the adrenaline kicked in. She pulled on her chains, hard, testing their strength. Sweat beaded on her forehead when she realized there would be no escaping them, at least not easily.

They waited, the silence deafening in her ears, until she thought she would scream if something didn’t happen. Long, tense minutes later, they heard sure and steady footsteps echoing from another tunnel entrance on the opposite side of the altar.

Shea held her breath, as did her escorts.

The footsteps grew louder. Whoever was coming was not making any effort to hide their presence.

Right before they got to the room, the footsteps stuttered and paused momentarily, and then picked up again, stronger than before.

Why the pause? Or had she only imagined it?

She didn’t have any more time to think about it before their owner strode into the room.

Her first impression was of a large raven, perched on a man's broad, cloaked shoulder. It tilted its head, curious, taking them all in with one beaded eye. A black hood covered the man's head and half of his face; pulled down low so nothing was visible except his lean, clean-shaven jaw. His hands were tucked inside the wide sleeves, and the material fell all the way down to his feet, which were cased in black boots with treaded soles.

He came to an abrupt halt just inside the room, remaining on the opposite side of the altar from them.

"Who is this?" he demanded.

His voice was deep, and although soft-spoken, it had a strong timbre to it.

"She's the Hunter. Leeha ordered us to bring her straight here." Gangster-dude appeared to be the only one brave enough to speak.

"I won't use her, if that's what she's planning."

"I wouldn't know. She just told us to wait."

The cloaked man pulled one of his hands out of his sleeve, and held it up to the raven so it could hop onto his arm. He stroked its feathers with strong, sure strokes, and then set it down on top of the bloody altar as he paced around it to join them. The bird hopped across the surface, staying as close to him as it could.

He stopped directly in front of Shea, and she stiffened, staring up at him defiantly. Though only about a head taller than she was, or maybe even less, he exuded a dark power that gave her pause. But he wasn't a vampire, or a werewolf. A witch, maybe? But he felt different than the witches she'd known. The witches normally used the forces of the earth and nature to conduct their magic. It was a part of them. You could practically smell the natural elements in them.

But not this one: this one was different.

She searched the shadows under his hood, trying to make out his features, but he kept his head lowered, and his eyes downcast. Even so, he seemed to be studying her somehow.

"What's your name, vampire?"

"Shea." She felt compelled to answer him, whether she wanted to or not.

"You're a Hunter. Of Luukas'?"

"Yes." She saw no reason to try to lie to him. The rest of them already knew. Besides, lying wasn't her thing.

"Are you not afraid of me?"

"No. Should I be?"

He didn't answer, but his lips curved up at the corners. "Do not try to escape, vampire. It will do you no good."

"Yes, well, I'm a little chained up at the moment, so..." She shrugged.

Still directly in front of Shea, he dismissed the others. "You may go."

Her four captors didn't argue, but sped on out of there like the hounds from Hell were after them.

And maybe they were.

"So, what are you, exactly?" she asked with genuine curiosity.

He didn't answer her, but she hadn't really expected him to give up his secrets that easily. The raven flew back to his shoulder, and contemplated her with the same curiosity she did it.

"What's the bird's name?"

"Her name is Cruthú."

"She's your pet, huh?"

Reaching up, he stroked her feathers with long fingers. "She's my friend." There was a wistful quality to his words.

"She's beautiful." Shea meant it. The bird was beautiful. Her feathers were so black, they looked almost blue in the flickering light of the torches, and there was an eerie intelligence in her beady black eyes as they studied each other.

Suddenly, the bird hopped over to Shea, landing solidly on her shoulder. She watched, amused, as it made itself at home, pulling strands of her hair through its beak, and plucking at her diamond stud earring. Ducking its head, it rubbed against her cheek before it went back to the man. She chirped in his ear, then ruffled her feathers and settled in on his shoulder.

"It seems she would like to return the compliment," he professed.

"Uh, thank you, Cruthú."

Abruptly, he turned away and strode over to the other side of the altar. Shea was confused at first, but then she heard the footsteps. More people were coming.

How did he hear them before she did?

Leeha swept into the room, her sheer blue gown billowing around her. A young, dark-skinned vampire followed closely on her heels.

With hardly a glance at Shea, she stomped across the room, facing off with the cloaked male across the altar. "Why is she still standing there?"

He regarded her calmly. "I won't use her. Find another."

She pulled back, surprised. "But it must be her. The new ones are rotting away before they can be of any use to me. She is old enough, and she is one of Luukas', just like the others who survived." She turned to the dark-skinned male who'd come in with her. "Josiah, chain her to the altar."

The cloaked male was in front of Shea before Josiah could begin to carry out her order, protecting her. He had moved with the speed of a vampire or wolf, yet he wasn't either of those. How had he done that?

"I said. *No.*" The raven spread her wings, squawking loudly in agreement.

It seemed she had a champion, or actually two of them. Good. She had a feeling she was going to need them for whatever it was Leeha had planned for her.

However, she wondered if she was really all that much safer in the cloaked one's hands.

Leeha fumed with silent rage. "You *dare* to disobey me? Who exactly do you think you are, witch?"

"I'm not a witch, and you would do well to remember who it is that *you* are dealing with, vampire."

Shea shrunk back against the cold, stone wall behind him as the air became rife with malevolence. She would almost swear she could hear evil voices from another realm shrieking around the cloaked one, in unity with him, as he dared to stare down the horrors that swirled in Leeha's red eyes, unaffected.

No human could resist the pull of her eyes. They would drag them

into their own worst nightmares, and have them on the floor, gouging their own eyeballs out, never to be sane again.

Leeha appeared to regroup, not backing down exactly, just trying a different tactic.

"You seem fond of this one. May I ask why?"

"No. You may not. But I'm not using her. Find another."

Leeha lost her patience, and spun away from him. "The others will be coming, if they survive, but I cannot wait until then! I need her for tonight!"

Calming the raven's ruffled feathers, he held his ground. "You will have to do without."

Leeha studied him with narrowed eyes, and then suddenly smiled sweetly. "I believe I can manage. I'll just have to think of some other welcome gift for my visitors."

She headed for the door. "Bring her along, Josiah."

"She stays with me."

She swung around to face him. "What for? No. She comes with me. Josiah!"

Josiah didn't move a muscle as the cloaked one turned his attention to him, daring him to try.

"Why don't we just leave her here, mistress? Maybe she'll annoy him enough that he'll change his mind."

Shea almost laughed at his pathetic attempt to avoid challenging the other male, but Leeha didn't find it quite as amusing.

Without a word, she gave the cloaked one a tight smile, then turned on her heel and slithered out of the room. Her young pet followed closely behind.

He waited until they were well and truly gone before he relaxed his stance and stepped from in front of Shea, dropping his head down again so she couldn't see him.

She stiffened her spine, wondering what he planned to do with her, and gave him a wary look. "So, what are you going to do with me?"

Ruffling the raven's feathers, he appeared to think about it.

"I don't know."

CHAPTER 6



KEIRA

Keira's arm shook with the effort to hold Luukas elevated, until she was certain he wouldn't come out of it again for a while, and then she gently lowered him down again, easing his body weight back onto the chains.

Fucking Blondie. He'd taken too much blood. Her lightheadedness and growling stomach urging her on, she made her way back over to the door, hoping they hadn't switched guards for some reason. She sent up a silent thank you when she saw his straw colored hair. She needed to eat.

"Psst. Hey, bloodsucker. I need some food. And some water." She waited for a response, any response, but it didn't seem like there was going to be one forthcoming.

Glaring at the back of his head, she wished she could zap him, and force him to cook her a gourmet meal. But it wasn't good to stretch your magic around too much. It became less effective that way, and made a witch too vulnerable. And she was already spread thin keeping up the cloaking spell on everyone in the fortress, the incombustible spell allowing them

to use fire on Luukas, and having the heavy burden of possessing his power.

Not to mention the recent blood loss.

Deciding her need for sustenance was more important than not angering a vampire, she stuck her hand through the small window opening and poked him hard in the back of the head.

"Hey!" she whispered loudly, "I'm talking to you."

Very slowly, the blonde vampire turned his head just enough for her to see his exposed fangs and the displeased look on his face.

Good, she'd finally gotten his attention.

"I need food, jerkoff. You took too much blood. And if *I* get too weak, so do my spells, and you'd better believe I'd throw you under the bus in a heartbeat when Leeha wonders why everyone suddenly knows we're here, and her prisoner goes up in flames. Besides," she added in a matter-of-fact voice, "If you feed me now, you'll be able to have some more nice, fresh blood tomorrow. Provided you leave me your bagged stuff again, of course."

He didn't respond for so long she began to worry she'd pressed her luck too far, but then, with a quiet hiss of displeasure in her direction that made her hair stand on end, he strode off to get her meal.

Keira breathed a sigh of relief when he'd gone, and leaned back against the wall to await his return. She hoped he'd bring enough water to allow her to clean the ugly wound he'd left. She could practically feel the germs crawling off of the filthy blanket to infect her, but it was better than slowly bleeding to death she supposed. At least with an infection, she'd have a fever, and with any luck would be completely out of her mind with delirium when she died.

Footsteps echoed down the corridor outside the cell and she pushed herself up off of the wall, not wanting him to see how vulnerable she actually was.

The bolt slid back and the door was cracked open. A bowl of mush was shoved at her through the opening, followed by two water bottles tossed onto the floor. The door slammed shut again, and she listened carefully for the bolt to be replaced back into the lock before she gathered up the bottles and took her meager meal over to the corner.

Sinking down onto the floor, she sat cross-legged and scarfed down the lukewarm contents before the taste – or lack thereof – could register. Once it was scraped as clean as she could get it and rubbed with dirt to prevent the local rats from seeking it out, she drank down half of a water bottle, saving the rest.

Belly full and thirst quenched, she stood up and crossed to the only semi-private recess in the room. Digging another hole, she relieved herself, using her blanket to hide her bare ass from anyone peeking in the window of the door. Finished, she yanked up her shorts, kicked dirt back into the hole, and went back to her corner.

Wrapped in her blanket, she curled up on her side and examined the vampire. He hung limply from the silver cuffs around his wrists, passed out cold. Thick chains led from the cuffs up to a wooden beam in the wall that could be swung out from one end, allowing him to be beaten on both sides, front or back. It disgusted her.

The blood she'd given him had healed the worst of his wounds that she could see, but he still looked like shit. That was good. She wanted to help him as much as she could, but she didn't want Leeha to suspect that she was doing so. If that happened, she'd get thrown right back into her own cell, and Keira had decided years ago that she liked having a roommate.

Plus, by being in here with him, she could do what she could to ease his pain a bit until she could think of a way to get them both out of there.

She must've dozed off, for she awoke to find the vampire's eyes on her, his expression unreadable.

Immediately alert, she sat up with a wince, and put her finger over her lips. Grabbing the half-full water bottle, she tiptoed over to him; quickly checking back over her shoulder to make sure Blondie wasn't paying attention. She didn't know if he'd really care what she was doing, as long as he got his fresh meals, but she figured it wouldn't hurt to be a little cautious.

As she unscrewed the top, she shot a quick glance up at Luukas, and her heart splintered inside of her chest at the utter desperation on his bruised face for that water. Hurriedly, she lifted it up to his lips.

He chugged it down in just a few swallows.

"More," he whispered urgently.

"I have more," she whispered back. "But let's allow that to settle first. If you drink too much, it might all come right back up."

His eyes silently pleaded with her, but she shook her head stubbornly. "Give it a little time, vampire."

With a huff, he turned his face away, and clenched his teeth together so hard she could see the muscles jumping in his jaw.

She scowled up at him. "Don't you go getting all surly with me. We have to be very careful. If the she-bitch suspects that I'm helping you, she'll throw me back into the cell next door, and I won't be able to get you anything from there."

Still not looking at her, he gritted out, "Don't feed vampire again."

"But, that's the only way to get you a blood bag..." she began.

"Don't care," he growled. "Don't do it again."

She shook her head. "I have to. I can't let you feed from me. You're so starved. You'd kill me." She lifted an eyebrow. "And the fact that you completely hate me wouldn't help things."

"I don't need it."

"Oh, really?" she scoffed. "Have you looked in a mirror lately?"

He shot her a dirty look from the corner of his eye: a semi-sane dirty look. Her lips twitched. Someone was obviously feeling a bit better.

A myriad of emotions crossed his face before it settled into just one: stubbornness. "No more feeding, witch."

"My name is Keira."

"No more. *Keira*."

"Why do you care anyway?" she wondered. "As hungry as you must be, I would think you'd take what you could get."

Confusion crossed his pained features. "I don't know," he admitted.

"Well, sorry, vampire, but I'll do what I need to do. There's no other way to get you more of that crap. I can't steal it. They never let me out of here."

Managing to get his feet under him, he braced his legs apart to

hold himself up, standing spread-eagle against the stone wall behind him.

"Told you. Don't...need...it." Sweat trickled down his face as he struggled to hold himself up of his own violation.

Keira stepped forward to help him, but stopped as he ground out through clenched teeth, "Don't. Touch. Me."

That's appreciation for you, she thought, but allowed him to do it on his own, understanding his need to not appear weak in front of her.

Panting heavily through his open mouth, the extent of his efforts was obvious as his eyelids fluttered and he fought to stay conscious.

After a few moments, he looked at her from underneath his dark lashes. "Please," he rasped out. "Don't let him feed."

"We're still on this?"

He shot her another look.

"All right," she finally promised. "I won't."

Crossing her fingers behind her back, she told herself it wouldn't really be a lie if he didn't actually see it happening. Right? She'd just make sure he was knocked out again.

A look of such relief came his features, that Keira felt a surge of guilt for misleading him. But, dammit, it was for his own good.

"More water," he demanded.

Grateful for the change of subject, she spun around to get the other water bottle off of the floor, but she moved too fast. Throwing out her hands as a wave of dizziness hit, she barely managed to catch herself before her face smashed into the dirt floor.

She heard Luukas' indrawn breath along with the rattle of chains and sat back on her haunches. "I'm fine. I'm fine. Not getting an award for being graceful anytime soon," she jested sarcastically. "But I'm fine."

Grabbing up the water bottle, she carefully rose to her feet and shuffled back over to him. "Here you go."

He clenched his lips together into a flat line, staring at her with burning black eyes.

She gave him a look of disbelief. "What? You're not thirsty anymore?"

"Promise me. No more. Don't lie."

So he'd figured that out, huh? Guess she needed to work on her duplicity skills. She looked him directly in his fathomless black eyes. "I promise."

He must've believed her this time, for he gave her a sharp nod and opened his mouth for the water. After just a few swallows, he turned his head away. "The rest for you."

Screwing the top back on, she buried the bottle in her corner, hiding it from Leeha. Sinking down to the floor, she pulled her knees up and wrapped her arms around them, pulling the thin blanket close.

"I can help you, if you'd let me," she told Luukas as she watched him struggle to keep his weight off of the chains.

His eyes skittered over her way. "No! No magic."

"Ok," she relented. "No magic."

She hated just sitting there passively while he struggled, but she understood his fear of her. It was her fault that he was suffering. No one else's. Only hers. Leeha would have absolutely no power over him if it weren't for her and her magic. Not even with her army of rotting, demon hybrids.

Oh, yeah. Keira knew all about those things. Being locked up for years with nothing else to do tends to really sharpen your eavesdropping skills.

Multiple footsteps coming down the stairs outside the cell brought them both to sudden attention. The lock slid back and Leeha marched into the cell, followed by Blondie and that faithful dog, Josiah.

Keira quickly pushed herself up off of the floor, trying not to panic. She pulled the blanket up around her neck to hide her makeshift bandage.

What were they doing here so soon? They never came down twice in the same night. Gods, was it even the same night? She'd fallen asleep...but it had to be. Blondie hadn't come back to trade for more blood yet.

She watched as Leeha strode directly over to Luukas. Watched as Luukas lifted his lip in a snarl. Watched as Leeha realized he was standing on his own.

Oh shit. No. No. No. No... Panic overtook her as Keira watched her narrow her eyes at Luukas, looking him over with renewed interest.

She wasn't supposed to be back down here already! She NEVER came down twice in one night. Not in all the years they'd been here! Why now? Why tonight? She'll know! She'll know that she fed the vampire. Anyone with eyes could see the slight change in him, and vampire eyes were so much more perceptive. If Leeha had stuck to her schedule, had come down tomorrow, she wouldn't have been able to tell. The signs would've worn off enough by then.

Keira's eyes widened in alarm as Leeha leaned in towards Luukas, sniffing at him. She smiled bitterly, her head twitching to the side in that odd way. "You've had blood. I can smell it in you."

Luukas didn't confirm or deny her statement, just continued to snarl at her, a low rumble emanating from deep within his throat.

"But it's not the witch's blood," she guessed correctly.

She turned to the witch in question, red eyes seething with her displeasure. "How is this possible, witch?"

Keira swallowed hard, raising her chin. So, Blondie hadn't rattled her out after all. She dared not look at him, or at Luukas. "I don't know. I fell asleep. Maybe a rat got too close to his mouth."

Blood, death, despair...they roiled around within those blood-red irises, drawing Keira in until she felt the pull on her very soul. She forced herself to look away just in time.

Leeha studied her for a moment longer and then turned back to Luukas. "Is this true, my love?" Not waiting for an answer, she started pacing back and forth. "I believe there is more going on here, for it doesn't smell like the rodents who live here either. It *smells* like the bags of blood I give the guards when they're on duty. Now, *how*, I wonder, were you able to get a hold of one of those? Hmmm?"

Keira jumped as Leeha suddenly appeared directly in front of her. "Do you truly believe me to be a fool, witch?" she spat. "Do you truly believe I am that naïve?" Grabbing Keira's jaw with supernatural strength, she held her face still as she tried to catch her gaze. "Do you not remember our *deal*, witch?"

Keira's stomach clenched in fear. The female vampire could rip her

head off with nothing more than a flick of her dainty wrist. But she dared not use her magic against her. Even if she managed to kill the bitch, and her minions, and released Luukas, how long would it take for Leeha's contingency plan to get to Emma? Days? Hours? Minutes?

Leeha was right; she'd never be able to get to her in time. She didn't even have access to a phone to call her and warn her.

"Leave her be!" Luukas's deep voice boomed through the small room.

Dropping her hand, Leeha spun towards Luukas, her sheer, forest green gown billowing out around her. "What did you say?"

Luukas's black eyes burrowed into hers without fear, and his voice dropped a few octaves as he repeated, clearly and dangerously. "I said, leave her be, you *fucking* cunt."

Keira would have laughed at the shocked expression on Leeha's face if the situation hadn't been so dire.

The shock was quickly replaced by a look of suspicion.

"So you like your witch now? After all she's done to you? Isn't this an interesting turn of events." Her voice dripped with sweetness, scaring Keira more than her anger. "Maybe you need a small reminder of what she's capable of?"

Keira was frantically shaking her head before she'd even finished speaking. "No! No. I won't."

"Oh, but I think you will." Leeha smiled at her. "Josiah, come here."

Josiah stepped forward eagerly, and Keira heard Luukas' low growl at the same time she noticed the whip in his hands.

Without thinking, she ran over and planted herself in front of Luukas. Though her head barely came to his shoulder, she tried to use her body to block his. "Don't touch him!"

This show of loyalty seemed to amuse Leeha to no end.

"And what are you going to do about it, witch?" she laughed out loud. "Are you going to stop me? Luukas needs to be taught a lesson. He isn't following the rules."

Keira sneered at the redheaded beauty. "Follow whose rules? Yours? You claim to care about him, yet you enjoy all of this!" She pointed at the whip Josiah was unraveling.

"But at least he will know that I'm not a hypocrite. I don't pretend to be something I am not. Now, step aside, before I decide that I don't need you after all."

Keira held her position. She couldn't do this anymore. She couldn't stand idly by and watch them torture the poor soul behind her. She sent up a quick prayer that Leeha would kill her quickly, and that somehow her sister would survive, if she were even still alive.

Without any signal between them that Keira could see, the guard, the same one who'd just fed from her a few hours ago, stepped up and lifted her bodily out of the way.

Leeha smiled her thanks at him. "You may begin, Josiah."

Keira struggled in the guard's arms, kicking and punching him as hard as she could.

"No! No! You leave him alone!"

Josiah cautiously approached the vampire who'd lost it again at the sight of her struggling in Blondie's arms. He didn't dare to get close enough to swing the wooden beam out. Instead, with a strong swing of his arm, he cracked the end of the whip across the front of Luukas' chest.

As Blondie took advantage of everyone's attention being on the vampire to grope her, Keira managed to get an arm free. Raising her hand towards Josiah, she was just about to send him crashing into the opposite wall when Luukas caught her eye and subtly shook his head.

With a sob, she lowered her arm.