

To Catch a Four Pointed Star

Clan of the Dark

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Prologue

My name is Xiara. At only 19 years old, I'm just barely over five feet tall, and I tend to keep my weight down. My eyes are dark as well as my hair, which falls to my waist. My complexion, well, I suppose you could call me light skinned. But it's easy to tell that I'm mixed. Who am I? I'm the most feared woman from here to cities miles away from here: I'm the leader of the Four-Pointed Star Clan.

Things happened so fast...I lost my parents when I was fourteen years old. They both died in a car crash, leaving over a million dollars' worth in life insurance for me and my twin sister. Before the courts could snatch us out of place, I began working, keeping an income in our home and eventually being granted emancipation. Four years have passed since that time, and things have changed over the years— some for the better, and some for the worst. But hell, I'm still living. Oh yes, and there was one last thing I forgot to mention— I'm a vampire.

I know what you're probably thinking, and you're wrong. I don't burn in the sunlight, I don't "react" to religious icons and garlic, I do indeed have a reflection, and I'm not undead. In fact, I pass for a perfectly normal human. My fangs can be hidden, which is an ability that was adapted generations ago as my kind began to mingle amongst humans. I was born a vampire, and I can't be "cured." Not that I would ever want to be. I'm stronger than a human man four times my size, twice as fast as the fastest human runner on Earth, and I can survive jumps and falls that could easily crush regular humans. I'm what you call supernatural, and that's how I enjoy it.

There are two types of my kinds: the natural-born, and the transformed, or the Zuns. Because our kinds like to stay rather secretive, there are few Zuns running around here. I don't mind; the new ones tend to talk too much anyhow. My sister and I, however, are Natural-Born, born from the union of two Zuns.

My clan isn't what you call a typical "gang." There are no gunfights, no drive-by shootings, no breaking and entering, and no real crime sprees. We fight with our supernatural prowess and our minds. How do we control? Sex. No, we don't rape our victims. We enthrall them. We have the power to make humans lust after us. All it takes for enthrallment is just one little bite. We don't even have to draw blood. Once our saliva gets into their system, they are ours until their bodies filter our DNA out. Once they are enthralled, getting what we want is easy. My clan has single handedly funded our meets and warehouses by enthrallment of CEOs, wall-street bankers, millionaires, trust fund children, and celebrities. We want for nothing. After we are done with our prey, we simply leave them to withdraw from their lust. It takes a few days of devastation and uncontrollable arousal, but after the withdrawal, all of their memory of enthrallment is gone. This is my Clan, and I am the big boss. Who am I again? Xiara Bellafeast.

You may not know me now, but once you do, my name will be burned into your memory like a bad dream. This is my story, and you're about to see for yourself.

Chapter One

As I walked through the dark streets one lonely night, scouting through my territory, I kept my eyes open and my mouth shut. I wore a tight purple sleeveless shirt with rhinestones dotting the neckline, black vinyl pants with a spiked belt, and knee-high killer boots with stiletto heels. My hair was pinned back into an oriental bun, and my face was decked out with temporary jewels on my jaw and cheekbones and leopard spots dotted my eyelids. I didn't dare wear jewelry.

My patrol went as normal. Not even a whisper of intruders...at least not yet. My heels clicked on the sidewalk as I made my way back home. As I saw myself getting close and closer to the door, it suddenly got quiet. I could feel it. I was being followed. I slowed my stride tremendously, heightening my senses. I used my peripheral to look around but uttered not a sound. When I stopped at my front door, the following presence suddenly became familiar to me. Without turning my head, I called out to the shadow,

"Get out here and face me like the arrogant little human bastard you are, Ethan." At my words, a tall human with black hair and pale skin approached me.

"Good to see you again, Miss Bellafeast," he muttered sarcastically. I rolled my eyes and scoffed, my leopard print spots moving as I did.

"Cut the BS, Ethan. I thought I told you to stay the hell away from Kiara." Ethan only laughed at me.

"Silly, silly girl. You waste your breath telling me to stay away when you should be telling your hooker sister to stay away. I'm not the one pursuing." I glared hard. He had struck a nerve. Turning on one heel, I stomped over toward him and grabbed his neck. My nails turned into sharp claws as my stress defense mode kicked in. Ethan tightened his neck in defense as his breath began to shorten. I looked down and shook my head.

"Hmph. Dumbass human. You know by now that I can kill you if I chose to. I don't know why you like to play this stupid little game..."

"Kiara Fucking Bellafeast!!" shouted a high-pitched voice from the house. I groaned with frustration and let go of Ethan. Turning back around, I shouted towards the door,

"Kiara Fucking Bellafeast! See? I can drop an f-bomb in between your names too!" My sister only glared.

“Leave Ethan the hell alone. He’s with me.” I growled and stomped to the door, whispering fiercely as I reached Kiara’s hearing threshold,

“Stupid little motherfucker.”

A few hours after my tantrum, I saw Ethan leaving through the front door. I shouted after him,

“Break my sister’s heart again and there will be hell to pay! Kiara won’t be able to save you again.” He said nothing, only waved me off as he left. I crossed my arms and sank back down into my chair and scoffed.

“Damn you Ethan.”

Chapter Two

After Ethan left, Kiara walked out of her room and into the living room with me. She pushed herself into my chair with me and snuggled up against my arm. I slowly turned my head to her, glaring.

“Really Kiara? Ethan again? Aren’t you like a ‘female escort’, or whatever the hell you call it as a cover? You don’t meet more decent men doing that?” My sister only chuckled.

“Sis, I get paid to pretend that I care about a stranger for all of maybe a few hours. Of course I don’t. Most of them are desperate little rich idiots who want something different. Or maybe something a little kinky. Doesn’t really matter anyhow because I hardly ever see them again afterwards.” I looked away and shook my head at her.

“Ethan Hallaway. What a pest! I still have trouble believing that he is with you while you sleep with strange men for money. Kiara, what if something happens to you while you’re doing all this?” Kiara wrapped her arms around my shoulder, as if to comfort me.

“Ethan loves me, Xiara. I know you don’t believe me, but he does. He’s been here the whole time, through good and bad...he even stays with me even though he knows that I’m a vampire!” I rolled my eyes in sheer irritation.

“That’s only because he’s using you, Kiara! You know damn well that he wants to be one of us!” Kiara only shook her head.

“There is no benefit to him being one of us.” Fiercely, I jumped out of the chair and growled loudly.

“That’s a damn lie, and you know it! He’ll use you to transform him into a vampire and then he’s going to join the Moonlight Clan of the Zuns just to get back at me and throw you against me!” Kiara looked down, crossing her legs and placing her hands on her knees.

“Then perhaps during your next initiation, you should allow Zuns inside. That way you can keep your precious little clan and Ethan won’t be so compelled to join the Moonlights once I make him one of us.” I scoffed loudly, appalled that my younger sister would even suggest such a thing.

“That won’t happen because those know-it-alls will never be allowed in my clan, and YOU will not change that bastard into a Zun! I mean it, Kiara; don’t you dare defy me!” My sister looked down and sighed. I suppose I had hurt her silly little feelings.

"You are not being fair, Sis, and you know it." I stomped my foot, my spiked stilettos making a loud click into the wooden floors.

"I don't have to be fair, Kiara! I'm here providing for you and looking out for you! This asshole hurt you before, and he will do it again! Don't go against me, Kiara, or I will kill him with my bare hands." Kiara gasped.

"You wouldn't!" I smiled evilly.

"I would." Kiara rose from my chair, her anger now piqued.

"You and your godforsaken clans and gang fights! All you care about is your clan, your lusts, and yourself! What I want doesn't mean shit to you! Maybe when I get done transforming Ethan, we'll just have to run away together and get married." My eyes soon began to blur with sheer fury as I heard my sister scream my biggest fear into my ears.

"Do that, Kiara, and not only will I kill him with my bare hands, but I will also have my boys hunt you down and have you bound and thrown into the nearest safe house until I say you can leave! Now get the hell out of my face!" Without another word, Kiara glared at me and stormed off, muttering to herself,

"I suppose you will never have to know then."

Part of me wanted to call her back in and demand that she tell me what she was talking about, but I instinctively refrained and walked out of the house, scouting the area before I left the property. I walked around the back and opened a small box that lay hidden in the corner of my back porch. I pulled out a sheathed dagger and attached it to my belt. I grabbed the handle and pulled it out to let the blade shine in the pale moonlight. Engraved near the hilt was the sign of our clan, the Four-Pointed Star. Placing the dagger back into its sheath, I tightened the spiked belt on my hips and walked away. It was time for a clan meet.

Chapter Three

"This clan meet is now in session!" boomed the voice of my sergeant-at-arms, Loot. I looked over all of my faithful puppets as I thought about my past. Once upon a time, I remembered being said puppet. Our clan was glorious back then. Soura was our clan leader. She was the Guardian. I called her my big sister. I wonder how things would be, had she never...

"Boss Lady!" shouted one of the boys. I snapped back to attention. The meet was now in session.

"State your progress," I demanded. The team leader, Bones, stepped in front of me and kneeled.

"The Moonlights have been seeking to expand territory. They have been trying to recruit humans to grow their numbers and take the city. If they aren't stopped, this could erupt into a brutal clan war. But if we do try to stop them..." He trailed off. I groaned with frustration and finished for him,

"Then we risk blowing our cover and getting innocent people involved." Bones could only nod. I crossed my legs and tapped my foot, allowing my clan to sit in total silence for a few moments while I contemplated what to do next. This had been a brewing problem for quite a while, but my attempt to solve it directly was not going to work. I personally knew that their leader was too stubborn to listen to reason.

Realizing that there was nothing more I could say about it at the time, I soon decided to move onto the next subject.

"Bones," I began, "what's next on our agenda?" Bones took no hesitation in answering,

"Our initiation is coming in three months. Boss Lady, you need to pick your suitor." I glared down hard with irritation. All of my boys cringed with fear as they saw the angry squint.

"Have all of you picked yours?" The boys mumbled in disagreement. Ill-prepared, as they always were. I laughed hard.

"Not prepared then? Good, then you can stop bothering me about my suitor. I will pick one when I'm ready."

"If he doesn't pick you first!" yelled a voice from the back. I gasped. My boys all jumped in defense, ready to attack the figure slowly walking between them. I stood quickly and waved my hand back, signaling the clan to stand back. The figure stepped into my sights, giving me a full-scale look at him. This human— no, he was a Zun— was more than familiar to me. He was tall, a little over six feet, and buff. His skin was tinted with a little color from his frequent activity, and his dark hair, which normally fell down to his shoulders, was pulled back. He had bright blue eyes that were said to be able to stare into one's soul, and these eyes were staring right over my body. This was Darian Means, leader of the Moonlight Clan of the Zuns.

"My, my, my," he began as he reached my sights, "little miss Shia, all grown up and bossing around her puppets. Never thought I would see this day." I took a step down and looked down, muttering,

"What the hell do you want Darian?" Darian grabbed my chin and made me look at him.

"Well right now I would prefer we discuss this in another room." I was either too afraid or too proud, or maybe even too curious to resist. I waved my clan at ease as Darian led me to the other room. Bones, too protective to just allow me to leave, stood guard outside the locked door. The meet of the clan leaders had now commenced.

Chapter Four

The meeting of the clan leaders commenced. Darian sat me in a lonely chair as he paced around me. Impatient, I began this meeting.

“What do you want, Darian? Why are you plotting this clan war? Do you want to get back at me that badly?” Darian only shook his head.

“It only becomes a clan war if you make it one, Xiara.” I bit my lip, hard. I didn’t want to say something rude and set the pest off. Darian, recognizing my body language, chuckled and placed his hand on my cheek.

“I suppose by your holding your tongue, you intend to allow me to speak my proposition.” I didn’t speak, only hesitantly nodded. Darian stood tall and began pacing again. I now had my personal space, but I still felt trapped. He stopped at the side of my chair, facing the direction opposite of me.

“Shia. My sweet Shia. All grown and bloomed,” he began as he moved the back of his hand toward my face. I pushed away and stood up furiously.

“No more games, Darian! Tell me right now what the hell you want!” Darian raised an eyebrow.

“Or else?” I closed in to him, face-to-face.

“Or else I have an entire clan of boys out there waiting to turn your scary little ass into mincemeat.” He shook his head at me.

“Tisk tisk Shia. So impatient and so violent. Why don’t you chill out and just sit down?” I growled fiercely.

“No!” Darian threw his hands up in surrender.

“Very well then. I will tell you why I’m here.” I crossed my arms and began to tap my foot.

“Go on.” He placed his hand on my cheek, reaching to lift my chin up. I coldly turned away. Darian, having lost any leftover patience, grabbed me fiercely and forced a kiss on my lips. Instinctively, I almost pushed away. But I didn’t. I stood, frozen in the moment. After a few seconds, we broke away. My face was hot and red with shock. Darian laughed at my flustered state.

“Shia...I want to be your suitor again. In you next initiation, I want you to become my woman and join our clans together. I miss you, Shia. Will you accept my offer? Together, we can rule this place and beyond. Think about it. Please.” My face struck a bright red. In fury, I snatched away from Darian and stormed toward the door.

“Never! Never in a million lifetimes will I mate or marry you, and you’re a dumbass for suggesting it!” Darian, apparently, defeated, looked down.

“Shia...”

“Stop calling me that! I’m not your damn Shia anymore and I never will be! My biggest mistake was changing you into a Zun, and I won’t allow you to manipulate me again! We are beyond over, Darian! **Beyond!**” Darian, getting a little bold, stood tall and stormed toward me.

“Watch your mouth, Xiara. The future of your precious little clan and your naïve little sister all depends on your decision.” I gasped.

“What the hell does Kiara have to do with any of this?” Darian looked down and gave a stifled laugh.

“Ethan Hallaway. I’m sure that you’re aware that we have our sights on him.” I shook my head.

“That doesn’t matter, because Kiara will not change him into one of you. She won’t make the same mistakes that I did!” Darian shrugged.

“You may be right, perhaps she won’t. But she’s already made her own mistakes.”

“Really.”

“Yes really. Oh how oblivious you are, Shia. You don’t really believe that Ethan hasn’t been communicating with us, do you? We know all about you. We know all about your sister. We even know about the little brat she’s carrying.” My face struck pale. Did I really just hear him say...?

“What...?” I whispered. Darian smiled with his usual arrogance.

“Ethan said that you didn’t know that, either.”

My blood began to surge fast and hot through my veins, triggering a blazing fight mode to my body. My fangs soon came unhidden as my nails turned again into sharp claws. I clenched my fists together and growled loudly. Darian stepped back. Even though he was a vampire, he wasn’t nearly as strong as I was. My eyes blurred with fury and my breathing soon shortened. I was definitely angry, and Darian was about to catch the tail end of it.

I suppose my angry energy had been felt beyond the room, because Bones soon burst in, pulling me back from charging at Darian. Bones wrapped his arms around my shoulders and pulled me into his chest, attempting to calm me down.

“Boss Lady, he isn’t worth it!” Bones said as he pulled me back. I finally took in a deep breath and relaxed, falling back into Bones’ arms. I sighed.

“You can leave now, Darian,” Bones growled. Darian, still apparently riddled with fear, slowly made his way past me and out of sight. I breathed in the scent. I loved his arms, I loved his warmth. But I had no time for love, and we both knew it. I looked up at Bones, now calmed.

“Jason,” I began, “This clan meet is over. I need you to do something for me.” He let me go and stood at attention.

“What can I do for you, Xiara?” I crossed my arms.

“Go prepare and stock up the safe house in Midi. When you’re done with that, get ten of your strongest team members and wait for my order. I may very well have to carry out one of my threats yet.”

Chapter Five

Bones and I went our separate ways as I stormed home. I was ready for hell to break loose, and this time Kiara couldn't avoid my wrath. So many thoughts kept running through my head on that walk. When did Kiara get pregnant? How did I not sense the baby or her change in behavior when she sat next to me earlier? Why was Ethan telling Darian all about Kiara? I didn't want to believe that he would betray her so early; no, he still needed her to transform him into a Zun. Why was none of this making any sense?

When I reached the house, I didn't even bother to check the property again before I stormed into the house.

"Kiara Bellafeast, get your ass down here!" I yelled as I slammed the front door behind me. Kiara came walking out of her room, pacing toward me slowly as if she already knew what was coming. I stood in silent fury for a few moments before saying,

"When were you going to tell me that you got pregnant?" Kiara, not fazed by the question, calmly sat down in front of me.

"Never," she answered. I growled angrily.

"Damn it all Kiara! You can't hide a damn baby from me! How pregnant are you?!" Kiara looked straight into my face, not making one frightened move.

"Three months." I furrowed my eyebrows in anger.

"And your prostituting is supposed to support this child?" Kiara chuckled lightly, shaking her head.

"You really are the most oblivious woman in all of Vashleyra. I haven't been a prostitute since Ethan and I got back together again." Now angrier than I could ever imagine, I clenched my fists together.

"So you mean to tell me that you've been sneaking out to go sleep with Ethan for something around five months now?" Kiara arrogantly nodded. I scoffed.

"Well I hope that smug little look on your face is permanent because Ethan will never get his hands on you or that baby ever again." In disbelief, Kiara shook her head and rolled her eyes. She thought I was making an idle threat. I didn't verbally respond; surely I could show her much better than I could tell her. I reached into my side pocket and pulled out a small phone, pressing

a number on the speed dial and then closing the phone to turn on the speakerphone. A voice sounded out from the other side.

“Go ahead, Boss Lady.” At the sound of the voice, my sister drew back. She didn’t think that I would actually do it. Giving her an evil smile, I turned away from her and answered back,

“Bones, how soon can you get your team members together and get the boys in Midi to stock the safehouse?” After a few seconds of silence, the voice called back over,

“The boys in Midi are already on it. We’ll be over there in fifteen, Boss Lady. Need anything else?” Turning back to see and revel in the horrified look on my sister’s face, I looked back to the phone and spoke into it one last time,

“Good. Get the team over here as soon as you can. We leave for Midi at sunrise.” A few more seconds passed and Bones finally answered,

“Ten-four, Boss Lady. See you in fifteen.”

Chapter Six

“Dammit Kiara!” my sister screamed at me at the top of her lungs, “Get these fucking cuffs off of me!” Ignoring my sister’s swearing and demands, I sat back into my chair and yawned. From the kitchen, Jason leaned over the counter island and watched soundlessly as Kiara and I went back and forth. The house was surrounded. No matter how much my sister wanted an outlet, there was nothing that anyone could do to help her escape. This was power. I loved this power. I marveled at it. It was finally something that I could exert over Kiara without feeling any sense of guilt about it.

“Kiara, it’s late,” I said, almost arrogantly. “Get some sleep. We’ve got a long trip in just a few hours.” Realizing that attempting to intimidate me was not going to work, Kiara rattled the cuffs and screamed again at the top of her lungs,

“Ethan! Ethan, please find me!” Knowingly, Jason shook his head and placed his hand over his face as he braced himself for my temper. Kiara had done it now, and she knew what she was doing all along. Finally infuriated, I stood and began to storm over to my sister, grabbing her handcuffs to yank on them and bring her close to my face.

“Shut the hell up, Kiara! If that son of a bitch even attempts to get in, my boys will kill him on sight! Save your stupid breath. You’ll need it to heave this kid out.”

“You’re jealous, aren’t you?” she taunted. “You’ve always been jealous of me. Admit it! The only reason you don’t want me screaming his name is because you know that that was how I got pregnant in the first place, isn’t it?”

That was it. I had had enough. No longer caring whether or not I hurt her, my hands instinctively reached out to snatch up her arm as my strength overpowered her obvious struggle against me as she felt herself being dragged into her room.

“Bedtime, sis.” Feeling that there was nothing left to say, I finally tossed her onto her bed, not bothering to attempt to free her from the restraints that she had been bound in before. Satisfied with my work, I began walking back to her door, taking the key from atop the doorjamb to lock it from the outside.

“Goodnight Kiara,” I taunted. Not giving her a chance to respond, I then closed the door and placed the key back on top of the doorway, effectively locking her in her room.

Waiting on me in the kitchen was that all too familiar face. As I walked over to the kitchen counter, I barely gave him a small smile, trying hard to hide the fact that I was somewhat glad that he was there.

“Jason, you don’t have to look so frowny.” Raising an eyebrow at my new word, he repeated,

“Frowny?” Moving over to the side of the counter he was standing on, I nestled myself next to his arm to take in some of his warmth. Was this affection? Was it possible to show such a vile thing in my own house? After a few seconds of silence, the thought vanished from my mind. This was not affection.

“Yeah. Come on, Jason. What’s on your mind?” Taking no hesitation, he answered,

“Xiara, are you sure that this move to Midi is for Kiara’s safety or are you just doing this because you’re afraid of what you think she might do?” Realizing that he had somewhat of a point, the frustration came tenfold as I finally broke down and ran my hands over the top of my head to express said frustration.

“Both.” Having been reassured in his suspicions, he somewhat brushed me off with a knowing laugh as he shook his head in amusement.

“She’s having his kid, Xiara. Nothing you can do now will change it.”

“I know, but that’s not going to stop me from trying to protect her from it. Ethan is scum. He’s no good; you heard Darian! Everything he knows and learns about us goes directly to the Moonlights. He is nothing but bad news, and you know it!” Deciding not to put up any more of a fight, his shoulders moved up in a digressing shrug as he turned away from my previous “affection.”

“Look, I know that you know what you’re doing, but I just wanted to make sure you knew that Kiara isn’t you. She’s not about to do the same things you did and it certainly isn’t under the same circumstances. Things were different with you and Darian back then. Kiara’s not in the same situation with Ethan.” In what seemed like a split second, my mind diverted back to that horrific night as I remembered just exactly what happened with me and Darian. This was why I was so afraid of Kiara’s relationship with Ethan. It had nothing yet still everything to do with him. The horror finally crept back into my mind as I saw my sister beginning to relive my past, making the same mistakes that I had at a younger age. When the words finally did come to me to be able to answer my team leader, it was only a whisper.

“Maybe...but I’ll be damned if I have to relive that last night with Soura because of my damned mistakes. No more innocents, Jason. I don’t care what I have to do.” In a surprise display of comfort, Jason turned to me and moved in behind me, wrapping his arm around me as he compassionately rested his head on my shoulder.

“Hey,” he cautioned, “don’t do that to yourself. Don’t go back to that night, Xiara. Look...Kiara is still young. Of course she’s going to go out and experiment and have sex while you hold down the fort here. Hell, Xiara, we’re not exactly old either.”

Finally feeling a change in my mood, my stomach began to make flips and turns inside of me as I gave Jason a seductive look. It really had been far too long.

“You’re right,” I agreed. “We *are* still pretty young, but we haven’t had much time to experiment either...” Caught in the moment, he remained silent, never really moving away from me. Turning to him, I began to lean forward into his chest, feeling his muscles tense as he tried to resist me. It was time for a short game of cat-and-mouse.

“Don’t be shy,” I whispered. “We’ve done this plenty of times before.” Obviously fighting the urge to give in to my advances, his muscles tensed as he moved away from me, letting me out of his embrace. This was getting fun.

“We don’t have time for love, Boss Lady.” Taken aback at this switch he had pulled on me, my jaw instinctively dropped. So maybe he wasn’t going to fall in as easily as I had hoped. Letting my temper rear its head again as I began to feel insulted at his calling me by my clan name, I reached out, snatching him up by his shirt and jerked him in toward me.

“Maybe not love, Bones, but I never said anything about love, did I? We have a fully guarded base house until sunrise.” Pushing me away gently, Jason shook his head again. This time, it wasn’t in amusement. The look on his face was grave.

“The boys will hear, Xiara. You’re not exactly a quiet lovemaker.” The smile crept back up on my face as I realized that the look on his face was not as serious as I had first believed.

“Well...gag me then.” Finally giving in, he leaned over and gave me a dry kiss.

“If I gag you, then I won’t be able to kiss those pretty lips of yours...” Realizing that I had ultimately won our game, the urge to be with Jason finally came over me. Barely even looking back with my seducing eyes while I strolled over to my bedroom door, I twisted the knob, almost excited as I heard the identifying creak of the hinge. Turning back to my secondhand, that seductive smile came back over me as I pointed to the inside of the room.

“As your clan leader, I command you to get your ass into this bedroom, Bones.” Playfully raising his hands in surrender, he followed, closing the door behind him.

“Yes ma’am, Boss Lady.”

Hours soon passed. The room sat silent as Jason sat upright in my bed and I lay on my side, trying hard to fight sleep. In what felt like all of a moment, my stress had been relieved. I don't know how this man was able to do this to me. Interrupting my thoughts, the feeling of his dry lips pressed against my cheekbone, making me turn my head, and then move my hand up to place it softly on his cheek as well.

"Jason..." I mumbled. Throwing up the shield around his emotions, his eyes soon went into a cold demeanor as he shook his head at me and sat back against the headboard.

"Xiara, don't." At those words, my heart began to sink. I didn't have the courage to say what I felt, but he already knew what I wanted to express. He knew that we weren't ready. Now fearing that he had hurt my feelings, Jason picked me up from my side and pulled me into his embrace, placing my ear to his bare chest. I lay my head on his chest without protest, hearing his heart still race even though his breathing had long settled by then.

"So...why not?" I asked. Grumbling lowly, he began to push some of my black locks that had long fallen with my bun out of my face.

"You know we don't have time for love, Xiara. Love is a weakness. In the midst of a clan war, we can't afford the luxury of a weakness. We've been through this already." Sitting all the way up, I sighed heavily. We had gone through this far too many times for it to have any effect on how I felt about it by now. My anger finally began to stir.

"Yes, we've been through this and it doesn't get any better no matter how many times we do. Maybe...maybe if I had never taken over this clan, then you would love me." Now turning to sit on the edge of the bed as he got ready to put his clothes back on, Jason groaned in frustration. This was a topic that came up between us very frequently.

"Don't start this again, Xiara. If you had never taken over the clan, I never would have met you. Now is not the time for this, and here is not the place for it." Finally sitting back against the headboard, my eyes moved to watch him as he began to dress again.

"So then *when* will be the time and *where* will the place, Jason?" Briefly turning his head to look at me, he then turned back away as he finished dressing.

"I will let you know." As he made his way to the door, I gathered all the remaining nerve I had left and called out after him,

"Jason, please." Possibly knowing that I was pleading for him to stay, he stopped. Seeing that I had gotten his attention, my nerves began to take over me once again as I finally whispered,

"Please don't let me sleep alone," Unsure of how to answer my request, he quickly made his way back to the bedroom door, turning the knob as he defied my request.

“We still have about three more hours of overnight guard, Xiara. Get some sleep. You will need it.” Saying no more, he left out of the room, closing the door behind him. As the door closed, my heart fell. I don’t know why his leaving me made me so sad. Gathering the bunch of sheets above my body, I finally turned back to my side as the cold chill of the room failed to help comfort my raw feelings. There was nothing else I could say.

There was no time for love.

Chapter Seven

Daybreak came quickly. As the sun began to reveal a beam of orange sunrise past the clouds and into my room, my instincts spoke to me, letting me know that a new day had begun. At the same time, my door sounded off that familiar creak as I heard the footsteps of my secondhand echo across the room as they made their way close to my bed. Barely opening my eyes, I saw that same wonderful face greeting me as I felt his warm hands grasp my shoulder to gently nudge me awake.

"Daybreak already?" I mumbled. Jason nodded.

"Daybreak already. Come on, why don't you get in a quick shower and get dressed. I will get the boys rounded up and call the limos. We need to get a move on." I sat up and stretched, partially forgetting that I was still naked under the sheets. Somewhat in awe, he gave me the full look over, smiling to himself.

"It still amazes me that you have this amazing body and this beautiful...everything, yet you chose some rough-around-the-edges outsider like me to be your secondhand." Not really thinking about it, I smiled at him and reached out like before, grabbing his shirt and pulling him in for a morning kiss.

"I don't think there was any choosing about it," I whispered as I slowly left his lips, "You just came to me like that. I knew you were the right choice when I saw you, Bones. You will always be the only one I trust so much with my life. I wish you would at least try to understand how I feel..." Blocking his emotions again, Jason's face went stiff and cold as he pulled away from me, turning his whole body away from me as he sighed heavily and mumbled,

"We leave in thirty. Go get your shower, Boss Lady." Not giving me a chance to even protest, he then made his way quickly out of the room and closed my bedroom door behind him. Feeling my heart sink again as I realized that he was not ready to connect emotionally to me, I looked down at my hands in my lap, feeling my ears begin to burn as the vulnerability inside of me began to peak. Shaking it off, I slid out from under the covers and felt as the cold wind embraced my bare body as I walked over to the dresser to begin picking out my clothes. From the bottom drawer up, I picked out an onyx pair of baggy pants with chains hanging from the sides, a dark pink midriff-baring crop top in the shape of an "x," then finally reached into the top drawer and pulled out a nude strapless bra along with matching boy short underwear and threw all of the clothes onto the bed. As I moved to close my top drawer, something caught my eye. Moving my clothes back out of the way to see what it was, I reached down and picked it up, feeling my eyelids pop open as I realized what I was.

“Oh shit...not this. Not now!”

All of the vulnerability in my spirit quickly changed into fear as I realized that what I was holding in my hand was my pack of birth control. My mind raced through the memories in my head as I kept trying to remember how soon it had been since my last pill, but right in front of me was the evidence. Nervously, I began to count backwards to the empty bubble on that all too important piece of cardboard. One, two, three, four, five...all the way to ten. I had not taken a pill for ten days. Suddenly feeling sick to my stomach, I tossed the pack back into the drawer as I realized just how at risk I was. Being a female vampire not only came with overwhelming advantages; it also came with damning consequences for carelessness. I was always fertile. There was no rest period for my kind; as soon as one ovum left our bodies, the next one was already developed and taking the old one's place. I was multiple times more likely to get pregnant from a one-night stand than a human or a Zun, especially since Jason was a natural-born as well. For all I knew at that time, I could have already conceived. The thought of actually conceiving in the middle of a clan war terrified me. If love was a weakness, what would stop Darian from using my unborn baby against me as a war tactic? Trying hard to throw the horrid thought out of my mind, I finally slammed my drawer closed and took off to my adjacent bathroom to shower as quickly as I could.

“Boss Lady, are you ready?” my team leader called out from behind the door some time later after I had finished dressing. Stopping my pacing, I called back to the door,

“I'm ready, Bones. Come in.” At my command, Bones walked into the room to see me fully dressed and trying hard to feign a confident look. Noticing the change in my demeanor, he walked up close to me as if he were trying hard to understand what was going through my head.

“Is something wrong, Xiara?” Shaking my head, I brushed him off. Now was not the time for this. He didn't need to know yet what I had seen.

“Nothing is wrong, Bones. If there is, I will let you know. Is the property secure? Is my sister ready and cooperative? Have the limos been called and the trapdoor been scouted?”

“All ready, Boss Lady. Your sister is sleeping right about now, which is almost as cooperative as we will be able to get her. The house and the trapdoor have both been scouted and given the all clear. The limos are at the port now. Everything should be ready to go. Are you sure you're going to be able make this trip? You really don't look so good.” I felt the color drain out of my face slowly as I realized that it was probably not too soon to begin showing symptoms of conception. Still trying to deny it in my mind, I looked down and shook my head, once again brushing off his concerns.

“I'm fine, Bones. Let's go ahead and get to the tunnel ports before it gets too bright out.” Not offering any more protest, Bones nodded at me and led me out of my room back into the kitchen to the counter island that we were standing at before. At my word, five of my boys picked up and

moved the island away from its spot, revealing a trap door under it. Reaching down, I pulled the handle to let the door up, revealing an entire tunnel system under my house. It was one of the first things that I had built when I took over the clan. Looking around one last time as my boys turned off all the remaining lights in the house, I jumped down through the trapdoor, hearing Bones drop in right after me. The rest of my boys dropped in after one by one and we then made our way toward the end of the main tunnel.

Without giving off any sign of affection, I moved in close to Jason. Something about him was compelling, even when I was doing my job as clan leader. Still, I had it in the forefront of my mind all the time that love was a weakness. Weakness was far too dangerous. As the idea of weakness and vulnerability flashed through my mind, I looked down to see if I could feel any sign of life in my body. Nothing. So many disastrous scenarios began to ring through my head. Could I be a mother and a clan leader? No. I couldn't. If I were going to choose the path of a mother, I would have to disappear. I would leave everything I had to Jason. He was the secondhand, the team leader. He was the only one I trusted to take over if something happened to me. Would he even want to be a father? I didn't think it was possible with our lives. He was probably better off never knowing. I would have to disappear, and take care of my child alone. No one would be able to find me. No one.

"Boss Lady."

I snapped to attention. We had reached the end of the port. Had my thoughts consumed me so much? Turning to my boys, I stood tall as I pointed out to begin my assignment of transportation. We would be taking three different limos in three different directions. This was the only way to keep everything as discreet as possible.

"Loot, Mace, Klept, and Metal, you will be taking the devil's hand. Axe, Nitro, Punk, and Drag, you will be taking the median. The rest of you, bring Kiara and take the right with me. Let's move!" Neither hesitating nor questioning my orders, the boys quickly shuffled into their assigned places; within minutes, we were gone. The hardest part was now over. Now all we had left was the four hour trip.

Not long into our trip, my sister woke. As she slowly began to fade into consciousness, she looked around to see that she was not alone. Immediately peeved by this realization, she sat up, shooting a hard glare at me.

"Really," she began, "a limousine, Xiara? You're kidnapping me with a group of your thugs in a limo?" Crossing my arms, I paid her anger no attention as I answered,

"We kidnap in style, sis. Besides, I would like to think it would be more comfortable than cramming you into the trunk of my little car. So while you're here, why not just sit back and relax. We've still got another three hours to go." Saying nothing more, Kiara instead lay back down on the lone seat as we rode the rest of our trip mostly in silence.

"This is your new home for the next few months, Kiara," I said as we pulled up to the safe house. We had made it to Midi by then and the rest of my boys already surrounded the house. As I got out of the car, holding my sister by her arm, the rest of my boys followed behind me closely, eventually surrounding the house as only Jason, Kiara, and I went into the small two bedroom shack.

"How unusual is this," my sister finally sighed in defeat as I let her out of her restraints. "To be kidnapped by my own sister and her personal bodyguard. Go figure." Pulling the cuffs away from her wrists and then placing them on my belt loop, I gave my sister a shrug.

"It's not really kidnapping. Consider it a security measure to make sure that you won't do anything stupid."

"So what about my pregnancy?" she asked quickly.

"I will take care of getting you some medical supervision. But if you think you're leaving this house with any chance of escaping, you may as well go ahead and get the thought out of your mind now. You're in for a long few months. Maybe then you will forget all about Ethan and your stupid plans to go against my word. I'll be back to check on you in a week." Feeling that there was nothing left to say, I turned and began to make my way back to the door, stopping short as I felt my sister grab my arm to prevent me from going any further. I turned my head to look at her. Her eyes seemed to plead with me, as if she had lost every tactic she had before and was stooping to the level of trying to beg.

"Kiara, please. I'm sorry. Don't...don't do this. Don't keep me and my baby away from Ethan." The sorrow in her voice seemed to tear at my heart. She was my little sister after all. Feeling some of my resistance melt away, I looked down and sighed heavily.

"Kiara—" Interrupting my submission, another hand yanked at my other arm, pulling me roughly away from my sister. I had forgotten that Jason was there with me.

"It's time to go, Boss Lady," he said, pulling me away. "We will be back in a week. We have things to get back to in Vashleyra." Realizing what Jason was trying to keep me from doing, my resistance came back up and my face went back into its cold demeanor.

"He has a point, Kiara. I'll see you in a week." Saddened that she had lost her only chance to reason with me, my sister turned her head away from me and made her way to the small bedroom as I locked the door from the outside and walked quickly back to the limo.

This time around, only Jason and I sat in the back of the car. The ride was eerily silent. My mind went back to the problem at hand. Was the reason he had been so silent because perhaps he may have been able to catch a second scent on my body? What was going through his mind?

Looking down at my hands, I noticed that my hands had thinned some. My heart began to pound. Were these symptoms or were they results of stress? Shaking it off, I curled my hands into fists and forced them into my lap as I made myself look back out of the window.

“You do realize that you will eventually have to tell me what the hell is wrong, Xiara, don’t you?” That voice boomed through my thoughts. Jumping back into reality, I looked across the seat to see him looking out of his own window with his arms crossed. Turning my head to look back out of the window, I sighed at the realization that I was horrible at keeping things from him.

“Yes, Jason, I know.”

Chapter Eight

All three of the limousines soon left as we all made it back to the port. Once again, Bones stood next to me as we all silently made it back toward the trap door under the house. As we reached the trap door, I stopped the entire group and turned to address them all.

“After you finish inspecting the house, you are all free to go.” Allowing them to pull the trap door as they climbed in one-by-one, I stood next to Bones, whispering in his ear,

“Except for you.” Not sure of what I was keeping him back for, he shook his head and helped me up the trap door as the rest of the boys finished their inspection and gave me the all-clear.

There we stood, alone. Jason and I stood silent in the kitchen, soundless as we both knew that something was wrong that had been keeping me from being able to talk to him since the night before. After a few moments of silence, he finally sighed and decided to take the conversation.

“Okay, Xiara. What’s wrong? I know you’ve kept me behind for something. I can almost smell it on you.” Not knowing how to explain what I wanted to say, I sighed and gently took his hands into my own, turning to lead him into my bedroom.

“Here, Jason. I think it would be better if I showed you.”

As we made it into the bedroom, I pushed him onto the bed as I walked to the drawers to get my pack of pills. Almost relieved, he gave me a devious smile.

“Already, Xiara? Wasn’t last night enough for you?” Realizing what he meant, I brushed him off, shaking my head at him.

“Can you just be serious for a moment, Bones?” He threw his hands up in surrender, allowing me to continue with my task.

“Yes ma’am Boss Lady.” Pulling out the pack that I was searching for, I then closed the drawer, moving back over to the bed to show it to him, placing it in his hands. He gave me a confused look.

“What are you showing me this for?” By now, I was trembling. Trying hard and ultimately failing to hide my nervousness with a heavy exhale, I took a shaky hand, pointing to the empty bubble of the last pill that I took. Jason still looked confused, but I could tell that he was beginning to get nervous. Continuing, I finally answered,

"This is the last pill I took." Moving my hand down a whole ten bubbles down, I pointed to the filled bubble and finished,

"And this is where I'm supposed to be now."

Clearly mortified, he uttered not a word. I looked up at him, almost praying for a response. Dread-filled seconds passed of only silence before he finally clenched the pack in his hand in anger and growled, hurling the pack of birth control across the room. Trying hard to rationalize the situation, Jason stood fiercely, turning his back to me.

"Damn it all to hell, Xiara! It was only one time!" I looked down in my lap, shaking my head.

"You know that it only takes once for us." Now finally directing his anger at me, he turned to me, beginning to yell.

"What the heavenly fuck possessed you to stop taking your birth control, Xiara?!" Now even more ashamed, I placed my face into my hands.

"I didn't stop, Jason. I forgot." Not satisfied with my answer, his voice rose.

"For *ten days*?!" Fighting back, I looked up and glared at him, shouting back,

"Hey! Don't you fucking yell at me! Before last night, when was the last time you actually bothered to do more than *sit* on my bed?!" He had no comeback to that.

Deciding that I had had enough of our fight, I got up from my bed, moving to stand against the dresser. It took a few seconds for me to break the silence.

"I've decided that once this clan war with Darian is over, I will leave the clan. You're my successor."

"Like hell you will," Jason snapped. "This clan is our lives!" Letting my thoughts move to the worst case scenario of becoming a mother, I crossed my arms as I looked down at my flat stomach while Bones pulled me into his embrace.

"It can't be our lives much longer if we have a baby," I whispered, "Why don't you want me to step down?"

"Taking over was never what I wanted, Xiara," he answered. "You know that good and damn well. Don't...don't try to take it upon yourself to have a kid alone if you get pregnant. I refuse to let you do this by yourself." At hearing his last words, I pushed away, no longer wanting to feel his touch.

"You don't love me," I spat out coldly. "You certainly won't be able to raise a baby with me." My coldness instantly angered Bones, as he clenched his fist and slammed it onto the dresser. I jumped back some.

"Damn it, Xiara! Don't start it with this shit again! You know that you're doing nothing but spewing a bunch of bullshit when you say that I don't care about you!" Apparently, I had struck a nerve, but I didn't care. I was determined to win this battle.

"You won't even tell me that you love me, Bones. You aren't capable of loving me. If you aren't even capable of that, then how can you be capable of loving a child that comes from me?" Apparently sick of my provoking, Jason tightened both fists, and then stormed over to my bedroom door to leave.

"Xiara, fuck this. Don't get me wrong—I really hope that you aren't pregnant. But if you are, don't treat me like I'm going to be some kind of asshole like Darian. I will never be him. I would give my life to protect you and nothing could change that. Sorry that you're having too hard of a time seeing that right now. Just...keep me updated. I'll see you tomorrow." Without giving me a chance to even say goodbye, he stormed out of my bedroom, slamming the door hard enough to crack the doorjamb.

I collapsed to the floor, letting the tears finally fall. I cared about him far too much. *This* was far too much. I looked back down at my flat stomach, moving my hand over it. This was more than vulnerability. This was an outright distraction.

"Jason..."

Before I had the chance to gather myself, I heard a scream outside of my room, along with Jason's voice.

"What the hell?!" His voice was silenced with a loud boom. Jumping to attention, I sprang to my feet and threw my bedroom door open, running to the sound of the bang. In the kitchen I found my secondhand laying in a pool of his own blood, barely conscious. The color drained out of my face as I kneeled down to tend to him.

"Jason!" Before I could even begin to try to assess his wounds, I felt a cold piece of metal being pressed against my temple. I froze. It was a pistol. Raising my hands in the air, I turned my head slowly only for the barrel to be forced to my forehead. That familiar voice rang through my ears once again as I realized exactly who it was.

"My offer wasn't exactly optional, Shia."

Chapter Nine

I stood frozen, petrified as Darian held the gun to my forehead in his sick pleasure. He marveled at his artificial power. I averted my eyes to Jason's bleeding body, feeling my heart rate begin to rise. I wanted to tend to him. Was he alive? Moving my eyes back up to meet my attacker, I gritted my teeth together in anger.

"Damn you, Darian! A gun? Really? Are you too much of a pussy to fight like a real man?" Without responding, he slowly began to move the gun away. Instinctively, I jumped and moved to tend to Jason, hoping to at least get the bullet out. Before I could get much further, Darian swung the gun and bashed me in the side of the head with it, knocking me out cold.

Time passed. My senses finally came to me some time later. As I regained consciousness, I looked around, trying to become aware of my surroundings. Jason was gone, but his pool of blood still stained my floor. I sat up, looking down at where I was. Darian was nowhere to be found. I stood, quickly realizing that my entire body was confined by chains. My hands were bound by handcuffs and my legs bound by shackles. Realizing that Darian was probably still in the vicinity, I sat back down in my chair, trying hard to calm down. My head was pounding from the blow he had delivered to it earlier. Holding out my arms, I tried hard to pull apart the chains that held them together. No good. They were too tight.

I began to notice that my body was not in a normal state. I had been involuntarily thrown into a defense mode. Every muscle in my body had been tensed, my fangs and claws had been bared, and my adrenaline rush continued nonetheless. Something was off. No matter how much I tried to push off my defensive mode, it remained. Could it mean...? No, that was impossible. Getting up, I waddled over toward my bedroom door, stopping short when I began to hear voices behind the door.

"You promised me that no one would get hurt, Darian!" yelled a voice behind the door. I recognized the voice instantly. It was Ethan. What were they talking about?

"I didn't promise you a damn thing except my help in getting your girl back and her sister out of your way," Darian answered calmly, "And once we find your knocked up little whore, you had better keep your end of the bargain. She better change you, and you would do well to finish your initiation into the Moonlights. If you even think of backing down, it will be more than just you that gets hurt. I'm not merciful like Xiara. Don't forget that. I'm surprised that Shia herself hasn't killed you yet."

"Xiara knows that I love her sister," Ethan snapped back. "I know she does. She will tell us where Kiara is. She can't hide her sister for that long. The baby will make her weak. And Xiara

will eventually have to tend to her sister. When she does, I will keep my end of the bargain. You will have your puppet.”

Almost unbelieving at what I was hearing, I waddled back over to my kitchen counter, leaning against it. My instinct had been more right than I had dared ever want. Ethan had made a deal with the devil and was planning to drag my sister and her son into it. The fury then set in as the adrenaline began to surge through my veins even faster. I wanted to fight. I wanted to burst into the room and kill them both. Looking at the pool of blood where Jason had been what seemed like only moments earlier, I held back the tears as I rattled my chains with all of the remaining strength I had, finally starting to feel the metal give way at my anger.

Abruptly, I stopped. I had caught scent of something new. Looking down, I realized that my body was still in defense mode for a reason, and it wasn't because I was angry. My body was in defense mode to protect the baby inside. It was then that I realized that I was too little too late. I was already pregnant. And Jason was gone.

Chapter Ten

I stood there shocked in my realization, not even noticing that Darian had entered the kitchen until he invaded my sight with his arrogant smile while he stood next to me, proud of the damage he had done. My body heat began to blaze as my eyes began to dilate. I wanted so badly to kill him. I wanted to cut his throat. I wanted more than anything to see him bleed out into the floor and watch as his blood mingled with that of my secondhand's. But I couldn't. I couldn't win against a gun. I could do several things, but winning against a gun wasn't one of them. He moved to the front of me, staring me down as he taunted me with his deviously blue eyes. He wanted to see me get angry. He wanted to see me lash out. But I was determined not to give him what he wanted.

Silently forfeiting his round of attempting to break me, Darian turned, reached into his pocket and pulled the gun out, placing it on the counter island. My heart began to pound once again. What did he plan to do with that thing? Turning back to me, he gave me his usual stupid smile as he stared me in the face.

"Hungry?" he asked. Without protest, I nodded. He walked over to my refrigerator, opening it up to take a peek inside of it. He lingered only for a few seconds before closing it back and moving back to stand next to me.

"There isn't much here, so it looks like food will have to wait. Down to business, Shia. Your initiation is in three months. Now that you don't have a suitor, I believe that I will be the perfect person to take that place. I will mate you this year, Shia, and our clans will join together. Once I take you as my mate for initiation, I will take over Vashleyra and all of your territory outside of the city. How does that sound, Shia?" Holding my tongue, I solemnly looked away from him.

"You don't even fully understand your own race, Darian. And your changing enthralled humans into Zuns only upsets the Vampire-Humanoid balance. You will see the consequences of what you're doing, and you won't like it. Remember that not all Zuns will follow you simply because of who you are." Crossing his arms, he gave me a forced chuckle.

"That may be so, Shia, but they *will* follow me with you by my side." I returned his arrogance with a chuckle of my own.

"That's nice, Darian, but you see, I will NEVER be by your side. Never again." Turning to face me, he raised an eyebrow.

"Is that so?"

“Yes. Now where did you take Jason, since we’re on the subject of suitors?”

“To hell if I know. I just told Ethan and some of my boys to drag him somewhere to die. If you want to find his body to give him a proper burial, then ask Ethan where he is.” I gasped. Darian was beginning to push buttons. Looking over at me, he laughed at my reaction, taking joy at my pain.

“Sorry if I hit a weak spot, Shia.” I bit my lip, deciding to withhold my anger. Recognizing my body language once more, Darian grabbed my chin and forced a kiss on my cheek.

“Good girl. You have better self-control now than you did when we were together. That much is for sure.” Feeling as though he had done enough damage, he grabbed his gun, shoved it back into his pocket, and then walked off.

I began to think back.

~ It had been years since Darian and I were an “item.” Sixteen years old. I could have sworn I loved him. Maybe I did at the time. There was a point in time where I believed that I would even marry him and give him children. He was a human then. Of course, a short-sighted teenage romance was never destined to last. Darian was far too lustful. He was also very sloppy, making it impossible to hide all of his affairs with other vampires and his periods of enthrallment with older women in hopes that they would transform him. It didn’t take me long to find out about all of his lust filled rendezvous points and realize all of the perverted things he did in his attempts to become “one of us.” We broke things off the same way that Ethan and Kiara left each other. There was no rumor, no talk, and no “official breakup,”—it was just bitter silence.

~I should have let him die that day. I should have never changed him into a Zun. He should have been a dead human, not the leader of the Moonlight Clan of the Zuns. I should have been with Jason. But because of my foolishness and my soft heart, I let Darian live. I changed him into one of us. I should have let him die that day.

“You’re thinking about something, Shia. Tell me what it is.” The voice interrupted my memory. I snapped back to attention, focusing my sights back to Darian, who was leaning on the counter island. Defiantly, I remained silent. Letting his anger get the best of him, he growled, stomping over to me and backhanding me against the counter, rudely reminding me of the chains that still bound me as I heard the clink of the metal slam against the counter.

“My commands are not optional, Shia,” he seethed. “Now tell me what you are thinking about.” Glaring hard up at him, I spat the blood out of my mouth, feeling my hatred to him grow ever deeper. But I suppose I could play this game, just this once.

“Get me out of these cuffs, Darian. You want to slap me around like you’re a big guy? Then at least give me the chance to fight with my hands unbound, you son of a bitch. And by the way,

you have a funny way of attracting a mate if *this* is your idea of courting.” Moving in to close in toward my face, he grabbed my chin, forcing me to face him.

“You want to see courting, Shia?” Not giving me a chance to respond, he pressed his lips against mine, forcing his tongue into my mouth. I squirmed, trying my hardest to get him off of me as I resisted his taste. It was the most wretched thing in the world. Roughly, he shoved me off of him and reached into his pocket, taking out the keys to my chains. Within seconds I was freed.

“There you go Shia. Don’t get too comfortable. If you think you’re going to be able to call for help, you may as well go ahead and give up on that now. I got rid of all of your communication devices while you were asleep. Now go clean yourself up. We’ve got work to do.” Finally feeling relief at seeing the chains drop to the floor, I rubbed my wrists, trying to relieve the previous tightness that had occupied it earlier.

“*You* should be the one that shouldn’t be getting comfortable, Darian. Don’t think that I can’t get rid of you just because you have a gun. You will pay for Jason’s blood with your own.” Rolling his eyes at me, Darian grabbed my arm and roughly yanked me out of the kitchen.

“Just get the fuck out of my face, Xiara.”

~Yeah. He should have been left to die that day. I should have never saved him. I remembered that day well. Darian was lying nearly dead on my doorway that evening as I walked back from a clan meet some years ago. He bled out onto the patio, having long lost consciousness by the time I got to him. He had been shot. Why did I even bother with him? We had long broken up by then, but I knew that I still loved him. I pulled him into my house that day and patched him up. I remembered pulling the bullet out, hearing his screams and enduring his thrashing. I couldn’t take him to a hospital; my cover could be blown far too easily. Using what little bit of first aid I had in the house, I patched him up, wrapping him in thick, tight bandages to subdue the bleeding. The bleeding had subsided some, but he was still dying. At that point, there was nothing I could do but wait.

~Soura was still the clan leader at that time. She was the Guardian, my Big Sister. She had warned me about Darian. He was no good. She always said that if I were to be with him then I would need to never fall in love with him. If I fell in love with him then I would never, under any circumstances, change him. Changing Darian into a Zun would not only get me denied from re-initiation into the clan, but also would make me a sworn enemy of the Four-Pointed Star Clan. Looking back on it then, the signs of Darian’s rottenness were evident, but I fancied myself to be so much in love that I ignored every sign. I couldn’t see how bad he was for me. That day, as he lay dying in my house, I thought that my love was enough to justify changing him. By the time Darian was finally strong enough to wake, I could tell that he was still dying. It had been far too long in between the time he had been shot and the time I had removed the bullet. I was losing him quickly. Even if I had wanted to take him to a hospital, it was far too late by then. He would

be long dead before an ambulance could even arrive. Realizing that there was no other way to keep him alive, I made the split decision to change him. I made him a vampire.

I walked into the bathroom, closing the door behind me. Turning on the sink to mask what I was doing, I reached under the bathroom counter and flipped a panic switch. Good. It was still there. I looked down to see that the red panic light had indeed turned on. It was only a matter of time now before my boys made it to the house. Darian wanted to make this a clan war, and he would get one.

Chapter Eleven

I sat on the bed in my room shortly after leaving my bathroom, allowing hundreds of thoughts to run through my head as I faintly listened to Darian stalking about outside my door. Part of me wanted to hide out behind my bedroom door and lock myself inside at the realization that I was more fragile now than I was two days before. Another part of me wanted to storm out and demand answers and, more importantly, blood. I did neither. Instead, I got off of my bed calmly and walked gracefully into the kitchen where Darian stormed angrily, uttering not a sound. Too tired and angry to even care about what was going through his mind, I moved over to my regular recliner chair in the den, not even daring to ask what his anger was focused on. I knew that it would all be irrelevant when my boys tore him to shreds.

~Changing a human into a Zun entailed a human drinking a vampire's blood. There were only two ways that said human's body would take the blood to begin the transformation, however. Enthrallment was the method most commonly used. In enthrallment, when a human could be lured into a lustful trance for a vampire for up to a week at a time, the controlling vampire could choose to "donate" its blood to the enthralled human to begin its transformation. During a transformation, the body system of the transforming humanoid switches into a high-gear, rapidly metabolizing mode that switches the old, inefficient system into a new, efficient system that alters the human DNA into something that resembles the DNA of a Natural Born. This is a days-long and painful process that throws the human into a deathly sickness for the entire time. Only the strong-willed survive the process. The rest..."unravel." The only other way to initiate this transformation was the method that I used for Darian, and that was unenthralled love. Unfortunately, his will was strong enough to not only survive the sickness intact, but also undergo the process faster than normal. It was all that he had ever wanted me for all along.

Minutes passed in our silence before my ears perked. Shouting could be heard from the outside. I looked up. Darian glared at me, hard. He already knew that I had planned this.

"You called for help! You little bitch!" Instantly, he dashed at my chair, barely missing me as I bolted to the floor. Ignoring the snag of the carpet on my pants, I broke into a fierce crawl, hoping to gain enough traction to get back onto my feet. The bastard was quick to catch onto my ankle, beginning to drag me back toward the hardwood.

"I'll teach you about being a smart ass, you little whore!" he yelled to me. Now that I knew that I was in real danger, my defense mode began to work in overtime. My already bared claws strengthened tenfold and my fangs lengthened. My eyes began to dilate as the adrenaline rushing through my veins made it impossible to think rationally. Everything that was going through my body at that moment was going through to protect the baby inside.

Instinctively, I clawed into the floor, keeping Darian from being able to drag me any further. Now feeling his anger rise, his own defense mode began to kick in. His claws became visible as he gave up on my leg, deciding instead to straddle my entire body. My blurry vision focused to see his burly arm begin to rise to strike me. In an attempt to stop the attack, my fangs came up from the floor, quickly sinking into his attacking arm. Within milliseconds, the nails from Darian's other hand sunk into my cheek. But I dared not let up. We were stuck there on the floor.

Before the situation could get any worse, the door broke down and my boys ran inside, ready to rip Darian off of me. Acting quickly, Darian snatched the gun out of his pocket with his bloody hand, pressing the gun to my temple. My boys all stopped in their tracks.

"Make another move and I blow her brains out just like I did to your team leader!" Not sure of whether he was making an idle threat, they chose to take the safe way out and do what Darian said. No one made another move. Smirking arrogantly at his control of the situation, he now lowered the gun a little, despite the fact that I still had my fangs sunk into his arm. It didn't seem to bother him.

"Good," he continued, "Now that we have a neutral crowd here, I suppose it's time that we tell all of you—Shia here is my mate now. That means all of you answer to me as well now. Now stand down!" Unbelieving, no one moved. My eyes went wide. Darian forced the gun back to my temple.

"Do it!" Choosing the safe route again, my boys obeyed him, backing away from us. Pushing the gun back into his pocket, he shouted out one last command.

"Good. Now get the fuck out of my house!"

As the last of them left, my fangs and claws began to retract. My defense mode had run out of energy to keep running. Darian glared back down at me and then threw me back onto the floor, getting up and turning to walk away from me as I lay dazed on the floor. I saw stars when the back of my head slammed against the solid wood of my floors. The pain was definitely there, and it was there with a vengeance.

"Fuck, Darian! You and your bullshitting!" I yelled as I feeling my head hit the hardwood. Instantly angered at my audacity, he spun sharply and dashed back over to me, delivering a powerful kick to my exposed side. I rolled over, coughing out a mixture of both my and his blood onto the floor as I sat on my knees and covered my now-bruised belly with my arms. Reaching down, he grabbed the back of my crop top, pulling me backwards to him to pull me off of my knees and force his punctured arm into my face.

"You're going to pay me back for *this* Xiara!" he yelled to me as he forced the bloody arm to me. No longer affected by his intimidation tactic, I gave him a cold stare as I moved my arms to cover the new bruise on my belly.

"You haven't even begun to pay me back for Jason's blood, Darian." Deciding not to take the subject any further, he dropped me back onto the floor, moving back toward the bedroom to begin taking care of his wound.

"Clean this mess up, Xiara. I'm getting you a bodyguard in the morning, but don't think that I was bullshitting when I said that you would repay me for the blood you made me spill for your little stunt just now." Instead of trying to provoke him further, I lay there on the floor, trying hard to see if I could still catch my baby's scent after his blow to my stomach.

'If Jason isn't going to live,' I thought to myself, 'then I need this baby to. God only knows how much hell Darian is going to put me through in the next few months. There is no way he would let me give birth to Jason's baby.'

~After Darian survived the sickness, he left. We never made up. He never told me that he loved me, nor did he even thank me for saving his life. His thanks to me? He joined the Moonlights. I remembered that day well, and I remembered when word got around to Soura. She immediately threw me out of the clan, telling me that I had gone against her word for the last time. Life got very hard after that day. I left school and quit my job, too fearful that I would encounter my old clanmates everywhere. They were now my enemies. They were out for blood. I was no longer the sweet little Shia they had all come to know. I was a traitor. After a few weeks of living in constant fear of the people who used to protect me, I got ready to leave. But Darian wasn't quite finished with me yet. It was time for initiation for the Moonlights, and they had just the task made especially for him.

I played nice the rest of the evening, trying to keep from bringing further harm to the baby. Late that night, I stood in my cleaned kitchen, clad in a knee length nightgown and patched over with a piece of gauze on my face where Darian had clawed me earlier. All was silent as we stood in the kitchen staring each other down, silently refusing give in and sleep first. Darian stood across from me, leaning against the kitchen counter while he stared at me sitting on top of my counter island.

"Are you going to sleep tonight, Xiara?" he finally asked. Taking in a deep breath, I turned my head away.

"You expect me to sleep after you take out my secondhand, and then nearly blow my brains out in front of my entire clan?" His laugh erupted throughout the entire hollow place, sending a shiver throughout my whole body. I hated this man's laugh.

“Come on, Xiara!” he teased. “You know I was just throwing a bluff with you!” Moving to leave the place he was standing, his evil smile crept back upon his face as he began to stroll toward the island, attempting to stand in between my legs. I reflexively crossed them before he could get any closer to me. I didn’t want him anywhere near me. Surprisingly, this didn’t make him angry. It seemed to make him more determined. With a swipe of his hand, he managed to lodge his prying fingers in between my powerful thighs, trying hard to force them open.

“Speaking of your secondhand,” he continued, “I know you’ve opened your legs for *him* and probably several of your other boys after you let me take you. So what’s one more night with me going to hurt? It’s the least you could do for making me spill this blood earlier today.” Flashing a bright red, I glared hard at him.

“Go to hell, Darian!” Before he even had a chance to respond, I balled up a fist and reared back, throwing my entire body weight into the punch. Instantly, he went flying to the floor, hardly realizing that he had been hit until after I had jumped off of the counter island.

“Hmph.”

With that, I walked contently over to my refrigerator as he lay sprawled onto the floor, grabbing a soda and taking it with me to my bedroom, locking the door behind me. I sat on my bed, opening the half full soda and drinking only a few sips of it before I grimaced at the realization that it was no good. ***‘I must have left it in the refrigerator too long.’*** Finally realizing that I was not destined to have good luck that night, I closed the drink, placed it on my nightstand, and then rolled into my bed alone once again, sighing to myself as I placed a hand over my stomach one more time for the night.

“I’m not ready for this...”

My ears perked instinctively when I heard my lock being picked soon after my sleep set in, but I couldn’t move. The door opened. Instantly, my eyes flew open, but again my body didn’t respond. Almost smelling my newfound fear, I could almost hear his smirk as he rolled me over in my bed, using his gruff hands to push my nightgown up. My muscles tried to tense, but it was to no avail. My entire body had been disabled. Realizing now that he had full control, Darian leaned his heavy body on top of me, pushing my legs apart as he bent down to whisper to me,

“Tonight, I take you as mine again, Xiara—whether you like it or not!”

This was a nightmare relived.

Chapter Twelve

The next morning I stood in my living room, pacing around in a zombified state as Darian lay sleeping peacefully in my bed. My body felt defiled. No amount of soap and water could wash the filth I felt from him off of me—not that it stopped me from trying. Throughout the morning, Darian slept without even a sliver of remorse in his face as my mind tumbled around my head in its conflict. As early afternoon finally rolled around, the sorry bastard finally rolled out of my bed to find me standing in my kitchen in silence, clad in a plain pair of jeans and a long gray t-shirt. I wore my hair down. He walked up to me, still standing bare chested, clothed in nothing but his plain black boxer shorts. I shot him a grave look. There was no mistaking my feelings; I was nowhere near happy about the events that had taken place in the 24 hours of his “reign.”

“Good morning, Xiara,” he said to me with the smug look on his face. Turning my face away to keep from making eye contact, I barely returned the greeting with a mumble.

“Morning.” Unsatisfied with my disrespect to him, he pulled me forcibly into his arms, snatching me in close to his chest.

“Don’t get snarky with me, Xiara. Not after I’ve gotten you where I need you to be. Now, we have some business to talk about, and I need you to at least pretend for all of a day that you *want* to work with me, or else this will become very difficult for you very quickly. Do you understand?” Rolling my eyes, I decided to give in again for the sake of my best-kept secret so far, my unborn baby.

“Whatever, Darian. Just get to the point, please.” Leaning over to give me a kiss on the cheek, he gave off a mocking laugh as I tried to pull away, only to feel him pull me back in.

“Well...” he began, “since you asked so very nicely, I will just tell you now; I am picking you a bodyguard today. I figure that since he will have to be with you for most of the times when I have to patrol, I will allow you to pick one of your own puppets.”

“Really now?” I questioned in surprise, “And you aren’t afraid that I will sleep with him if I choose one of my own?” Shoving off my worry with a careless shrug, he pulled me even tighter into his arms and began to move his hand towards my bottom, giving it a hard slap when I tried hard to move his hand away.

“No one in their right mind would touch you after you’ve been with me. My scent is all over you, and any man who would dare challenge that would smell it from a mile away. You’re mine now.” Deciding not to say anything else, I realized that he was right. Whether it was willing or not,

Darian's scent was still all over me, and no amount of soap and water could mask that. The only positive out of that was that his awful smell masked the scent of a baby on me, and his actions made it hard for even the most attuned to be able to detect a baby on me this early. They would literally have to be looking for any sign of life other than my own to be able to catch it.

As the day passed on, Darian did his normal patrols, keeping me locked inside the house to give me time to think on who I wanted to choose as a bodyguard. During his day of absence, I made it my mission to find a bodyguard that I could trust just as much as I could Jason – that would mean that no new recruits were in the running. The only problem I foresaw with finding an original member to be my bodyguard was the dilemma of having Darian's scent all over me. By then he had surely told everyone about his twisted idea of a "mating" and some clan members with a less forgiving view would not be able to even look at me after I had been touched by Darian. It was during this time of thought that I eventually realized that I had very few people I could trust, even in my own clan. Damn that Darian! He knew that this would happen. Finally realizing that I would have to take a gamble either way, I gave up with an upset groan in frustration and placed my head on the kitchen table, deciding to wait until my captor returned before making a concrete decision.

"Xiara," whispered a voice into my ear, "wake up." Slowly opening my eyes, I found myself being greeted by the ever familiar presence of my captor as he leaned against my ear to whisper into it. Apparently, I had fallen asleep on my kitchen table. As I lifted my head to see him, the fog in my mind instantly cleared as I felt the anger begin to rise in me again. I was nowhere close to being happy to see him.

"Oh God, Darian. What in the name of hell's bells do you want?" Slightly amused by my greeting, he let out a low laugh as he began to rub on my shoulders.

"It's evening, Xiara. I gave you all day to pick a bodyguard and you will do so tonight at the clan meet. Do I make myself clear?"

I didn't answer. My heart instantly dropped as I realized that it was indeed the night for another clan meet, and I was no doubt about to be paraded around by this lunatic. Now upset at the humiliation I was surely about to face, I turned my head away from him.

"Yes, Darian," I mumbled obediently, "I have." Satisfied with my resignation to him, he grabbed me by the arm and picked me up out of the chair to lead me out of the door.

The meeting soon commenced. I sat uncomfortably on my chair, barely able to keep myself off of the edge while my captor paced around the chair. Looking around, I began to see new faces merge into the crowd. It only seemed to make me more nervous. Finally the crowd came in and settled down, looking up at me as if they were waiting for me to say something.

"Xiara," he said to me sternly. I jumped upon hearing the authority in his voice.

"What is it now, Darian?" He leaned over to me, beginning to whisper fiercely into my ear.

"Say anything about what happened last night and there will be much more blood to deal with than your secondhand's. I mean that." I took the threat to heart. Resigning to go along with the illusion, I stood from my chair and addressed the entirety of the two clans.

"As many of you know," I began, "Darian and I have made the decision to join the Moonlights and the Four-Pointed Stars together. I know that many of you will not be happy about this decision. Which is why I am giving all of you a chance to choose your allegiance. You can either continue with your membership by participating this year's initiation, or you can make yourself a permanent enemy and target for the unified clan. There is no in-between. Either you're with us or you're not."

Instantly, whispers broke out in the crowd. A lot of unrest immediately followed my silence. With that, I knew that I had to wait while my boys took in the information that I had just given them. Choosing not to cause any more unrest, I sat back down in my chair, waiting for them all to settle down. Darian was not nearly as patient. Not willing to wait for a silence, he began to yell over them.

"Shut the fuck up! She has something else to say!" Having brought them to attention, he shot me a glare one last time. Taking advantage of this silence, I spoke up again.

"Today is the day that I will choose a bodyguard. Since Bones is no longer with us, the need for a strong team leader is more important than it has been in years. Believe it or not, there are many outsiders that would oppose to the merging of our clans. I need someone that is up to the task of overseeing initiation so that everything goes well in three months. In order to be chosen for this position, you must be an original member of the Four-Pointed Star Clan and have no other side jobs that will keep you from being able to perform your duty as a team leader. Any takers?"

The silence continued. For what felt like an eternity, no one moved or spoke. Letting his impatience rear its ugly head again, Darian snatched me up out of my seat and forcefully pulled me to my feet, standing me in front of my boys.

"This isn't a round of the quiet game, morons! You heard her! Either someone speaks up or I pick for you!" Finally out of all of the silence, one lone voice spoke up.

"I'll do it." I looked to where the sound of the voice came from. Mace rose to his feet as the men around him stared at him with what looked like a mixture of confusion and rage. As he made his way to me, he reached out and snatched me away from Darian, defying his authority boldly.

"I will take care of Boss Lady." Satisfied at the way the cards had fallen, Darian gave an evil smile before turning back to the boys.

"We will meet once more in two weeks to discuss the arrangement of the initiation. You all are dismissed."

Chapter Thirteen

The next morning came quickly after the clan meet. Mace sat at my kitchen table that morning as I left the room alone to begin cooking breakfast for myself. We had yet to say anything to each other about the events that had taken place the day before. As the morning passed by and we both ate in silence, he finally broke the tension.

"Boss Lady, I'm not necessarily happy to be here either, but I have to wonder why you've looked like you wanted to kill me since I've gotten here." Taken aback at the statement, I looked down as I began to wring my hands together in my lap.

"I'm sorry, Mace. It has been a very long couple of days."

"I noticed."

"I have been dealing with this the best way I can without Bones, Mace. Please bear with me." Now curious to know why my entire demeanor had changed, he leaned over the table to see if he could catch a hint of what was really going on in my body language.

"Boss Lady," he began, "Did Darian do something to you to make you act this way? It just doesn't seem logical that your choice after losing Bones would be to run back to that scumbag after what he did to you."
I thought back to that night.

~ The memory of what Darian did to me stayed in the forefront of my mind every single day that I had to look at him. After his joining with the Moonlights, Darian was given a task for his initiation. Their initiation rites were far more complex than the annual initiation that my own clan had to go through. Zuns were really nothing but modified humans. Their idea of running a clan was much more violent and disrupting than ours, a clan of Natural Borns. So of course when he joined the Moonlights, their task for him had something to do with me. His task for initiation that year was to get me back to their base house. Whether I wanted to be there or not.

~ All I remembered before the base house was walking back home. I was still in a deep depression from losing Darian and my own clan at the same time. I walked up the steps to my house front door. He ambushed me, quickly gaining control of me before he threw a napkin over my face. Before I even had a chance to fight back, I was out cold. I woke from my chloroform-induced sleep in their base house. Before I had even enough time to process what

was going on, I came to the realization that I was not alone. I was sitting in a dark room tied up against a chair while Darian and his leader stared me down. I tried my hardest to move, only to realize that whatever drug they had given me in my sleep induced paralysis. Now that they knew that I had no resistance to the drug, Darian silently took me out of the chair and lay me on the floor, going silently while the fear resonated from my very being. There, I had to watch in horror and humiliation as the man that I once considered spending the rest of my life with did one of the most horrible things that I could fathom—he took advantage of the drug and raped me. Right there in front of his leader, he humiliated me in the worst way possible, and I was powerless to stop it. His leader enjoyed the show so much that he joined in, and they took turns taking advantage of me until they both felt that they accomplished what they wanted. I couldn't scream. I wanted to scream. But there was nothing I could do but watch. Finally after Darian's initiation was done, he took me back home and tucked me into my bed quietly, kissing me on the forehead while he pulled the blankets over my defiled body. Before he left, he looked at me with no remorse and smiled as he kissed me on the cheek and stood up to leave.

"I will always love you, Shia."

"Boss Lady?" I snapped back to reality to look at Mace sitting in front of me. Apparently I had blanked out between his last question. Getting back to what was in front of me, I rebuilt my emotional wall and sat up straight to face him.

"I know what I'm doing, Mace. I am doing what I feel is right for the future of the clan and for the city. It's time this war came to an end." Not entirely convinced, he looked at me with a raised eyebrow.

"What you're doing isn't what Bones would have wanted, Boss Lady." Hearing his words made my heart drop, as I knew that he was right. I looked away in shame, stealing another glance at my unchanged belly.

"Yeah, well Bones isn't here anymore, is he?"

From that day on, Mace had to follow me everywhere. As much as I hated the idea of having a 24-7 bodyguard, I dealt with it the best way I could while still trying to hide the pregnancy that would either prove to be a bargaining chip or a certain death for me. Even though I loathed being followed around everywhere, I was somewhat glad that it was Mace that took the stand and not any of the other original members. They surely would have my head by now. Or they would have gotten all of us into some kind of inescapable shit with the Moonlights. I knew, though, that the new scent of the baby would eventually become obvious before I started showing. It would be at that time that I would have to explain a lot of things to Mace.

One evening, I lay in my living chair in the den while Darian and Ethan met in my room. I had gotten used to being consistently bothered those past few days, and so far had been careful enough to keep the scent of my best kept secret hidden from the rest of the boys. Today was different in the sense that Mace met with all of the boys for the first time as the new team

leader. So in a rare moment, I sat alone in my den while the sound from the television rambled about. Before I knew it, I had drifted away to sleep in my chair. What felt like mere moments later, I woke abruptly to the sound of my bedroom door opening. My ears perked. It was Ethan. Determined to ignore him, I said nothing to him, waiting on him to walk out of the front door. Much to my dismay, he focused his sights on me.

“Hello Xiara. I heard about your arrangement with Darian, and I really wanted to congratulate you on it.” I shot him an awful glare. I knew that he had everything to do with Darian’s takeover, and I was nowhere near happy about it.

“What the fuck do you want?” Seeing that I was not in the mood to entertain simple pleasantries, he skipped over the front and got to the point, kneeling down to my level. Oh my God. This human was really about to beg.

“Xiara,” he pleaded, “I really want to know where Kiara is. I know that you are upset about everything that has been happening as of late, but please believe me when I tell you that it’s for the best.” Instantly angered at his attempt to sweet talk me, I growled lowly, sitting upright in my chair. My defense mode automatically activated, lengthening my nails and strengthening my fangs.

“Give the location of my little sister to you? So you can drag her and her baby into a clan war that they never would have been involved in if you were never around? Force her to change you so that you can attempt to get back at me? You’ve lost your fucking mind. The answer is no, Ethan.” Finally showing some aggression, he got angry at me and snatched up my arms to begin shaking me.

“Dammit, Xiara! You have no right to keep me from my baby!” The defense mode in me switched into high gear in all of an instant. Without even realizing what I was doing, I swung back and clawed him in the face, watching in satisfaction as he fell back, writhing on the floor at his newly inflicted wound.

“You have all of ten seconds to get out of my house before I drag you out of here with my bare hands, Ethan. Don’t test me.” Putting up no more of a fight, he got up quietly and left.

The next morning I sat at the table with Mace as I had gotten used to doing, finishing up my breakfast. Darian was out on patrol. The morning passed through as quietly as it normally did. By early afternoon, I heard a knock on my back porch screen door. Who could be knocking on my door and what did they want? Not thinking too hard about it, I got up and walked over to the screen door to see Ethan behind it, his face newly patched with gauze—undoubtedly to cover the wound that I inflicted on him the day before. Instantly not happy to see him, I reached to slam the back door.

"Darian is not here, Ethan. Stop coming to my house like it's some kind of watering hole. You're not welcome here!" Trying hard to disarm me, he threw his hands up in surrender as he walked up the porch step.

"Look, Xiara. I don't want a fight today. I just want to a chance to be able to talk to you without being watched by Darian. There are some things that I need to tell you that he can't hear." Brought to attention by the conversation, Mace stood from the table and moved over to the back door.

"Anything that you can say to the Boss Lady alone can be said in front of me." Uncomfortable with the confrontation, Ethan drew back a little.

"Hey, I don't want any trouble...but Xiara really needs to know what I have to say. And I won't be able to tell her unless I know that it won't go anywhere." Looking to me for an answer either way, Mace lessened his stance after I raised my hand for him to stand down. Stepping back, Mace gave a small huff as he stared Ethan down.

"Fine. I will leave. But remember this, human, and remember it well. I'm only one room away from tearing your throat out of your neck. Tread lightly." With that said, Mace made his way to the guest room as Ethan sat down at the table.

"Alright Ethan," I started, closing the back door and locking it. "What is it that's so important that you felt the need to tell me when Darian was gone? It couldn't have waited until he got back?"

"No," he answered quickly. "The reason I need to tell you and you alone is because it is something that I think you would find important enough to want to know. It's also something that would have me dead if Darian were to find out." Now I was curious. I sat down at the table and stared him down gravely, clasping my hands together.

"What is it then?"

"Jason isn't dead."