



# Huntress Unleashed

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**Category:** Romance, Paranormal, Vampires

**Description:** Dane hunts down rogue vampires and is on a mission when he is ambushed and pays the price. Jacqueline Anderson also hunts rogue vampires, loses to a vampire, and fights her attraction to the hunter when she has her own demons to battle. For the two of them, they've lost friends and gained new ones, but they're ready to right some wrongs while they're being targeted by hunters who should be on their side.

It's kill or be killed. Jacqueline is determined not to fall for Dane while he's head over heels over her and ready to take this further. But they also have to take care of the threat that's aimed just at them and others like them and learn just who set him up to be ambushed in the first place. Time is running out before those who want them dead manage to get their way.

**Total Pages (Source):** 98

## PROLOGUE

On edge after having another disagreement with Wendy, his fiancée, over finances, Dane Edmonton arrived at the popular Wilding Club, a vampire club, late that night in a Dallas, Texas suburb where Lucilla, a rogue vampire, often visited. He watched the establishment, waiting for her to leave. He was sitting in his black pickup, the rain coming down hard on the windshield as he conducted surveillance of the red brick building, disco lights flashing through the windows. Vampires and blood bonds were mostly going inside. Occasionally, a couple of people would leave the club.

The police had verified that Lucilla was killing homeless men, and as a hunter assigned to the case, it was Dane's job to eliminate her. She was known to often have a couple of male vampires with her, but his informant, only known as Green—a blood bond that Lucilla sometimes fed off—had said she was leaving the Wilding Club—going downtown alone again tonight, just before midnight. When she went alone, it meant she was hunting prey.

The blood bond also was an informant to four other hunters—Van Olson, Moose Warner, and cousins, Flynn and Felix Freeburg—but Green swore he always shared information with Dane first, when he knew a rogue vampire needed to be taken down.

Yet, Green had seemed more nervous than usual. Maybe the vampiress had learned he was an informant, and he was afraid she would kill him. Dane could certainly understand Green's concern.

Then Dane saw Lucilla leave the vampire club and head downtown alone in her black Nissan coupe. He knew he had his chance to eliminate her without any interference

from her friends. She was evil to the core and until a hunter terminated her, she would continue to prey on the innocent.

Most vampires paid for a blood bond's blood, a mutually acceptable arrangement between humans and vampires, but she liked to hunt for potential victims too.

Dane assumed she was going to target someone downtown where her other victims had been, and he had to stop her before she murdered anyone else. He parked his black pickup down the street from where she cut her car's engine. She was wearing a long flowing black gown as if she was going to a formal ball, but it made him think of a large black raven, fluttering its wings when it went to kill a small mammal. In her case, a male who lived on the streets.

The police department had hired him to eliminate her, paying the usual bounty that hunters received for taking down menacing rogue vampires. Humans within the police department couldn't successfully deal with the bad vampires, normally. Though there were some Van Helsing human hunter types who took on the missions and risked their necks in this life-or-death business. They didn't have the superior strength that hunters and vampires had, so they were truly at a disadvantage. But they wanted the money and loved to live dangerously. More power to them, Dane figured.

Some hunters did serve as homicide detectives in some police departments. But most police departments hired hunters to do their dirty work because most hunters didn't want to do anything but work for bounties. As homicide detectives, they would have to work other kinds of cases, not just rogue vampire-related ones.

Lucilla spoke with a woman sitting next to a grocery cart stacked full of her treasured possessions. If she attempted to kill the woman, she would be changing her MO. She had only killed men in the past. Any age, race, it didn't matter. She didn't discriminate, except that she didn't target women.

Dane was following her, his sword out, keeping to the shadows, making sure she didn't hear or see him approaching. The vampire's hearing was as good as a hunter's, and hunters were just as stealthy as a vampire. And they had the same kind of strength, healing up quickly from injuries suffered.

She had to know she would be on a list for termination. Unless she was so arrogant that she thought no one knew who was killing the homeless men.

Then she slipped into a dilapidated building, and he hurried after her, afraid he was going to lose her. As soon as he did, two male vampires hiding in the darkness attacked Dane. Damn, he hadn't expected that.

Worried that he would alert Lucilla that he was after her, he swung his sword at one of the vampires, and the other cut him in the shoulder. Hell. He ignored that vampire because the one in front of him was defending himself and wasn't as good a fighter. Dane suspected he might have been more newly turned. Dane quickly penetrated the vampire's heart and swung around to fight the other vampire who was just trying to strike him again. Dane slammed his sword into the vampire's sword, sweeping it away, nearly making the dark-haired vampire lose it. The vampire quickly lost his composure, his jaw dropped, his blue eyes wide. What did he think? Just because he cut the hunter once, he would win the battle?

The vampire tried to recover, but he couldn't swing his sword around fast enough before Dane attacked and killed him with a sword to the heart. Both vampires had dropped to the ground when they were mortally wounded and remained in the same physical state as when they were alive—so they were more newly turned. Ancient vampires would turn to dust when they died.

But where was Lucilla? That's when two more male vampires came after Dane and Lucilla made her appearance. She had blood on her mouth and Dane was certain she'd found her victim. She didn't look surprised to see him and he figured she'd

lured him here to his death. The male vampires attacked, and he was fighting from one to the other when she suddenly was behind Dane and bit him on the right side of the neck. For a moment in time, he wondered if his informant had known that this was a setup.

He expected Lucilla to drain him dry like she did with her victims, though he was trying to shake her loose, while swinging his sword at the male attackers. Yet they weren't going in for a kill. No, they were working with Lucilla to keep him under control. He sliced at one of the vampires, cutting his arm, and he howled. His dark brown eyes turned nearly black, and he tried to cut Dane this time, even if it wasn't what Lucilla wanted. Then to Dane's horror, he was afraid she meant to just turn him. He was trying to fight back, his vision blurring, his strength waning when she released him and he sank to his knees, trying to rally his strength, knowing if he didn't, he was going to die. He smelled her blood then as she bit into her arm and the males held Dane's arms while she pressed her bloody wound against Dane's mouth. He shook his head, trying to get away from her, knowing that if he tasted her blood, the mutual exchange would have been made.

One of the vampires reached over and pulled his chin down and Dane tasted Lucilla's blood. "You're here because a hunter you know made it happen and so did someone close to you."

"Who?" He had to know which hunter would set him up. And who was close to him who would do this horrible deed. Green? His informant?

Dane was doomed. He couldn't kill her. She had turned him. And now he was going to be a hunter turned, owing allegiance to the vampiress. He would rather have died in the battle between good and evil this night.

Worse, she wouldn't tell him who the hunter or the other person was who had sabotaged his career, his life, and turned his world inside out.

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Jacqueline Anderson had thought the mission she was going on would be easy. The vampire was known to eliminate blood bonds he had recruited after they riled him. She often didn't know why the vampire who she was hired to eliminate went rogue or targeted some type of person. But in his case, the trigger seemed to be when the blood bond refused to do anything for Moulson, and then in his eyes, they became disposable. Once they had become one of his blood bonds, he owned them.

He often recruited blood bonds at a human club, so she'd been staking it out for nights until she finally saw him. He left the building at two in the morning, wearing black boots, a black satin shirt, and blue jeans, leading two new potential blood bonds outside on the rainy Dallas night that spring. The two men looked like they were in their mid-twenties, wearing jeans, sneakers, and T-shirts. She didn't know when Moulson would snap and kill the blood bonds, so she didn't want to leave him with them for any length of time and discover he'd left more victims in his wake.

He got into his van and the potential blood bonds hesitated. Not a good idea when faced with a short-fused vampire. Then they reluctantly got in.

She started her car but didn't follow Moulson. She knew where his house was located, and he always went there after he visited a club. Before he arrived at his Spanish style estate, she was waiting curbside at a house down the street. She saw his van drive past her vehicle, a black sedan, and then he parked inside the garage. The two humans and the vampire left the van. He told them to enter the house. He was hostile, probably still annoyed because they hadn't gotten into the van right away near the club. Anything would set him off.

These guys were already in trouble.

Jacqueline got out of her car while the three of them went into the house, the garage

door still open. She rushed toward the open garage and slipped inside and hid behind the van when the door leading into the garage opened, and someone pushed the button to close the garage door.

She studied the shoes of the wearer. White sneakers. It was one of the humans. As soon as he shut the door to the house—glad it didn't squeak—she moved quickly to that door and listened. She heard voices deeper in the house, and with her sword out, she quietly opened the door. Thankfully, it wasn't locked though she had a lockpick she could have used too but it might have alerted the vampire that she was trying to gain entry into the house.

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She entered the house and saw that the short hallway was clear. She carefully closed the door to the garage. A laundry room was off to the left, the door open to it, and then the hall opened to another hallway. The voices were off to the right. Before she could make a move to eliminate Moulson, a knock at the front door made her heart skip a bit.

Now what? Please be a pizza delivery, not another vampire. She never knew how blood bonds would react either. They usually left the fight to the vampires and the hunters, but sometimes they were so loyal—or brainwashed, they would fight on the vampire's behalf.

She ducked into the laundry room off the short hall as she heard footfalls—one person—heading for the door. She so wanted to peek to see who it was—Moulson or one of the blood bonds—but she was afraid she would be caught at it.

Still, if the person at the door was another vampire, she could be in trouble. One could be hard enough to take down on her own.

She made the decision, good or bad, and checked to see who it was. It was Moulson. But she couldn't trust that the person at the door was someone like an innocuous delivery guy and not a vampire. She quickly moved to take Moulson out, praying that the blood bonds wouldn't come to his aid. She couldn't look and see how they were reacting, but at least they were quiet and didn't alert the vampire. Maybe they didn't really want to be his blood bonds after all.

Moulson whipped around when he spied her move in behind him. It was too much to ask for that she could just swing her sword and take his head. She tried, but he leapt



at her with a vampire's flying leap and hit her with such an impact that he knocked her flat on her back on the marble tile floor. Not a good position to be in for a hunter who was fighting a powerful vampire. She couldn't use her sword in such close quarters and instead, she yanked a dagger out of its sheath and cut into his chest. But she didn't reach the vampire's heart. Damn it.

He screamed in pain and anger. "Open the front door," Moulson said to the humans, but neither moved from wherever they stood, maybe afraid if she killed the vampire, she would take them out next.

When Moulson turned his head to growl at the humans again to make them do his bidding, he made a fatal mistake. She stabbed the vampire in the heart, and he looked shocked right before he disintegrated on top of her. An ancient vampire, arrogantly believing the huntress he'd taken down was done for the count.

Then the front door burst open and a man—who looked like Moulson—saw Jacqueline getting off the floor, throwing aside Moulson's clothed, wizened body. He appeared aghast. Oh, no. This man looked like Moulson's twin brother. Even though she didn't know he had one. And she hadn't been hired to kill him, though if he attacked her, she had every right to defend herself because she had been in the right where Moulson was concerned.

Like Moulson, this guy swooped in, and it appeared that he was planning on using the same maneuver, plowing her down and forcing her onto her back. But she quickly sidestepped him and being ambidextrous, she swung her sword with her right hand, cutting him in the arm, her dagger still ready in her left hand and she cut into his chest, but nothing fatal. It only made him angrier.

The two humans—appearing to think this was the time to make their escape before whoever was the victor decided their fate—dashed for the front door, still standing wide open. They stumbled over each other, trying to get around Jacqueline and the

vampire, hoping to avoid the fight. But as she moved back to get her stance to thrust her sword at the vampire and strike his heart this time, they bumped into her and threw her off balance completely. It was time enough to give the vampire the advantage. He grabbed her shoulders and rammed her against the wall, then bit into her shoulder before she could stab him with her dagger.

“No...no...no...no...no.” She tried to pull free from the vampire’s vicious bite. She attempted to stab him in the heart with her dagger while he was drinking her blood, but she was losing too much blood, and she was afraid she would pass out soon.

The next thing she knew, she was on the floor, coming to, tasting blood in her mouth—his blood—and she knew that the exchange had been made. She was no longer just a huntress, but one of them. A vampire. Worse, she couldn’t kill the one who made her no matter how much she wanted to. And then he smirked at her and vanished.

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A week later

In the pouring rain, Jacqueline Anderson stalked across the cracked asphalt parking lot to a red brick building where Hunters turned by Vampires Group Therapy was meeting in Dallas, Texas—not that she wanted to go to it at all. No other vehicles were there yet, and she was hoping no one was coming. She had a list of five rogue vampires to eliminate, and she felt this was a total waste of time.

The brick building looked like it had seen better days, the asphalt shingle roof sagging, moss and ivy growing all over the red brick walls, the door needing to be sanded and revarnished. Inside, one of the rooms was serving as the meeting place for the therapy group. She wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for her parents and brother forcing her to do this. They were hunters still and they believed after she was bitten

and turned, she was living on the edge—taking risks she could ill afford, going after rogues without a hunter partner to back her up, working all hours of the day and night and not taking time to rest. She was a ticking timebomb some hunters said. Rogue vampires had given her the tag that she was the huntress unleashed. Which truthfully, she didn't mind at all. Though it could make her more of a rogue vampire target.

She considered the look of the building again. She'd learned Anne Struthers had purchased it after she was turned a month ago—the building standing idle after the ring of rogue vampires who had owned it had been terminated thirty years ago and no one had wanted to own the building since, some saying it was cursed.

Jacqueline didn't believe in curses or ghosts, like she suspected Anne didn't, and opened the door and headed inside, brushing wet strands of hair off her cheek. She headed down the hall past empty rooms. She stepped into room five and observed the mostly bare walls, a clock hanging on one, but only shadows remained where framed pictures had been removed. Plastic chairs had been hastily thrown together in a circle, so it appeared. It looked like a place for members of an Alcoholic Anonymous group to meet, except that this was a meeting place—first meeting ever for a group of hunters who hunted rogue vampires down for the murderous killing of innocents or turning innocents into vampires so they would be at their beck and call. But these hunters had been turned by such rogue vampires and were now considered hunters turned.

Jacqueline smelled stale coffee, nothing freshly brewing in the coffee pot on a table against one wall. It looked like it had seen better days—grimy, a can of coffee, and a half-crushed box of filters sitting next to it. At least the coffee can wasn't rusty.

She pulled off her rain jacket on the bleak March day where the sunlight hadn't shown in four days and wind and rain had sent the temperatures dropping. She wondered what the vampires had used this building for before they were terminated, and the place fell into disrepair.

And where everyone was! She had to be early—always. She glanced at the clock, and it said she was two hours late. She glanced at her watch and sighed. The clock on the wall was wrong. Naturally. She hung her rain jacket on the back of one of the chairs and then did stretches in the form of sword practice.

She heard the main door shut that she'd walked through a little earlier and stiffened. She really didn't want to be here, exposing her feelings to a bunch of strangers. But they would be like her, wouldn't they? Their worlds turned upside down because they had viciously been attacked by a rogue vampire and turned.

She listened to the footfalls of the person walking down the hall, like a good hunter always did—on edge, watching for someone to initiate an attack. She couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman. If they ended up with hunter turned vampire sponsors, they better be of the same sex. Unless the hunter was gay and then they had to have a sponsor of the opposite sex. That was to keep the therapy on a professional level and for it not to turn into a sexual relationship. At least she hoped it was like AA meetings in that regard.

Not that she'd attended them for herself, but she'd had a human friend who'd needed them for her own sobriety and had told her what the protocol had been.

A woman walked into the room looking wetter and more haggard than Jacqueline even. She was about thirty, her curly blond hair hanging over her shoulders, wet, spots of water on her raincoat. She was wearing nice slacks, boots, and when she pulled off her coat, a sweater featuring a butterfly. "Sorry. I'm Anne Struthers. I set this group up and didn't mean to be late. Six others are coming, but one is having trouble finding a sitter for her baby girl. One is on a job on Sixteenth Street"—which meant she or he was probably tracking a rogue vampire—"and said he would be here if he finished the job before the meeting was over. The others, I'm not sure about. I wasn't able to get a hold of them to confirm they were coming."

“You organized this?”

“Yeah. You know how it is for things like this. It’s all so new. We’re the first group like it in all of Texas. It might be a while before we get real active participation. I’m excited about it. Though I can see how most might feel reluctant to share their stories. At least at first. So what do you want to do? Have a one-on-one meeting between us and if others show up late, they can join in? Or should we skip it and try for next week when more can come?”

In truth, Jacqueline was ready to keep her story to herself. Most likely no one could think her story was all that traumatic. She did like Anne though. She was outgoing and organized. Jacqueline admired her for it. And she felt she owed it to Anne for setting up the meeting in the first place. Maybe Jacqueline would feel better if she spoke with someone who was like her now.

“We can have the meeting, just you and I.” Then it wouldn’t be a wasted trip out here. The five vampires that she needed to track down were on the other side of town so she wasn’t even close to where she needed to be. And she needed to do it before they learned she was the one hired to take them down. At least they were individuals, not working together in their criminal enterprises.

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“Sure, great. Let’s take a seat then. Okay, so unless you want to talk, I’ll go first,” Anne said.

“Yeah, sure, go ahead.” With just the two of them there, Jacqueline felt more comfortable with the notion of sharing how she was feeling about all the changes in her life. But then she wondered about the huntress and her baby. “Oh, what’s the situation with the woman with the baby? Had the mother been turned while she was pregnant? Is the baby a mix of hunter and vampire, or just a hunter, if born before the mother was turned?”

“Doreen’s baby was born before she was turned. The baby is nearly a year old. So the baby is a hunter, not a vampire mix.”

“Wow, that’s scary.”

“Yeah. She said when her daughter is an adult, it would be her choice if she wanted to be turned or remain a hunter.”

“Oh, sure.” Jacqueline just couldn’t imagine a situation like that. “What about the baby’s daddy?”

“He’s out of the picture.”

Maybe if he hadn’t been “out of the picture,” the huntress wouldn’t have been turned.

Jacqueline and Anne took seats opposite each other, but then heard footfalls headed their way.

Jacqueline let out her breath in annoyance. Just when she was feeling like she could do this, when she normally wasn't afraid of anything, more participants would be listening in.

"Looks like some more folks found us," Anne said, sounding cheerful.

A woman was saying to the other person, "Well, I know what you've been doing."

A man laughed. He had a lovely, deep laugh that sent a whisper of a thrill up Jacqueline's spine, which annoyed her. Hadn't she gone through enough of an ordeal with her ex-fiancé? She wasn't about to show any interest in a man after that had happened. She had enough to deal with now that she was a vampire and a hunter.

The young woman came bouncing through the doorway first and smiled. She was a pretty brunette, dark brown eyes, tall, model-like, in good shape, perfect for fighting vampires. "Oh, good, we're not too late. I'm glad I didn't skip the meeting since just the two of you showed up. I'm Stacey."

"Welcome, Stacey. I'm Anne."

"I'm Jacqueline." She couldn't help that she didn't sound enthusiastic to greet the newcomer.

Then a dark-haired man of about thirty walked in with a limp, wearing a shredded shirt, where he'd been clawed—most likely by a rogue vampire—blood on his black button-down collared shirt, but the man's cuts appeared like they had mostly healed. "Sorry, I didn't have time to change. I'm Dane." He had a wet rain jacket slung over his shoulder, wearing cargo pants and boots meant to fight in.

"You could just remove the bloody shirt, if anyone's bothered by the blood," Stacey said, giving him a sexy smile.

He cast her one back.

“It would be fine with me,” Anne said, winking at him.

Jacqueline hoped he wouldn't hear her heart beating triple time at the sight of him. He was gorgeous. All six-foot, one of him. He appeared to already have an admirer in Stacey, and Anne was smiling just as brightly at him. He appeared to be alpha to the max.

“What about you?” he asked Jacqueline.

“It's your call.” But Jacqueline didn't smile or wink at him. She gave him more of an evil eye, annoyed he would even ask her as if she cared one way or another. She wasn't interested in getting to know him beyond these meetings and maybe not even here.

“Who did you fight, and did you take him or her down?” Stacey asked.

This wasn't supposed to be a “show and tell” about taking down rogue vampires!

“Astrophel, and yeah, he's terminated,” Dane said.

Jacqueline's jaw dropped. That was one of the men she was after! Hunters were hired to take down rogue vampires and she didn't think a ton of other hunters were searching for him. Though she was exaggerating, but still...

Dane noticed Jacqueline's reaction right away. “Uh, were you after him too?”

“Yeah. He was on my list.”

Dane nodded. “I was told there were four hunters hired to take him down because he



was so...slippery and difficult to eliminate.”

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She wasn't told that other hunters had been tasked to take Astrophel down. From now on, she would ask to make sure that there weren't a ton of other hunters trying to eliminate the same person. It was a waste of her time. Then she got a notice on her phone, and she checked it. The police force who had hired her notified her Astrophel was dead and they no longer needed her services. Great. She shoved her phone back in her pocket.

"Well, that's great that you terminated him," Stacey said, all smiles.

"Yeah, he was bad news." Dane ran his hand through his wet hair.

"Okay, so we had four others who contacted me that they were coming. But they might not be showing up," Anne said, "so we'll get on with the meeting. Unless someone else wants to start, I'll go first."

"Sure, that sounds good," Stacey said.

Dane agreed and glanced at Jacqueline, but she had already agreed that Anne was going first, and she didn't feel she needed to do it again.

Anne said, "Okay, so like all of you, I was turned by a rogue vampire. Before I could kill him, he bit me and forced me to drink his blood. I was his to control. A hunter friend killed him thankfully, and I was free of the vampire's will. Not only did I have issues with myself for being too slow in killing him, I hated the changes in me—the need for blood, that I was one of them and no longer strictly a hunter—I also hated the looks of sympathy from friends and family, who felt sorry for what I had become."

“But don’t you love being able to vanish like vampires do? To be able to fly and leap into the air to fight? I love being able to do that,” Stacey said.

Then why was Stacey here if she was so happy with her life? This was a place to talk about their ordeals with dealing with this, not the wonders of being vampires. Jacqueline wanted to shake her head but caught herself before she did.

“I have to admit I enjoy the new feats I have. It has helped me to take down rogue vampires,” Anne said.

Jacqueline was ready to leave.

“What about anyone else? Does anyone want to tell us your story of how you were turned or the effect it has had on you?” Anne asked.

Stacey held up her hand as if she had to ask the teacher permission. “I do. Okay, so I was making out with this guy, and I didn’t even know he was a vampire.”

Jacqueline rolled her eyes, and wouldn’t you know, Dane caught her at it. He gave her a smidgeon of a smile.

Then Stacey said, “Anyway when he showed his fangs, I knew it was too late. I had my folded sword with my clothes on the floor beside the bed?—”

Way too much information...

“But I couldn’t reach it. I was furious when he bit me when I had thought he was just human. Then, as everyone knows, I couldn’t end his miserable life because he’d turned me. I ended up finally getting away from him. He knew he could let me go and call me to him anytime he wanted. But my brother came for him and ended him. Then I was free of the vampire’s control.”

“How do you feel about being turned?” Anne asked.

Other than great things, Jacqueline thought.

“Well, no one understands me. I mean my hunter friends and family,” Stacey said.  
“But what do they know?”

Anne nodded. “Do you want to go next, Jacqueline?”

Jacqueline motioned to Dane. “He can go next.”

“I was turned by a female rogue vampire.”

Oh, God, like Stacey was making love to a male vampire rogue, except he was fooling around with a female? Jacqueline didn’t want to hear about it.

“Yeah. I believed she was alone. In fact, a blood bond had told me she always went after homeless men alone, which made us believe she didn’t want any witnesses. But truly, I believe I was set up.”

“By the blood bond? Maybe the vampiress knew you were targeting her. Or maybe a hunter had it in for you?” Jacqueline asked, then chastised herself for wanting to know. But if she had been set up by either, they would be on her assassination list.

Dane smiled at her, but this time his smile had taken on a slightly sinister tone. “I’m still trying to learn the truth. Anyway, the vampiress had four male vampires with her. I wasn’t prepared to have to fight that many. I’m ashamed to say she got the best of me and turned me. But I was lucky my three brothers had been looking for me, were close by, and they came to my aid and killed the vampiress and the other two vampires. Not that my brothers didn’t have some choice words to say to me about going to fight the rogue vampire on my own,” Dane said.

Okay, so at least he was humble enough to tell his story and he hadn't been making love to a rogue vampire when he was turned.

Everyone looked at Jacqueline, waiting for her to tell her story. She didn't want to share, but she took a deep breath and let it out. "I was turned during a fight with a vampire where I lost control, like others have said here. My fiancé was furious with me when he learned I was turned. He dumped me and started dating my best friend, a huntress I had known since we were five. My parents are sad about it and can't deal with it. I can't be around them. They...make me uncomfortable. I make them just as uncomfortable. My brother hasn't spoken to me since it happened except for telling me, along with my parents, to get some therapy. And my hunter friends that I've known for years no longer want to be around me. Yeah, sure, some of the vampire skills are handy to have, but it has changed everything for me. And not in a great way." There, she said it. She wasn't going to sugarcoat the way she felt.

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Dane was impressed with Jacqueline for having shared her story. He could see how reluctant she'd been to do so. Him? He figured it was the only way to heal from the trauma and the whole change-to-their-lives aspect. He was fortunate his brothers were behind him all the way. Of course, they were angry with him for going off alone to fight, but he'd had his reasons. Still, he felt a hunter might have even been responsible for setting him up, if Lucilla hadn't lied to him about it. He still couldn't believe someone close to him could have been involved in his downfall either. He needed proof though. Which is why he didn't mention at the meeting any names or that a hunter and someone close to him might be responsible. It would be irresponsible to out any hunter who might not have been involved in any kind of shenanigans. He hadn't even mentioned it to his brothers who would be sure to take down a hunter or two if they believed their actions had led Dane to have his current vampiric condition.

He couldn't believe Stacey had sex with a guy she thought was human and turned out to be a rogue vampire though. That was one for the books. At least Anne and Jacqueline had both opened up more about how they truly felt about being hunters turned vampires. He wasn't really able to do that yet. Maybe in the future.

He had wanted to change out of his bloody shirt before he came into the meeting, but he hadn't had a spare one with him and if he'd returned home to do so, he wouldn't have made it back in time for the meeting. As it was, he was a quarter of an hour late. Besides, he figured whoever was there would be used to seeing someone after a fight with vampires. He really thought some other men would be here too, so he felt a little uncomfortable that he was the only male here who had been turned. Maybe in the future, they would have more men in the meeting. Though being with all the ladies had been a boost to his ego when he'd kind of needed it.

He still couldn't quite figure out Jacqueline. She was a gorgeous redhead with penetrating blue eyes. She looked like she could fight most any rogue vampire without any problem.

Anne and Stacey were intrigued with him. Jacqueline seemed to be immune to him—in a way—like she was trying really hard to not show she was interested in him. Maybe. Perhaps he was seeing things into it that were not truly there.

That was one of the problems he was having with being both a hunter and a vampire. He couldn't quite figure out his place in the world, so he was glad that some of the women who were in the same boat as him seemed to think he was all right. Like Jacqueline, he'd been engaged to be married and that went out the door as soon as his fiancée learned he had been turned. She might have come back to him in time when she realized he hadn't changed all that much, but her parents were dead set on him never showing up on their doorstep again. Period. And she was close to her parents, so it was a foregone conclusion marrying her wasn't a viable option any longer.

“Well, if no one has anything else to add,” Anne said, “we'll meet the same time next week, and I'll be sure to bring a new coffee pot, coffee, and filters. Oh, and I've shared everyone's emails and phone numbers with everyone else so we can do group chats or individual chats if anyone is in need of an understanding ear.” Anne was a pretty woman who was in great shape and probably could take most of the rogue vampires out that she had to fight. She was a vibrant brunette with dark chocolate eyes, and he was glad she had organized the group.

“Thanks,” Dane said.

Stacey and Jacqueline also thanked her, and then Stacey rose from her seat, waiting for Dane to stand and walk out with her. Dane stood, but he wasn't leaving yet. He knew Stacey was hoping to make a deeper connection with him. She was a lovely dark-haired woman with soft green bedroom eyes, but he wasn't biting.

Jacqueline was still sitting, and he suspected she wanted them to leave before she did so she could avoid talking to them. Finally, Jacqueline let out her breath and said, “Night, all. See you next week.” She rose from her chair suddenly and stalked off.

“Until next week,” Dane said, and found himself inexplicably trying to catch up to Jacqueline.

Stacey hurried after him, and Anne closed the door to the meeting room and followed the rest of them out. Jacqueline suddenly vanished, surprising him.

“Don’t you hate it when they do that?” Stacey asked, catching up to Dane and taking hold of his arm.

He was not into women who forced themselves on him. Though, as he left the building and saw Jacqueline driving off in a black sedan, he wasn’t used to women fleeing from him either. He smiled. He had every intention of getting to know her better. She was a challenge and a puzzle, and he loved managing both.

“So do you have anything going on tonight?” Stacey asked him as he pulled his arm free of her hand.

“Yeah, sleep. I’ve been busy the last few days and if I’m going to continue doing my job, I’ve got to get some rest.” Would he have said that to Jacqueline had she asked him the same question? No way in hell. He would have had a cup of coffee with her, though he guessed that wouldn’t have been a great option the way he was dressed right now.

“Oh, yeah, me too. But you know you can call me or email me, text me, whatever, any time,” Stacey said.

Anne locked the door behind her to the building and said, “We need to do group



emails, no dating between males and females. Unless one of you is gay and then you can share chats and the like. But no romantic involvements while we're trying to sort out our feelings."

Stacey looked at Dane as if she was hoping he would tell Anne that he wouldn't go along with it.

He smiled. "Yeah, Anne's right. If a guy joins the group, I can meet up with him to discuss how I'm feeling and vice versa. Unless he's gay and then Stacey can talk to him."

Stacey shrugged, then got into her chartreuse-colored, Flower Power VW Bug. She smiled and waved at him and drove off.

Anne just smiled and got into her Jeep. "See you next week."

"Unless I'm fighting evil, I'll be here." He got into his black pickup and followed them off the parking lot, thinking maybe this therapy group wouldn't be such a bad thing after all. Of course, as soon as he was in his vehicle, he swore his brothers knew it and one of his middle brothers Ryan called him right away.

"So, how did it go?"

"Better than I expected. It's kind of too early to tell."

"How many showed up?" Ryan asked.

"There were only four of us. The other three were women." All three were damned attractive too and none of them appeared to have any mates.

"Bummer," Ryan said, sounding facetious.

Dane knew he was thinking he had all the luck. But really, all of them had issues, so it wasn't like they were all there to get together for fun. Well, maybe Stacey was. Anne seemed to have a good head on her shoulders. All four of them seemed to be about the same age. But Jacqueline was the one who really intrigued him. Go figure.

## Page 6

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Jacqueline settled down on the couch with her cat, Princess of Maine. As soon as Princess curled up on her lap, waiting for attention, Jacqueline started brushing her beautiful, fluffy tortoiseshell coat. She was a Maine Coon cat and definitely looked and acted like a Princess at all times. She was quiet and affectionate, loved to sit in windows, and sleep on Jacqueline's bed with her, something her ex-fiancé, Van, had problems with so it was just as well that things hadn't worked out between them.

Jacqueline turned on the TV and started to watch the Matchmaker for Millionaires reality TV series. It was all made up, of course. Imagine her being on that show—a millionairess in her own right who was looking for Mr. Right, only he had to be...what, exactly? She had no intention of dating a vampire. And hunters were out. They didn't trust her because she was one of the vampires now. And hooking up with a hunter who had just as many issues as she did over having been turned wasn't going to happen.

She thought of Dane and about how Stacey was holding onto him when they had left the building. He hadn't disengaged from her, so Jacqueline figured they were going to hook up.

She sighed. Who cared? They had to find their way through this somehow and if that's what it took, so be it. At the next meeting, Dane and Stacey might be the most well-adjusted people there. Who knew?

Brushing a purring Princess on her lap while Jacqueline watched the show, she considered the women the male millionaire had been interested in. What he wanted was a blond, who was well-built, not after his money, and she had to be intelligent. The other millionaire was a woman who wanted a young, hot guy, funny, and smart,

who could take her sense of humor. Both of the millionaires were in their mid-forties. Both wanted a partner who was in their twenties. Of course. Beautiful, sexy, and young—but for a meaningful, well-thought out, long-term marriage? Not.

“Not for us, Princess, eh? We know just how this will turn out. The man and woman will have a date with their respective partners and will find they are just gold diggers who will put on the cutesy charm and it’s all just meaningless and proves the matchmaker’s advice was right and they should have dated someone else and would have broken the pattern of dating whoever was wrong for them.” Jacqueline glanced down at Princess. “And you’re sound asleep. We sure dodged a bullet with the last guy in our life, believe me. Well, you especially did. He had insisted you wouldn’t sleep in our bed once we were married. Then again, what would he have done if a vampire had turned me while we were married? Insta-divorce for sure.” She changed the channel to one about vampires. “Nope, don’t want to see this.” Even though the vampires weren’t like the real ones, her current situation made her shy away from anything to do with them unless they were on her terminal list.

She turned the channel to a story about finding love in the wild. Couples would compete against other couples to see if they could find the right man or woman for them. It looked promising. Instead of blind love where they didn’t see each other and learned about each other’s wants and dreams, with this new show, the couples would be working together through stressful adventures in the wild—riding horses through the mountains on narrow, cliffside trails, and across rivers, pulling cantankerous donkeys carrying their crates filled with some kind of puzzle pieces, diving, swimming, rope climbing, rappelling, all of which most had never done. They might even end up falling in love. It was worth checking it out.

There were ten men and ten women to begin with and they had to choose someone of the opposite sex to complete the challenges. She really liked most of them, but she was amused to see how they navigated different obstacles and were still speaking to each other, working together to solve puzzles—at least some of them were. Some

weren't and they definitely weren't meant to be together with all the bickering they were doing, mad at each other, blaming each other for not being successful. Then after they completed the rigorous challenge, they could keep their partners or change things up a bit, based on the order they came in during the challenge. She loved seeing the dynamics between the couples. Especially the five that were really doing well together and showed a genuine interest in each other.

She glanced at the clock. It was nearly midnight. Time to get back to reality and go to work. "I'll be home in a little bit." She hoped. She never knew how long the job would take her or if she would get it done when she headed for the location where she thought the vampire would be.

Princess got off her lap, leapt to the floor, and sauntered to the bedroom in her carefree way, like a little princess as if she knew Jacqueline would join her in bed when she returned and so she was going to be ready for her. Then Jacqueline got a call on her phone and looked at the caller ID. Dane Edmondson.

The guy from the meeting? What did he want?

"Hey, is this Jacqueline from the therapy meeting?"

"Uh, yeah, if you need a sponsor, it has to be a male."

"No. I was calling because I'm going out on a job." He paused.

So? What did she have to do with it? She waited for him to say.

"I just wanted to make sure I wasn't going after someone on your list."

Now that surprised her. "Who are you going after?" she asked, wanting to make sure of the same thing then.

“Axel.”

“No, damn it. How many hunters have been assigned this mission?”

“Just two. I guess you and me if you are also after him.”

She didn't say anything. She was so annoyed. Not with Dane obviously, but with the police who had hired her.

“Okay, it sounds like you're being hired by the same police agency. Let's see if we have any more of the same names.”

“How are you learning there are other hunters who are actively searching for the rogues?” she asked.

“I asked. I've had that happen to me before. I was headed to the location where the rogue vampire was known to go, had surveyed the whole area, learned when he would be there, and when I arrived at the place, I found a hunter had just killed him. Then a few minutes later, I got a notification that the rogue was eliminated by a hunter. I thought it was just a chance happening until they told me that two other people also had the mission. From then on, I ask so I know what I'm up against. I also discover when the posting first came out and when the other hunters were given the job. They don't give me the names of the hunters.”

“Great.” She didn't say it in a cheerful way, more annoyed than anything.

“So if you're willing to share, who are the rogues on your list?”

She let out her breath. “Besides Axel? Maggard, Quillon, and Paine.”

“Yep, we have the same list. I also have Mabon.”

“Good. I don’t have that one. You can take care of Mabon.”

Dane laughed.

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She smiled. She didn't think he would be agreeable, but she figured she would just toss that out there.

"I have another suggestion."

She was sure she wouldn't like it. She didn't share kills and bounties with other hunters, if that's what Dane was going to propose. Not even with her ex-fiancé. Neither of them worked well together on hunts. They'd tried it twice, but he had preferred hunting with his own brothers instead. He felt his brothers were stronger and faster than her, so they made a better team.

"Okay, how about we go together and take down the vampires who have the most hunters after them? Then we can both get credit, share the money, and go after the next one at twice the pace."

She didn't want to work with him, since she didn't know his style of fighting or hunting. What if he and she couldn't work in sync like her ex claimed he and she couldn't? What if they lost the rogue because they were getting in each other's way? Worse, what if either of them ended up getting killed because of it?

"Uh, you don't like the idea. We could try it on this one assignment and see how it goes. I don't want to mention it, but we both were hunting alone when we were turned, right?"

She didn't want to be reminded of that. And she really didn't want to try this with him. She could see him being just like her ex and then she would really be angry about it. "Did you ever hunt with your fiancée?"



“Yeah, but it didn’t work out.”

“What makes you think working with me would?”

“We both have new abilities we’re not totally used to, which is the reason I was a bit...well, scratched up before I ended up at the meeting. I mean, really, what could go wrong?”

“One of us or both of us could end up dead?”

\* \* \*

What was the likely chance that Dane would have all the same rogue vampires on his termination list that Jacqueline had except for the one? He was glad he had touched base with her. He really wanted to try working with the huntress so they could at least share in the take downs and maybe even protect each other. He was certainly willing to give it a try. But he didn’t believe Jacqueline was going to be receptive to the idea no matter what he said. Still, he figured he would try to prove to her that he wasn’t out to get all her hard-earned bounties.

“Well, think on it. In the meantime, I’ll take care of Mabon, and you eliminate whoever you’re targeting next. We can revisit this talk when it comes to the other names, if you would like.” He really felt it would be a way of trying to reach the rogues before the other hunters could do it.

“Did you know the hunter who took down the rogue before you arrived on the one case?”

He was surprised she was still talking to him and hadn’t already shut him down.  
“Olson.”

“Van Olson?” She sounded more than surprised.

“Yeah, I take it you know him.”

“I don’t understand why they’re doing this. I mean, assigning so many hunters to eliminate the same rogues.”

“I know. It’s something new they’re doing so I was really surprised too and more than a little annoyed,” he said. “They could have at least told us.”

“I agree.” She was quiet for a moment. “Oh, and yeah, I know Van. He’s my ex-fiancé.”

Dane didn’t really know what to say to that. He suspected from her comment that she probably wasn’t on the best of terms with him.

“Okay,” she finally said.

Dane hesitated to respond, then he said, “Okay?” Had she wanted to take down her rogue and he would go after Mabon, and they would consider working together on a different mission?

“I’m after Axel. Meet me at...” Again, she paused.

“We could go together,” he suggested. “That way we would be more of a unified force, arrive together, and take him on at the same time.”

“You didn’t work well with your ex, you said,” she reminded him.

“Wendy canceled on me three times when I was about to go on a mission. And the one time she went with me, she held back and never really did any fighting. I was

more worried about protecting her at that point and knew she was more of a hindrance than an asset. What about you? Did you ever hunt with your ex?"

Lengthy pause. Jacqueline cleared her throat. "Yeah. He preferred to hunt with his brothers. So, I mean it might not make any difference if we work together. We might not be suited to do it."

"We'll do great. If you want, I can pick you up at your place. I think it would be safer to be together, and after we take him down, we'll go after Mabon."

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He tapped his foot on the floor, hoping to get an agreement out of her. He just hoped they could work well together, and they were able to take down the perps and come out unscathed.

“All right. My place.” She gave him her address.

“Lakeview Estates.” He smiled. He lived in her neighborhood. “I’ll be right over.”

It was a posh place to live where a mix of humans and hunters had taken up residence. No vampires, that he knew of, so he was hoping he wouldn’t have any trouble with anyone who took exception to a vampire suddenly living among them. And now there were two of them. That at least they knew about. Maybe more had been turned but they were keeping it a secret. What did he know?

He jumped into his pickup truck and headed over to her house that was just a few streets north of his place and parked in her driveway. Before he could get out of his truck to knock on her door, she was headed outside wearing a black leather jacket, black leather pants, and thigh high black leather boots. Her jacket was zipped up part way, revealing her black tunic underneath. Her beautiful red hair flowed as she walked, and he swore he was mesmerized by her beauty. She had high cheek bones and a sultry mouth, and her catlike eyes were narrowed a bit. She looked like a huntress who meant business.

“How did you get into my gated community without me giving you the passcode? Oh, you know someone living here and already knew the code.”

“I live several streets behind you.”

Her jaw dropped. Then she smiled. “There goes the neighborhood.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, two vampires in a mostly hunter neighborhood? I’m sure some wouldn’t be happy about it.”

He was relieved she wasn’t making a jab at him for some other reason and really didn’t like him. “I was thinking the same thing. I miss not being able to go to one of the hunter clubs. I’m not sure we would be welcome at a vampire club either.”

“I know. I guess we could go to a human club.”

He glanced at her, surprised she would say so.

She quickly added, “I mean, you know, like if you wanted to go to a club, you could go to a human one and nobody would know that you were a hunter or a vampire.”

“Ah.” He had thought she was saying she would go out with him to a club, and he was about ready to jump at the offer, if she had, so he was glad he’d used restraint. “Everyone at the meeting mentioned how family or a friend had killed the vampire who had turned them, but you. So what happened?” He hoped the vampire wasn’t still living or she could easily be influenced.

“Did I mention that my hunter friends dumped me after I was turned?”

“Yeah, hell. So you’re telling me the vampire that turned you is still alive?”

“Yeah. His name is Hesel, the twin of Moulson and when I dug further into his background, I learned he was the same as his brother as far as disposing of blood bonds that they got tired of. They were sharing them. But his twin brother had taken

all the blame and was put on a termination list. Heskell hadn't been."

"Even so, he would be on a terminal list for turning you. He didn't have to attack you. You hadn't attacked him."

"True. I expected it for revenge, but because of his action to take me down without me being able to call a truce, I didn't have any choice."

"Exactly. Has anybody gone after the vampire?"

"He's on a termination list now, and the police said they would inform me when a hunter eliminated him, but he's still out there as far as I know."

Dane didn't say anything for a while and then he finally said, "We have to take him down."

"Yeah, but I can't."

"Right. But if I don't do it on my own, I'll solicit the rest of our therapy group members to help me take care of him."

She frowned at him. "I...I don't know. I mean, we only just met them. I don't even know if the other two huntresses are still hunting."

"Hey, we take down bad guys. If the ladies aren't game or don't feel they can do it, I'll ask my brothers."

She let out her breath in relief and suddenly brushed away a couple of tears. "Thanks." Her voice was choked with emotion.

He reached over and took her hand and squeezed. "I've got your back."

“That means a lot to me. Thank you.”

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“Has he tried to contact you? Force you to do anything yet?”

“No, but I figure it’s only a matter of time.”

That’s what he was worried about. And being a rogue, he could very well force her to kill someone and then she would be on a terminal list.

3

“Here we are,” Dane said, pulling into the parking lot of one of the city’s libraries. He was glad Jacqueline had located a place that Axel went to regularly. Axel often had lots of people at his house, so if they could get him after he left the library, they would have a better chance at taking him down without any collateral damage. “So what is he doing in there?”

“Reading?”

Dane smiled at Jacqueline. She gave him a smart-ass smirk back. He chuckled. “I probably shouldn’t ask but do you know what he is reading?”

“He reads everything he can get his hands on regarding swordsmanship and how to use a sword. He trains out with other vampires on his acreage. Once I got his name, because he had turned six humans against their will, I started researching him and watching the house from the acreage around his properties. A lot of woods surround the place so it was easy to observe from there without being seen. The vampires practice fighting in the evenings, blood bonds come and go, and then the vampires leave. Often, Axel goes with a few of the vampires and they’re out the rest of the



night. Sometimes he doesn't return at all.

"But then I found he goes to the library from nine to ten before they close on Wednesday and Friday nights regularly. I've been watching his movements for three weeks. It's important to make sure that you know as much as you can about the rogue before you take him or her down, unless they're about to murder someone and then it's time to step in and eliminate him."

"I agree," Dane said. "I'm always diligent too on trying to figure out their routines and who they're with and when. Recluses are often easier to take down. That's what Mabon is. I've watched him for about three weeks also. He rarely has anyone over to his house except for blood bonds, no vampires, and he is a vampire that is considered a hitman—an assassin for hire. As far as the police could determine, he has assassinated ten people and had been hired to do so by the victims' partners."

"Brutal. I hope the partners are up on charges for the scheme of a murder by hire."

"They are. The police just couldn't go after Mabon safely so I got the call to take him down."

"How many hunters have been assigned to take down Mabon?"

"Just me, as far as I know."

They saw Axel leave the library dressed all in black, wearing a long black leather trench coat as if trying to embrace the whole vampire persona—as books and movies portrayed them to be—when in truth, they often dressed just like any ordinary citizen so they would blend in with the general population.

Hunters didn't like taking a vampire down in a public place unless the rogue had targeted someone, and they needed to rescue the person before he or she became a

victim.

“Oh, oh, he’s not going to his car,” Jacqueline said.

“Right, he’s on his way down the path through the woods right there.”

“And there’s a thirtyish-year-old woman, wearing blue jeans and a floral shirt walking on the path into the woods. She’s carrying a book. He appears to be headed straight for her,” Jacqueline said.

Dane watched the scenario, and he agreed it could be that the vampire had found his mark. “Come on. We have work to do.” Dane got out of his truck but before he could walk toward the woods, Jacqueline left the truck and vanished. “Holy shit.” He was already behind the eight ball on this. Vanishing as a vampire and reappearing somewhere else wasn’t something he’d practiced at much. It appeared Jacqueline had this down. He hoped he didn’t screw this up. He vanished and reappeared on the walkway, but Jacqueline rushed out of the woods, seized his arm, and pulled him into them to cloak them from view. He was usually a hell of a lot stealthier than this, but he just wasn’t used to teleporting like a vampire would. But he couldn’t have run on the path to catch up to Jacqueline either and he hadn’t wanted her to have to fight the vampire on her own. One fatal stab on the vampire’s part and she could be dead.

“They’re up ahead on the path. He hasn’t approached her yet. She’s headed for that bench, I think,” Jacqueline whispered.

Jacqueline might be right that Axel could be after the woman. It was isolated right here and no one else was around to witness anything.

They moved closer to where the woman was sitting on the bench, reading the book she had in her hand. Axel had walked past the bench, not even glancing at her as though he wasn’t interested in her.

Dane figured it was a bust, but Jacqueline and he were watching the vampire, making sure he wasn't just pretending he didn't have anything sinister in mind. Rogue vampires could be deviously sneaky.

Then the vampire suddenly turned and with a flying leap he was at the woman's throat. Just as quickly, Jacqueline grabbed his shoulders from behind and threw him onto his back into the holly shrubs. The woman ran off toward the safety of the library screaming and Dane rushed in to kill the vampire. Jacqueline had the same idea and the two of them used their swords on him, hitting his heart at the same time. Axel disintegrated into a wizened body, leaving his clothes perfectly intact.

Dane said to Jacqueline, "Do you want to call the police?"

"Yeah." She called them and let them know that she and Dane had eliminated Axel so they would get paid. Also the notification would go out to other hunters to remove him from their lists if anyone had recently picked him up to terminate.

Dane was just a little surprised that she had told the police that they both did the job. The police arrived in short order and took their statements and would dispose of what was left of the body. The would-be victim had also called it in, the officer said. Jacqueline grabbed the book the woman had dropped on the cement path and offered it to the officer so he could return it to the lady. But he shook his head and wouldn't take it. He motioned in the direction of the library. "She's back that way. The bounty will be paid to...?"

"Split between us," Jacqueline said, motioning to Dane.

"Okay, we've got your information. You're free to go."

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Then Jacqueline and Dane walked back to the library on the brick path. “Quick reaction,” Dane said, “and your vanishing act is really great.”

“I’ve been practicing, figuring it could give me an edge.”

“It does. I need to practice at it more.”

“You do. Being able to move like that can be a real benefit to us in the fight against the rogues.”

They saw the woman shaking, crying, sitting in the ambulance and they joined her. Jacqueline gave her a hug and Dane thought the world of her for being so caring.

“They...they say he’s dead,” the woman said, wiping away more tears.

“Yes, and good riddance.” Jacqueline handed the woman her book. “Here. You dropped this.”

“Thanks so much,” she said. “And thanks to both of you for coming to my rescue. I didn’t want to be turned.”

“Which is why the vampire was on our terminal list,” Dane said.

“Thanks again,” she said as a blond-haired woman wearing nurses’ scrubs rushed up to see her and hug her. She looked like a sister.

“Are you okay?” the blond asked her.

“Yeah, the hunters took down a vampire that tried to turn me,” the woman said.

Hunters, Dane was thinking. They were no longer just hunters. How would the woman feel if she had known that they were both vampires also now? That was one of the things he hated. That he wasn’t all hunter any longer. He wondered if Jacqueline felt the same way. In a way, meeting up with her and doing this together with a hunter turned gave him a gratifying feeling—that she didn’t look at him with disdain for using a vampire’s abilities, just like he was glad that she had them and could use them so successfully.

Then Jacqueline’s ex-fiancé showed up and Dane knew he had come for Axel. Dane figured Van wouldn’t have any other reason to be here at this time. Dane didn’t believe in coincidences.

“Ohmigod, don’t look now,” Jacqueline said, and pulled Dane into a hot embrace, the breeze making her silky red hair wrap around him as she lifted her face to him and kissed him like they’d been lovers for months.

Okay, so he could really get into this, though he knew the reason why she’d kissed him like that. And it had nothing to do with really wanting to kiss him, but more to aggravate her ex. Maybe. But truly, he was all for it.

She finally pulled her mouth away from Dane’s, but he wasn’t ready to part company with her yet. He kissed her this time, initiating the delicious mouth-to-mouth contact, wanting to prolong the interaction between them, but not because her ex was here.

Just then her ex got a text message, read it, and frowned at them. “You killed Axel?”

“Yeah, before he turned the woman who is sitting in the ambulance right now,” Jacqueline said.

Van glanced at Dane and then back to Jacqueline. "That was quick."

Jacqueline shrugged. "Just like you going after my best girlfriend was a fast turnaround for you." She took hold of Dane's arm and headed for the parking lot.

Dane wasn't used to a woman taking charge of him, especially one who had acted disinterested in him when they were at the therapy session. Well, except at the meeting when Stacey grabbed his arm but that hadn't been welcome. But with Jaqueline, this certainly worked for him.

But Van headed in the same direction, probably to his own vehicle in the parking lot.

"Did you get anything from informant Green last week?" Dane asked him, still wondering if one of the hunters the informant spoke to had anything to do with his being ambushed in that alley with Lucilla and her vampire friends.

"Yeah, about a vampire named Carrel, but someone else got the vampire."

"Not anything about a Lucilla?"

"No. Green never mentioned anything to me about her. Why?" Van asked, frowning.

Dane shrugged. "I was just wondering. He told me he sometimes worked for you too."

"Yeah, he does. I...didn't know he worked for you also. I hope it doesn't cause any difficulties for you," Van said, sounding arrogant, like he didn't care if it did or not.

It made Dane wonder if maybe Van had something to do with Dane being targeted in an ambush. But why? He barely knew Van.

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Then Dane and Jacqueline headed for his pickup, and she said to him, “What was that all about?”

“I still think someone might have set me up and that’s why I was ambushed. I can’t imagine the informant Green would have done it on his own.”

“The vampiress then?”

“Or another hunter who Green works for.”

“Like Van? Oh, that would be awful,” Jacqueline said.

“Yeah, I know.”

“What would be the reason though?”

“If I ended up taking down a rogue vampire who paid a really big bounty, maybe? Lucilla was a huge bounty.”

“Oh, wow, why didn’t I hear about her so I could have gotten the case?” Jacqueline asked.

Dane smiled at her. But then he turned serious. “Then you would have been ambushed.”

“Yeah, and turned. That would have been awful.” She was being facetious. “Is there any specific reason why you feel that a hunter was responsible?”

“Lucilla said a hunter was the one who set me up. Now of course, she might have just said that to make me distrust other hunters, but still, I have to consider it’s a possibility.”

“For sure. I would take it seriously until I determined it wasn’t true. Are you ready for the next mission?” Jaqueline got into his truck.

“Yeah, sure. I’m always ready to take down a rogue before they kill any more innocents.” He liked that she seemed dogged to get the job done. He wasn’t sure she would be ready for another one tonight, but he was ready to share the bounty on this one with her after she had shared the bounty on Axel with him like she had said they would.

“Okay, so you’ve got his address, right?” she asked.

“Yeah, using GPS now to check on it. It’s out in the country on the north side of Dallas. Thanks so much for sharing the bounty with me, by the way.”

She smiled. “You earned it.”

“I guess your ex had the same mission as us.”

“Yeah, and I know him well enough to recognize he was pissed that he didn’t get the score.”

“I’m glad we got there before him, but mainly because we saved the woman. Actually, you did most of the saving. We worked in unison to take him down after that.”

Jacqueline glanced out the window at the dark sky. “How do you feel about humans believing we’re just hunters still? Does it bother you?”



“Yeah. I hope to get over that feeling someday. But for now, I feel aggravated because we were the ones taking down rogues. Now people who have experienced trauma at their hands, or teeth, could feel we’re just like them even though we’re the good guys.”

“I feel that way too. I guess that’s why we still need to go to meetings.”

He looked at her. “Yeah. I thought I would try one out and if it wasn’t for me, I would just attempt to figure it out for myself.”

“Oh, me too. What do you think of Stacey?”

He smiled. “She’s hot to trot and not my type at all. You’re hot, and definitely my type.”

“Could you use help in figuring out who might have set you up?”

The question surprised him. He wasn’t sure he wanted to accept her help should the person be a hunter. He had a couple of people in mind. But he didn’t want her to be in harm’s way if it turned out to be a hunter. He wasn’t sure with their changed status if they could eliminate a hunter who had tried to have another hunter murdered...or in his case turned. He might have to have his brothers take care of it.

“Forget it. I’m helping you if you’re willing to take down my...‘master,’” she said.

“Okay, you can help me learn the truth, but I think my brothers will have to take the hunter down.” He swore he heard her growl a little.

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“Because we’re part vampire,” she finally said.

“Yeah, and by law, vampires can’t kill a hunter, no matter if hunter is a rogue or not or they’re on a terminal list.”

“Okay, fine, I’ll help you learn the truth.”

“Thanks. I appreciate it.”

They finally reached Mabon’s house, surrounded by trees and acreage, pulled off onto a side road leading out into the country, and parked.

She got out of his truck before he did. She was quick, he had to give her that.

He quickly joined her and then she vanished. Shit. He wished she would give him a heads-up. He wanted to know where she was going. Suddenly, she reappeared, seized his hand, and vanished with him. They ended up in the woods off to the south of the house and he felt totally disoriented, not like when he teleported himself on his own.

But at least they were together, and he was glad for the partnership again, even though he would have gotten the bounty for himself. There was something to be said about having someone along with him to help if they had to fight a rogue.

They saw a light on in the main living area and they crept closer to get a look. All the blinds were closed, but they would see if they could find an unlocked window.

He saw a balcony to a dark room on the second floor and was about to mention it to

Jacqueline, but she had the same idea and vanished and reappeared there. He immediately followed her and ended up on the balcony.

She tried one of the double glass doors on the balcony and the door opened. Mabon probably figured that no one would try to enter his house from there. Jacqueline was clever.

They slipped into the room that was large and opulent, featuring a king size bed with a gold headboard and the rest of the furniture was golden, 18th Century Italian Baroque. Dane only knew because he had learned about Mabon and his hobbies and collecting antique furniture and decorations was one of his things.

Dane moved to the bedroom doorway, the door open and they heard Mabon on the phone downstairs. “Yeah, yeah, I got it.”

They moved down the hallway to get closer to where Mabon was, and Dane began recording the conversation just in case the caller was contracting a hit. The police could track it down to the caller, and hopefully this time, Mabon wasn’t in the process of killing anyone.

“Your husband has an insurance policy of a million dollars and a five-million-dollar estate, a two-million-dollar cabin, a yacht. Yeah, I do my research when someone wants to hire me for a hit. I want the money from the insurance policy.” Mabon hesitated. “If you want to pay someone else less, be my guest. With me, it’s a guaranteed hit.” He paced across a tile floor. “Okay. So when does Mr. Dunlap get home from work? Seven. Be sure and have a good alibi. Do not be there when I am.” Some more pacing. “Between seven and eleven. Hell, I don’t know. Have a ladies’ night out with a bunch of ladies, but don’t make it look like you’re trying to create an alibi. I want the money as soon as you’re able to access it. If I don’t get it...well, let’s just say you will no longer be needing it.”

Dane and Jacqueline began making their way down the stairs, glad it wasn't creaking. They heard Mabon in the kitchen opening the fridge and then pouring something into a glass. Jacqueline disappeared and reappeared next to a dining room hutch. Only Dane could see her. They had to be careful not to get too close to the vampire until they were ready to attack. Otherwise, he could hear their hearts beating, though they could hear his also when they were close.

Dane joined her and then the phone on the counter rang and Mabon picked it up and said, "Yeah? All right, Jerome. That's tricky. Your business partner has a penchant for blond hookers. Yes, I know all. I'll make sure he has one for the night in question...tomorrow night? Right, between eleven and two the next morning. So be home with your wife and make sure she can verify you're with her for the entire time..." He paced again. "I don't care if she goes to bed early. You need to have an alibi that proves you're home when your business partner meets his untimely death...no, that wasn't me. All right. Send the money to my account and when I have it, I'll make this happen." He set his phone on the counter. "Business is good," he said out loud to himself.

But Mabon's lucrative business was finally coming to an end, Dane was thinking.

4

So far, so good, Jacqueline was thinking. As soon as Mabon finished his second murder-for-hire phone call, Dane shoved his phone in his pocket. She loved how he was proactive and was taking a recording of Mabon's business dealings before they terminated him. She hadn't even thought of that, but he was doing the right thing in doing so. Once they took Mabon down, the people who had hired him could still kill their partners, just by hiring someone else. So they needed to be convicted of trying to do a hire-for-murder scheme also and in the end, save their partners before they hired someone else to do the job.

Mabon turned and started to head for the living room, but he suddenly stopped and glanced in the direction of the dining room where they were standing. That's when Jacqueline realized she heard Mabon's heart beating. He could probably hear their two hearts beating at once.

She and Dane made their move, both of them vanishing and appearing in the living room. She had to admit she loved that she could vanish and appear in places like that. It really helped to get somewhere much more secretly. As hunters they would have to have moved quickly and decisively but they would have exposed themselves too early to the rogue vampire threat.

Even though she suspected that Mabon knew they were hunters, their movements said that they were vampires. He looked surprised, maybe like he was trying to figure out who they were and why they were there. He hadn't invited them, so he knew they were not there for fun and games.

Not when they were armed with swords and targeting him. Mabon threw his bloody cocktail at Dane, and he dodged it. The rogue immediately dove for an umbrella stand filled with sheathed swords and tried to pull one free but it was tangled up with four others.

Yes! Fatal mistake, hopefully, on his part. She wasn't going to let down her guard in the event he could finally free his sword or come after them with his deadly teeth. She'd never even let her vampire teeth down, not wanting to experience that part of her vampirism so it wasn't something she felt she could use in a fight.

Dane was on the vampire and before she could even engage Mabon, Dane removed the vampire's head. His body and head quickly turned to shriveled leather body parts. Her adrenaline was still racing through her blood, and she couldn't believe how easy that had been, all because the vampire had a tangled mess of sheathed swords in an umbrella stand. He should have just had one for easy retrieval.

She hugged Dane and whooped and hollered. He smiled at her, then kissed her.

“See? We make a great team,” he said.

“Yeah.” But Dane hadn’t really needed her on the job this time, she felt. Just looking at him, their gazes meeting, she felt butterflies taking flight. She couldn’t believe it. She had just finished a hunt, for heaven’s sake. “Listen, you terminated him, and you can go ahead and claim him.”

“No way. We’re in this together. You could have been after another bounty or enjoying the rest of your night off. Besides, having two of us here rattled him enough that he couldn’t grab his sword.”

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“Well, thanks. I appreciate it.” She had hoped Dane wouldn’t take her up on the offer because she thought he deserved all the money, but she really thought the world of him for giving up half the bounty to her.

He called the police and reported the kill. “I also have a recording where he was making a couple of deals to be a hitman for a murder-for-hire scheme. Yes. We’ll be here.”

They always hung around until the police arrived and verified who the dead vampire was. Providing evidence that the rogue vampires were up to their usual shenanigans regarding trying to turn or kill people when the hunters took them down was helpful, but it wasn’t absolutely necessary. The police already had enough evidence against them. They just needed hunters to terminate them.

They both went into the kitchen and found fresh bottles of blood. Because they were newly turned, they had to drink them occasionally, especially if they were injured and had lost blood. Dane poured them both a glass before the police arrived. It was better if the police didn’t witness them drinking blood. It just kind of freaked some humans out.

“Have you extended your fangs yet?” she asked Dane, then finished her glass and washed it out.

“A couple of times.”

“Oh?”

“When you kissed me the first time.”

Her jaw dropped.

He smiled. “Apparently, when a vampire is aroused, his canines can extend. I suppose that if you are an ancient vampire, you would have more control over it. I’ve never kissed a woman since I became a vampire, so when we kissed, I wasn’t expecting that.”

“You hid them well.”

“We didn’t kiss deeply, or you might have noticed. Yours didn’t drop down?”

“No. I thought they would, only if you were really angry.”

“Yeah, then too, supposedly, but I guess I haven’t been angry enough. And of course, they’ll drop down at command if you want to bite someone or want to show them off. I had to show them to my brothers. They still didn’t believe that the vampire had turned me until then. Of course, once I could vanish, they really had to believe it.” Dane finished his glass and cleaned it and set it on a drying pad next to hers.

“I think it’s nice that they are still close to you. But you don’t hunt together.”

“Sometimes. Like if we know a group of rogues need to be eliminated, we need more of us to do it.”

“Well, I think it’s great.”

Then they heard the sirens and three police cars pulled up. Dane identified himself and Jacqueline to an officer and gave their statements. Another couple of officers were searching through a file cabinet and one said, “Holy, crap! We’ve got the



mother lode.”

“What have you got?” a homicide detective asked.

“Files on several people that Mabon murdered, including all the contract information—payout, details on where a key would be left for him to have easy access to victims’ homes or offices, or when his target would be home or alone. Names, addresses, everything,” the officer said.

Then the detective started looking through them. “Okay, we put the people who hired him on five of these robberies in jail, but there are another six here that we thought were home invasions, robberies that had gone bad, but now we know they were all murders. We’ll get all the culprits who hired him.” The detective thanked Dane and Jacqueline then and released them.

“Are you ready to go home?” Dane asked her as they headed out to his truck.

“Yeah. I’m tired. It’s late. It’s time to call it a night.”

“What do you like to do for fun?” he asked as they got on the road headed back to their housing development.

“Terminate rogue vampires.”

He smiled. “Other than that?”

“I used to like to dance at a hunter club close by.”

“We could go there.”

“We’re vampires now.”

“You mentioned a human club. They don’t know what we are and vampires who are looking for blood bonds go to them, so we would fit right in.”

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She glanced at him. “You’re not thinking of looking for rogue vampires at a human club, are you?”

“No. Unless of course one shows up who we know is trouble. But first, we need to get rid of your vampire.”

“Not the others on our lists first? What if other hunters get them before we do?”

“We can always get more contracts, but we need to get the vampire who turned you so he doesn’t force you to do something you’ll regret.”

“Okay, I agree.” She had wondered how she was going to manage that on her own. But with Dane’s help, she felt that he might be able to handle it. She was glad he thought they made a good team in a vampire fight. She thought she had done well when she’d fought alongside Van too, so she had really been surprised when he told her he preferred fighting beside his brothers instead.

“Since my place isn’t too far from where you live, if you have any trouble with the vampire, let me know,” Dane asked.

“Thanks.” She was really glad he lived in her gated community. “Have...you tried talking telepathically to anyone yet?” She had been practicing with the disappearing and reappearing act because she knew how helpful that could be in a fight and because she could do it in the privacy of her home. Telepathic communication had to be done with a vampire who was willing to talk to her in that way.

“Not yet. I haven’t really had anyone to talk to who is one like us. My friends Adonis

Cameron and his sister were hunters turned. His mate is Rachael and her cousin, Zachary, was turned against his will. Adonis turned Rachael so she would be able to protect herself better from a rogue vampire who claimed her for his own. But they've been out in Florida taking care of the vampires that decimated the rest of Adonis's family. They're living out there now but come here to visit their family in Dallas too."

"Oh, wow, that's awful about what had happened to Adonis and the rest of his family."

Dane parked at her house. "Yeah, it was. They terminated the last of the rogue vampires in their territory in Florida though. If they had been here in Dallas still, I would have tried it with them."

"Well, maybe we can do it with each other."

"Yeah, I would like that."

Then she hopped out of his pickup truck. She wasn't going for another kiss and lead him on. But maybe later? She wasn't ready to get into a relationship with anyone after the ordeal with her ex-fiancé. Plus, because of the changes she faced with being a vampire, she just wanted to be more settled with her new self before she had any notions of courting anyone else in her life.

"About our other cases—" he said.

She let out her breath in a heavy sigh. "Okay, sure. You can take some of the cases we have left, or we can work on them together."

"What do you want to do?"

“Well”—she shrugged—“we did pretty well as a team for the last two missions. I’m good with doing it together until it doesn’t work out any longer.” Not that it wouldn’t, but she wanted him to know that she didn’t want him to feel obligated to work with her if he decided she was more of a liability than a team member.

“All right. Do you want to take some of the names and learn their locations and who they associate with, and I’ll do the same with the others? Then we can go to the first one we can locate before other hunters get there to take care of the rogue.”

“Yeah, that will work. We’ll keep in touch then. Whoever gets a location first, will let the other one know and we’ll take it from there.”

“Sounds great.”

She unlocked her house and turned to see he was still watching her, being a gentleman, making sure she got in okay. She smiled and waved, and he smiled back and waved.

Then she walked into the house and locked the door. Instantly, Princess came to greet her, rubbing her furry body against Jacqueline’s leg and she reached down and stroked her. “Okay, I’m done with jobs for the rest of the morning. Time to go to sleep.” She took a shower and dressed in pajamas, then climbed into bed and Princess quickly joined her.

“Well,”—Jacqueline stroked Princess’s head—“that went fairly well tonight—the meeting, taking down one vampire on my list, and taking another down who wasn’t. Good beginning to returning to work. And we even have a hunter who is willing to go after the vampire who turned me.”

Princess purred, her nose turned up as she eyed her with her big green eyes, her chubby cheeks the cutest thing ever.

Then Jacqueline thought she heard a male voice in her head. She jumped out of bed, Princess leaping off the mattress at the same time as Jacqueline went to check the house and make sure that no one really was inside. She found no one. Why did the voice sound familiar? Though she hadn't made out what he had said. She didn't think it was Dane, but what did she know? She hadn't tried to talk telepathically with anyone, so it could be he tried to talk to her, and his voice would be different than when she heard it in his physical form.

She wasn't sure how to do this, but she tried in her mind to say, "Dane, did you try to speak to me telepathically?"

He didn't respond. Did she not do it right? Or maybe he was sound asleep.

But then she heard someone in her head saying, "Go to 75692 Evergreen Drive. I'll be waiting."

"Who is this?" she asked in her head.

But she didn't get a response. She got on her phone and called Dane. "Hey, did you try to telepathically connect with me?"

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“Uh, no. I thought we would do it sometime when we’re together to try and figure out how to do it.”

“Someone told me to meet him at 75692 Evergreen Drive now. And it sounded like a man, but it was hard to hear, like he was a long way off.”

“Is it the vampire who turned you? Is he forcing you to go? I mean, do you feel compelled?”

“Yeah, like I’ll be in trouble if I don’t go. I don’t know if it’s him. He never spoke to me when we fought, so I don’t know what his voice sounds like.”

“I’m going with you. He won’t be expecting me.”

“What about your brothers?”

Dane was silent for a moment.

She spoke again. “He might know I went on a hunt with you tonight. He might believe I would call on you. He didn’t tell me not to say anything to anyone about going anywhere tonight. What if he’s laying in wait to terminate you? Or maybe he can even force me to do it? What if he has a bunch of vampires at that location and you can’t fight all of them on your own, particularly if he’s controlling me? If your brothers could join us, maybe you and your family could take the vampire down.”

“I’ll call them. I’m coming right over. I don’t want to lose you while I’m getting hold of my brothers.”

“All right. Sorry about this. I’m sure you’re as ready to sleep as I am. The same with your brothers.”

“They’ll be behind this all the way.”

“Well, if you’re wrong, let me know.”

“I’ll be there in a few minutes.” Dane sounded determined to protect her.

She usually felt confident in her own abilities but there were too many unknowns in this case. Particularly with the problem of a vampire potentially being able to control her actions. She had kind of hoped Heskell wouldn’t remember he had turned her. But that had been too much to hope for. She couldn’t imagine it would be anyone else who was directing her to come meet up with him telepathically at this time of morning.

5

Jaqueline didn’t have to tell Dane twice that she could be in trouble before he was at her house. He knocked on the door and he could hear her running to answer it.

As soon as she opened it, he took her into his arms and hugged her in a way that said he was there for her. “We’ll get this done. I promise you. My brothers are going to meet us at the house the rogue vampire told you to go to.”

“Oh, wonderful.” She sounded relieved.

There was no way he was going to let her do this on her own. No telling what the rogue vampire wanted her to do. “They will get there faster if they go from where they are. I’m sure you’ll like Matt, Ryan, and Trey. Matt is the eldest of the bunch of us, and always takes the lead when we’re all together. Ryan and Trey are



twins—Ryan is the mischief maker while Trey is the serious one, and then there's me."

"Oh, you're the baby of the bunch."

Despite the seriousness of the situation, he smiled. "Yeah, I get that all the time from my brothers."

"Well, I'm the youngest between my brother and me so I hear that all the time too." Jacqueline and Dane climbed into her car because the vampire might realize that's what she was driving, so Dane didn't want to take his pickup truck.

"Is that the reason you were out on the case on your own when you were turned? Because you felt you had something to prove to your brothers?" she asked.

"No. My brothers were all on different jobs, but they were nearby, so we knew if anyone needed help, we could call for it."

"Yeah, right. Like either of us ever had that opportunity."

"None of us ever thought of that scenario." Dane hated to admit that he and his brothers had been arrogant in that regard.

"At least they still back you up."

"That's what families should do. Same with our friends, but like you, I've lost several of my hunter friends over this." He turned down another street. He tried not to take the betrayal personally, but it was hard not to do it sometimes.

"Some friends, though I can understand when it comes to me because the vampire who turned me could possibly make me turn on them."

“True, which makes it more imperative that they took him down. I mean, if they’re truly your friends, they’re there for you through thick and thin, not just when it suits them.”

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“Yeah, I agree. What did your friends that dumped you say about it?” she asked.

“Nothing, really. I learned hunter parties are coming up that normally I would be invited to and that’s not happening any longer.” He shrugged. “I could be irritated about it, but I figure they’re not worth my attention.” Which wasn’t totally true. It was hard growing up with these hunters as friends, play-fighting, socializing with them, watching each other’s backs. Now they treated him like he was a rogue vampire—the only difference being that they couldn’t terminate him legally.

“What if they’re at a scene that you happen upon? Are you going to help them? Or just let them deal with it themselves?”

“Well, I would help them, unless they threatened me. And then it is their problem. But yeah, despite their abandoning me, I wouldn’t hold it against them if they needed my help. What about you?” Before she answered, he assumed she would step in to help them.

She shrugged. “If there was a reward for the vampire’s expiration, I would help.”

He chuckled. He was sure she would, even if she didn’t get any bounty for it. Then he got a call from his oldest brother. “Hey, Matt, are you there already?”

“Yeah, we’re parked down the street, but we’re watching the house. How do you want to handle this?”

Usually, Matt decided when they would do a job, where, who would be involved, and how, during cases they worked on together. A lot of research was done first, and they

did fight the vampires together when they had a rogue crew of them that they had to deal with. This was the first time that Matt had ever asked Dane to tell him how this was going down. Why? Because a fellow friend was involved? Most likely. Maybe also because she and he were vampires now and that might give them a different perspective.

“Hi, I’m Jacqueline Anderson, the huntress turned vampire, damsel in distress,” she said.

Matt laughed. “From what Dane tells me, the only ones in distress are the vampires you’re targeting.”

She smiled at Dane. Yeah, he’d called his brother up to tell him what they’d done tonight together. He didn’t usually check in but after that last fiasco with the vampire who had turned him, his brother had told him if he didn’t call, he and his other brothers were coming after him.

“I’m really not sure how to handle this situation. If this is Heskell, who telepathically communicated with Jacqueline, he’s probably expecting just her. Unless he knows I was with her tonight, eliminating a couple of vampires on hunters’ lists and he hopes I’ll be with her, and he can eliminate me.”

“Because you’re possibly an obstacle to his control over her,” Matt said. “But should she go into the house alone? Shouldn’t we keep her in one of the vehicles until we can take him out?”

“He might not even be there. It might be another situation entirely. We might blow the whole mission,” Dane said.

“I’m going in,” Jacqueline said. “Wait, let me test something out first.” She took a deep breath and said, “Okay, I’m talking to you telepathically to see if I can speak

with you from inside the house.”

“Oh, hell, I can hear you in my head,” Dane said, surprised to hear her speak to him like that.

“Yes, but talk to me telepathically so I can get feedback from you and you can tell your brothers what is going on. I need to know that you can do it too.”

“All right. Can you hear my words when I try to communicate like this?” Dane asked.

“Yes. It’s amazing, isn’t it? Okay, I’ll go in, and you stay in the car. I’ll let you know who all is there and what’s going on. If I say I need rescuing, don’t hesitate to come to my aid.”

He really didn’t like that she would be going in alone, but they had to try this her way. “Okay. Matt, she’s going into the house.” He explained about the telepathic communication they had just shared.

“Why didn’t you answer me the first time I talked to you telepathically?” she suddenly asked Dane.

“The first time?” Now he was worried since he hadn’t heard her speak to him like that before.

“Yeah, before you came to the house. I tried reaching you that way and then I called you on the phone.”

“I was in the shower. Maybe that’s why?”

“I hope that’s all it was and that it wasn’t something like we were too far away from each other in the housing development.”

“I’ll just be in the car and we’re right outside the house.”

She nodded, then leaned over and kissed him. He sealed the kiss with a promise to be there for her. Then she got out of the car and headed for the house. It was completely dark, and he really had a bad feeling about this. She knocked on the door, but nothing happened. Then she turned the doorknob and it was unlocked. She glanced back at him, appearing confident, though he had smelled her anxiety before she left the car, and then she went inside.

“I can see, though the whole house is dark. I don’t hear anyone’s heartbeats. I don’t think anyone’s here yet.”

“Okay, keep me informed.” Dane relayed the information to Matt.

“Oh, he’s here, sitting in the dark. I hear his heartbeat now. Steady. Calm. Like a hunter waiting for his unsuspecting prey.”

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Like he had nothing to fear. “Is there anyone else there?”

“No, it appears he’s alone.”

It was killing Dane not to go into the house right this instant and rescue Jaqueline. He knew nothing good could come of her meeting the vampire. If he sat tight and did nothing and the vampire murdered her or sent her out to murder someone else and made her a rogue, Dane would never forgive himself.

He rushed to the front door, and it was still open. His brothers hurried to join him.

6

“I’ve been busy so I haven’t been able to really get to know you, Jacqueline. I didn’t even know who you were when you killed my brother,” Heskell said.

She was standing about ten feet away from where he was sitting on a brown and beige plaid couch, acting comfortable, like he had nothing to worry about. “He had been killing blood bonds when his temper got the best of him.”

Heskell smiled a little, his expression sinister, his blue eyes chillingly cold. “We’re twins. We both have that trait. It probably had something to do with our father who taught us all we know.”

That’s what she was afraid of and what was worse was she couldn’t do anything to him like she so wanted to. “Where are you, Dane? Take him down, now!”

Heskel said, “Just in case you alerted anyone that I’ve called you here, we’re going to leave.”

She readied her sword.

“You can’t kill me.” Heskel’s brows rose, and she suspected no one he had ever turned had challenged him before.

She swung her sword at him, and his eyes widened right before he leapt out of the way.

“You can’t threaten me,” Heskel said, his voice dark with condemnation, but it wavered a bit. He sounded a little unsure of himself.

It was just instinctive for her to react as a hunter to a vampire threat, but she couldn’t believe she could even do that much when he had been the one who had turned her. He disappeared and reappeared at her back, and she heard his heart beating wildly. Hers was too as she vanished and showed up on the other side of the couch to put some distance between them. She loved how she could vanish and reappear like they could. Even though he couldn’t turn her again, he could still kill her while she would be unable to terminate him.

“Huntress,” he snarled, angry that he couldn’t control her as much as he could humans.

That was great news to her. But when she flew at him to strike him, she felt his control stopping her. Still, she fought against his mental strength when she heard someone coming in through the front door. Heskel whipped around to see who had just arrived in the dark house.

Dane, her hero.



Heskel cast him a dangerously, evil smile. “So, you are the new lover? You can join my little pack.” Then he bared his teeth and Dane swung his sword at the vampire.

Heskel vanished and came in for an attack at Dane’s back. But Dane shoved his sword under his arm and into Heskel. He didn’t manage to strike his heart, or Heskel would have collapsed in death as a wizened form of himself, but the vampire did howl in pain.

Then Dane’s brothers rushed into the living room. They all had their swords unsheathed and hurried to take the vampire down. But he vanished.

Usually, vampires stayed and fought, being so arrogant that they thought they could fight any odds and win, but Heskel was playing it safe, the fight against four hunters too much to deal with. Still, they waited, making sure he wasn’t going to come back and try and pick each one of them off.

When he didn’t, the brothers went in twos to check out the rest of the house, Jacqueline going with Dane and Matt. The twins stuck together. She was so glad Dane had cut Heskel and the vampire hadn’t injured him. But she so wished they could have taken him down. She suspected Heskel was long gone.

It appeared that Heskel didn’t realize Dane was a vampire too, which could be to their advantage. After they finished looking through the rest of the house, they returned to the living room.

“He’s going to continue to come after Jacqueline, but since he can control her—” Matt said.

“I’m dangerous to be around,” Jacqueline said. “I couldn’t kill him, but I threatened him.”

“Do you mind having some guests at your place?” Matt asked.

“Uh—”

“I could just stay there,” Dane offered.

“No,” his twin brothers said, and she thought it was wonderful Dane had all that family support. Trey and Ryan were both dark-haired like Dane, both green-eyed. Matt was lighter haired and had blue eyes.

“We can stay at my place,” Matt said. “Or Dane’s.”

“I have a cat, Princess,” Jacqueline said.

“She’ll be welcome anywhere that she’ll stay,” Dane said.

“All right, but she sleeps with me,” she said, waiting to see what Dane’s response to that would be.

Dane smiled and all his brothers looked at him to see his take on it as if that’s where their relationship was headed.

“Hey, that works for me,” Dane said.

She sighed. She thought she would be staying alone in a bedroom—with her cat, but she guessed that could be dangerous if Heskell got to her and could take her with him right under everyone’s noses.

“If we stay at my place”—which frankly she would have preferred—“Heskell would most likely know that’s where I live.”

“Yes,” Dane said, “but if you would feel more comfortable with staying there, we’ll do it. This is a really trying time for you with your ‘maker’ after you.”

“Well, who has the bigger place?” she asked, smiling. She might as well get something out of this.

Ryan laughed. “You’re my kind of girl.”

“Dane does and he even has a swimming pool that we love to use,” Trey said, his twin agreeing.

“Okay, well, it’s close to my place so we’ll meet you at my home first, I’ll pack some things and Princess and then go to Dane’s home with my cat?” she asked Matt.

“Yeah, let’s go,” Matt said.

They got into their respective vehicles and Matt followed them in his car, the twins with him.

“You’re really all right with my cat sleeping in bed with me?” she asked.

Dane smiled at her. He had the most disarming and charming smile of any hunter she’d ever known. Why couldn’t she have met him before instead of Van? She really liked him deep down so much more than her ex-fiancé. Dane was there for her no matter what.

“I’m fine with it. When I was a kid, we had a German shepherd and he slept with me. He always tried to sleep in the middle of the bed and would kick me when he was having doggy dreams.”

She laughed. “Truthfully, Princess gets hot, and she’ll leave the bed, but if there’s another body in the bed, she might leave sooner.”

“I have a king-sized bed, so maybe she won’t feel too confined. On another topic, I want to talk to your parents too,” Dane said.

That shocked her. “Why?” She couldn’t imagine he was thinking of talking to them

about dating her. There was no way Jacqueline felt her parents should have any say in her life from now on, unless they changed their tune about what she had become.

“I just need to get something off my chest with them.”

Her jaw dropped. Then she frowned. “It’s their problem.”

“That’s not good enough.”

“All right. You do what you want.” She wanted to be a fly on the wall when he did it. She could imagine her parents getting defensive, but she was also curious how he would handle it.

“Good.”

She hoped he had let it be her choice, but he was his own person and in a way, she liked that he would stick up for her. It would be interesting to see if it had any effect on the way they treated her. On the other hand, she didn’t want them to feel they had to be close to her again just because they were being forced to.

They finally reached her house, and Matt pulled up in his car next to hers.

Then she went to the front door and wasn’t surprised when Dane and his brothers all went inside with her. They greeted Princess who had heard her car’s engine so she was eager to see her. Jacqueline was so tired after hunting two vampires tonight and then going after Heskell, she just wanted to retire to bed.

“If you could grab some of Princess’s food, her water dish, the litter box, and the bag of litter, I would be grateful,” she said to the brothers. “Princess will not ride in a carrier, so we’ll just take her in my car. I’ll pack a bag.”

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She hoped it wouldn't take too long to terminate Heskell so that she didn't have to impose on Dane and his brothers' generosity for too long. She knew they had their own jobs to do.

When she came out of the bedroom, she smiled to see Dane brushing a very satisfied Princess's long soft, silky fur, stretched out on his lap on the couch, her big fluffy tail waving a little. Princess perked up when she saw Jacqueline getting ready to leave, pulling a suitcase. But making sure she wasn't going to be left behind again wasn't enough of an incentive to leave Dane's lap and the heavenly brushing she was getting.

"Traitor," she said to her cat, amused and glad she seemed to like Dane.

"I'll bring Princess, her comb and brush. Is there anything else she needs? My brothers hauled out everything else."

"Nope. I'm ready to go." Then she pulled her bag out the door with Dane following behind her with her cat.

Ryan quickly took her bag from her and put it in her car and then she got in to drive to Dane's place while he held Princess on his lap in the passenger's seat. She drove behind Matt's car since he knew where to go, though Dane could have given her the directions.

"She really likes you," she said to Dane.

"Yeah, I have a way with animals."

“You don’t have any pets right now, do you?” She wasn’t sure how that would go over with Princess. She hadn’t been around dogs or other cats before.

“No. My ex-fiancée was allergic to everything. I’m not totally convinced that she was or if she just didn’t like animals.”

“Okay, so she wasn’t the right one for you.” She motioned to the way Princess was sitting on his lap, looking out the window. “She adores you and you seem to like her just as much. I can tell you’re an animal person.”

“I am and I agree she wasn’t the one for me.”

Then Jacqueline pulled into the driveway of his two-story, red-brick, Greek Revival home and parked next to Matt’s car. Nice. Really nice. She loved the four pillars that reached up two stories high, white trimmed windows with white blinds filling them. Just beautiful.

Dane’s brothers started hauling stuff out of his car to carry the items into the house. She got out of her car and started to roll her bag to his house while Dane carried Princess inside, but Trey returned to grab her bag. Ryan had opened the garage door.

“Matt said you need to park your car in the garage so that no one sees it here,” Trey said to her.

“You mean Heskell or someone who works for him,” she said.

“Exactly.”

“Okay.” She got back into her car and drove it inside the garage next to Dane’s. It was actually a three-car garage which meant they had plenty of room.

“We’re going to each take turns returning to our homes and grabbing a bag so we’ll have what we’ll need to stay here also,” Ryan said.

“Thanks to all of you for doing this for me,” she said, genuinely thankful to Dane and his brothers. They had even set everything up for Princess.

“No hunter should have to live under a vampire’s control,” Ryan said.

“I agree.” It’s just too bad all hunters didn’t see it that way. And the thing of it was, they would get a bounty if they took Heskell down, so even if they didn’t want to do it altruistically, why not just do it as another mission that they got paid for? Maybe they were afraid he would turn them too.

Trey closed the garage door, and they went inside the house. Matt was leaving first to get his bag packed. Princess was walking around the place, swishing her tail, like she owned Dane’s home.

A seamless flow between the dining room, kitchen, and living room existed, covered in wood flooring and Turkish blue and ivory area rugs. The kitchen counters were white marble, and the cabinets were all white, very cheerful. Prints of longhorn steer and fields of bluebonnets hung on the walls. She was impressed. She hadn’t known what to expect, but she hadn’t thought he would have that much style. Her brother didn’t and Van hadn’t, so she just figured all bachelor hunters were like that.

The dark oak dining set was large enough for eight people and she figured that was because Dane and his brothers would take up half the seating without even inviting anyone else over. The living room had three blue-velvet, sectional sofas and four, high, wingback chairs—all elegant, yet comfortable.

Through the floor to ceiling windows, she could see the indoor swimming pool with its aqua water and a rock waterfall at one end with fern plants growing between the



rocks. The tile pool patio was a pretty gray slate. Just beautiful.

Then she sighed. “I’m so tired. Can someone just show me to the bedroom?”  
Jacqueline asked.

“Yeah, come this way. Your bag is in there. You’re truly all right with me staying in bed with you?” Dane asked.

“Yes. As long as you don’t snore.”

He chuckled. “I don’t. Does Princess?”

“Sometimes Princess snores.”

Dane laughed.

“Night, everyone,” Dane said to his brothers.

“Night,” everyone echoed back.

As soon as Princess realized Jacqueline had entered the house, she followed her and Dane to the bedroom. Jacqueline wanted to see the whole house and the swimming pool. But for now, she just wanted to go to bed.

The king size bed featured a big fluffy black comforter with a box-pleated, blue and black striped bed skirt.

She sat down on a blue, velvet loveseat in the bedroom and removed one of her boots but before she could get the other, Dane crouched down and untied it, then pulled it off. Wow, that was nice. Van would never have done that for her.

“Which side of the bed do you want?” Dane asked.

She looked at his bedside table that had an alarm clock and a stand to charge cell phones and other electronic devices so she was pretty sure that was his side of the bed. She pulled off her socks and rose from the loveseat and pointed to his side of the bed.

He gave her a knowing smile, plugged his phone in, then stripped down to his boxer

briefs. “Is this okay with you or do you want me to dress more?”

“Dress however you usually do.”

He cast her more of a sexy grin this time and she suspected he usually slept in the raw.

“I’ll be right out.” She grabbed her pajama shorts and top and headed into the bathroom. Despite that he was sharing his bed with her to protect her from Heskell, they were not dating. So she didn’t want to give him the impression that was how she was viewing this.

She brushed her teeth and changed into her pajamas, then carried her clothes out and set them on the love seat. She would organize her clothes tomorrow. Dane was lying underneath the black comforter on the bed and Princess was curled up beside him as if Dane was her newest best friend. It was true love.

Jacqueline climbed into bed, assuming Princess would move over and snuggle up to her until she got too hot, but nope, she stayed right next to Dane. Maybe Jacqueline was dating Dane, and Princess knew it before she even did.

“You’re all right with me seeing your parents, aren’t you?” Dane turned to face her.

“Yeah, sure. What are you going to say to them?”

“That you’re their only daughter and they should be thrilled that you are alive at all. That family means everything, unless you had all parted ways some years ago.”

“We hadn’t.”

“I hadn’t figured you would. The rift between you has to do with you being turned.”

“Maybe...maybe they’re just worried that Heskell will force me to kill them or something, when they’re least expecting it.”

“Which is why they should have solicited all the help they could get to take the maniac down.”

“I agree.” She swore Dane looked like he wanted to hug her, to tell her that he was now in her life and would be there to protect her even if she no longer had family to aid her.

But they had one problem. She was actually changing her mind about dating him, and wanted that hug, if he was so inclined. Princess was the problem. She was cuddled next to Dane, keeping him from reaching her. It was probably just as well.

She reached over and squeezed Dane’s hand. “Let’s go to sleep.”

“Yeah, in case we have any more trouble. If he communicates with you again, wake me.”

“I will.” Then she released Dane’s hand and closed her eyes and finally fell asleep. Until Princess ran over her body and jumped off the bed. Then Jacqueline moved over and cuddled against Dane, and he wrapped her in his arms...before Princess could separate them again.

7

Dane woke to the aroma of eggs and bacon cooking in the kitchen, coffee brewing, a big fluffy cat sleeping behind him, and in front of him was the beautiful redheaded huntress whom he held in his arms in bed. He smiled. She was still sleeping, but she had moved against him as soon as Princess had left the bed. He was enjoying their deepening friendship and hoped it would continue.

Then he got a call on his phone on her side of the bed. He didn't want anyone to disturb her!

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It was too late. She sighed, turned, kissed his mouth, then moved over to get his phone. When she got it, she glanced at the caller ID, and said, “Oh, it’s Stacey.”

“From the meeting?”

“Yeah. It looks like she’s ready to hook up.”

Dane laughed. “It’s not happening.” He took the phone from Jacqueline and answered the call. “Hello?”

For a moment, Jaqueline stayed in bed, but then she left the mattress, grabbed some of her clothes, went into the bathroom, and closed the door.

“Hey, Dane. I was wondering if you would like to go on a hunt with me tonight,” Stacey said.

“Uh, I can’t. Sorry.”

Jacqueline came out of the bathroom, dressed in blue jeans, boots, and a blue floral shirt, raised her brows at Dane and smiled, waved, and headed out of the bedroom. She looked like spring and ready to have some fun today.

“My brothers and I are staying with Jacqueline?—”

“Jacqueline from the meeting?”

“Yeah. The rogue vampire who turned her is still alive.”

“Oh, no. I thought hunters had killed the rogue vampires who had turned all of us. I want to help take him down.”

“Good. We’ll sign you up. We need to locate him first. He went after her last night, so my brothers and I are staying with her until we get this done,” Dane said.

“Wow. Okay, should we get hold of Anne too? I bet she’ll want to help,” Stacey said.

“Sure, that sounds good. I had thought of our group, but when my brothers said they would help, I figured that might be enough.”

“What happened last night?” Stacey asked.

He explained what had occurred. He suspected since they were all so new at this business, she wanted to know how it would all go down. “She couldn’t kill him, but she did pull her sword on him, which distracted him.”

“Oh.”

“And when he told her to meet him at a house, she didn’t feel compelled to go. So maybe her hunter abilities have given her a little bit of an edge compared to a human who is turned,” Dane said, getting out of bed.

“That would be good. Okay, well, I’m on standby and if you decide you need me, or if you can help me with my mission tonight, just let me know. I’ll let you call Anne and tell her what’s going on. It’s best it comes from the horse’s mouth, rather than me pass along the news and get it wrong.”

“Sounds good. I’ll do that. Talk to you later.” When they ended the call, he headed for the bathroom and hoped that Jacqueline didn’t believe he was making date plans with Stacey.

After dressing in a blue T-shirt, jeans, and boots, he went downstairs and found everyone setting the table for breakfast. That was one of the things he was glad for. He could still eat regular food.

“So?” Jacqueline asked Dane.

“Stacey wanted me to go on a job with her tonight. I told her I was sticking with you because of the vampire issue you’re having.”

“You can go with her if she needs you. We can’t abandon others like us if no one wants to work with us—making an exception of your brothers, of course,” Jacqueline said.

Trey said, “A couple of us can go with her.”

“I told her we’re trying to track down Heskell, and she wants to help with that.” Dane had no intention of seeing Stacey except when it came to meeting her at the therapy session or on a mission to take down vampires to help each other out. He was sure she wanted more of a relationship.

Jacqueline poured a glass of orange juice for everyone. “If she has a vampire that she needs help with tonight, I’m all for going with her too.”

“All right,” Dane said. If Jacqueline wanted to help, he was all for it. But also, he needed to make sure she remained safe. He called Anne to see if she wanted to go with them.

“Oh, I’ve got a family issue to deal with, but I’ll be happy to help when that’s resolved.”



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“Okay, we sure appreciate it. And if you need any help, just let us know.”

“I sure will,” Anne said. Then they ended the call.

“I did some research into Heskell to learn where he might go,” Trey said.

“Trey is our private investigator when we’re trying to learn all we can about a rogue vampire that we are after. What did you learn?” Dane asked.

Trey finished his slice of crunchy bacon and wiped his fingers off on his paper napkin. “The house we went to last night is owned by one of his blood bonds, a chef at a restaurant in Plano. He obviously wasn’t home at the time. Heskell might have told him to stay away. Heskell has five other blood bonds and I have a list of their residences. I’m also investigating the whereabouts of his three close vampire friends. None of them are on any termination lists, so hopefully they’ll stay out of it if Heskell goes to one of their places and his friends are there when we turn up.”

“Okay, that sounds like a good start.” Matt drank some more of his coffee.

“Call Stacey back and tell her we’ll go with her tonight,” Jacqueline said to Dane.

He smiled at her. “You know, I think you need to get in touch with her.”

Jacqueline chuckled. “I will.” She pulled out her phone and said, “Hey, Stacey, it’s me, Jacqueline, from the meeting. Dane told us you want some back up on taking someone down. We’re ready to help. Can you tell us more about the rogue?” She put the phone on speaker.

“Uh, yeah, and thanks. It’s a woman, Italia, an ancient vampire. She has an ancient vampire boyfriend who strays quite often and every time he does, Italia tracks down his new human lover and then kills her. The police have pinned ten crimes on her finally and I ended up with the case to take her down.”

“What about her boyfriend? Is he on a terminal list too?” Jacqueline asked.

“No. Franklin hasn’t done anything wrong but gotten his side interests killed because of his jealous want-to-be mate. They’ve been together for centuries, but he won’t agree to being her exclusive mate.”

“I’m surprised that she doesn’t kill him, instead of the women,” Jacqueline said.

“She still wants him. According to witnesses, she always has,” Stacey said. “I’m sorry about the situation you have with Heskell. I hope Dane told you that I want to help you get rid of him.”

“Yes, thanks so much for offering.”

“You should have mentioned it at the meeting. The rest of us had someone help to take out the rogues who turned us. We are a team.”

Jacqueline swallowed hard and smiled. “Thank you. Where and when do you want to meet to take down Italia?”

“Seven tonight. Franklin goes to a vampire bar—the Blue Moon—every Tuesday night and Italia does also, but they go in separate cars. Then he leaves the club, goes to a human club, picks up a woman, and drives to her place. Somehow Italia learns where he has gone, possibly tracking him to the human club and lying in wait, then follows him to the victim’s home,” Stacey said. “We can meet at the grocery store half a block from the Blue Moon. The police suspect she has killed more women, but

they couldn't prove it. They have proven she murdered the others."

"Okay, we'll meet up with you at the grocery store," Jacqueline said.

"Then we have to go after your vampire once we take down Italia," Stacey said.

"We're trying to find any location he might be at and then sure, that would be great."

Then they ended the call and Dane sighed. "I'm glad you called her."

"Do you think she's after you?" Jacqueline asked.

"Yeah."

Trey laughed. "Here we were so upset that Dane's fiancée ditched him and he already has a couple of huntresses interested in him."

Dane gave his brother a look to cool it. He didn't want to lose whatever headway he had hoped he was making with Jacqueline.

"Oh?" Jacqueline said.

Trey's face reddened.

Dane suspected his brother thought that Jacqueline and he were already an item. He wished, but he had to take this slowly. He suspected all the changes to her life were making her hesitant to really get involved with another hunter who had been turned like her. He didn't blame her for feeling that way. Also the business of both of them being recently separated from the ones they were engaged to would make a difference.

Matt laughed. “It seems you stuck your foot in your mouth again, Trey.”

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Then Jacqueline smiled, to everyone's relief.

"You know we were talking earlier about how you liked to go to hunters' clubs for drinks and dancing. We shouldn't be banned from hunters' clubs," Dane said.

"I agree, but I'm sure that we'll have trouble if we go to one," she said.

"Tell us when you want to go there and we'll be there for you as backup," Trey said.

"You took the words right out of my mouth," Matt said.

"Yeah, I agree." Ryan toasted them with a glass of orange juice. "Just say the word. Between the two of you and the three of us, we'll change their tunes if anyone gets nasty."

"Exactly. You're both still hunters. You were born that way also," Trey said. "Sure, you're vampires now too, but you're part of our community, still taking down rogue vampires, just with additional skills the rest of us don't have. You're the good guys, like the rest of us are."

"But then if we wanted to go there, we would always have to go with you guys," Jacqueline said. "That's an imposition for you."

"No, not at all," Matt said. "The more you go there, the more they'll get used to you being there and realize you're not any different than you were before."

Dane would like to take Jacqueline to a hunters' club. If they hadn't been turned and

they hadn't been engaged to other hunters, that was something he would have done without question. "I'm game." But he didn't want Jacqueline to feel uncomfortable about doing it if she wasn't sure.

"Yeah, I'm willing." She smiled at the brothers. "We'll have fun. And maybe we'll make new hunter friends who are more openminded."

"Right. That's who we'll want to be around," Dane said.

"Okay. We could go early when it's not as crowded. But we probably should wait until we get rid of Heskell. I would hate to be at a hunters' club and then worry that Heskell could control me and try to force me to hurt anyone. That would undo our effort at proving we're still hunters and like the rest of them. And that we should be allowed to go to a hunters' club." Jacqueline drank some of her orange juice.

"It's a date," Dane said. They just had to get rid of Heskell.

"All right. That sounds good," Jacqueline said.

After they finished breakfast, she said, "Okay, I need a tour of the house."

"Uh, I didn't make my guest bed," Ryan said. "And I probably left my dirty clothes on the floor."

She laughed. "Dane can show me the rest of the house, and not the rooms you're staying in."

"Let's go." Dane was proud of his home that he had purchased with the idea of finding a huntress mate and eventually raising a family there. He had bought it before he had met Wendy, his now ex-fiancée, so it wasn't like they had purchased it together. Though she loved the home and planned to move in. She'd had the nerve to

tell him he needed to sell the place and give her half the proceeds, as if they'd been married already and were getting a divorce. To which he'd said no way.

He showed Jacqueline the den and the sunroom which had windows that faced the swimming pool.

"Oh, I want to swim."

"You're welcome to anytime you want," he said.

"Thanks. I brought my swimsuit."

"Great." He showed Jacqueline the laundry room and then his office. "And of course there are the three guest rooms my brothers use when we're going on a mission together and want to watch each other's backs." Then he showed her the other two bathrooms.

"I guess your brothers believe we're dating, but we both had relationships that had ended abruptly because of what we have become."

"Yeah, but we are much more suited to each other because of it." He truly believed it.

She shook her head. "Until Heskell is eliminated, I don't feel anyone who is close to me is safe."

"Yeah, but we always run that risk, even when we were just hunters."

"Well, that's true, but we still had control over our own actions."

He couldn't argue with that. He sure didn't want her to feel unsafe and he didn't want Heskell to control her. More than anything, he wanted to get rid of the menace to her.

But until they found Hesel, they couldn't do much about him.



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“I’ll tell you if he communicates with me again,” Jacqueline said as they walked out to the patio and stood looking at the aqua pool.

“Good.” He knew she would, as long as she was able to and Heskell didn’t stop her from doing so.

“Is it...too early to go swimming?”

“Anytime is great for swimming. As hot as it is already in Dallas? No. And since it’s indoors, even if the sun is fully out, we’re fine.”

“Great. I’m off to change. Coming?”

“Yeah, I sure am.” He was thinking he needed to do some fun things with her and not just prove to her that he could make a great hunter companion on hunts. He was right behind her when she vanished. He chuckled, his brothers smiling at him.

“She’s tenacious,” Matt said.

“That she is. We’re going swimming.”

“Enjoy!” Ryan said.

He would.

To give her some time to change into her bathing suit, he headed up the stairs, instead of vanishing and reappearing in the bedroom. When he reached the bedroom, she was

already changed, wearing a bright teal, high-waisted bikini and she smiled at him. The bikini top caressed her breasts, her bottoms fitting her shapely form beautifully.

Before he could tell her how much he loved the bathing suit on her, she vanished. He laughed. He would never get used to that. He hurried to strip out of his clothes and yanked on his swim trunks. He wanted to join her quickly, so he teleported himself to the indoor pool and found her already in the pool, swimming.

He jumped in so that he could be in her path, making a calculated strike. She saw him, just before she swam into him. He captured her in his arms and kissed her.

“Hmm, as a hunter, were you this persistent in dating a huntress?” she asked.

“Is it working?” he asked, kissing drops of water off her cheeks.

She laughed. “I think you are doing just fine, despite me trying to keep this on a more professional level.”

“Hell, yes! I was so afraid I wasn’t doing this right. As to dating others? I never was successful at dating and truly, I don’t know how I ended up with being engaged to Wendy.”

“She didn’t deserve you.”

“Yeah, in retrospect, I realize that’s true. The same with Van being engaged to you.” Then Dane kissed her again, and she deepened the kiss. Oh, yeah, she was incredible and way too good for the likes of any hunter like Van. “I can’t imagine anyone giving you up. And we truly make a great team on a hunt.”

“Oh, yeah, I was thinking the same thing about you.” Then they kissed again.

After they separated, they began to swim and tackle each other. Then his brothers came out to the pool wearing swim trunks, and Jacqueline and Dane laughed. He loved his brothers, and he knew they wanted to kind of slow things down between Jacqueline and himself because they wanted to make sure he wasn't just having a case of rebound, just like she wasn't after they were no longer with their ex's.

He knew they would help them to be in the relationship, to back them, but just to take it more slowly. He hoped Jacqueline was okay with it, and she appeared to just be amused and happy to see them. Maybe she was thinking the same thing. He figured if it was meant to be between the two of them, it would be.

He chased after her, ignoring his brothers as Trey cannonballed into the pool, and Matt dove in. Ryan soon joined in, and the three brothers began wrestling each other in the pool, splashing water everywhere. But for now, Dane preferred playing with Jacqueline in the pool when he usually loved to horse around with his brothers when they went swimming together. Yeah, he wasn't giving up on her that easily.

8

Jacqueline loved Dane's brothers. She thought they were the greatest. She loved that they were willing to back them on going to a hunters' club. She didn't want them to tarnish their reputations as hunters, but she thought the world of them for offering to be there for both of them. And she was completely amused that they would come and insert themselves during their pool time to cool things down a bit between her and Dane. She knew they had his best interests—and probably hers—at heart.

She got a kick out of the brothers all wrestling in the pool. They were fun. But Dane wasn't playing with them. He stayed with her and kept her company, chasing her, or she chased him, diving under the water, treading water together.

She and he finally got out of the pool and sat down on a couple of lawn chairs to dry

out. “It was good that you have an indoor swimming pool once you were turned.”

“I know. It really was fortuitous. I just figured we could use it all year round, even in winter if it was enclosed. But it was really good that we can use it any time now, even if it’s fully sunny out.”

“Where are you?” a voice said in Jacqueline’s head suddenly. “You’re not at home.”

Jacqueline grabbed Dane’s arm. “It’s him.”

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“Heskel?” Dane took her into his arms as if to protect him from the monster.

His brothers stopped playing and watched them, having heard him mention Heskel’s name.

She nodded. “He asked me where I’m at.”

“He knows you’re not at home?” Dane asked.

“It appears that way. Do you think he sent his blood bonds to come for me?”

“It sounds like he has sent someone to check on you or grab you.”

“But he doesn’t know where I am now. No one must have been watching my house when we returned there, packed up, and left. Which I’m glad for.”

“Me too.”

“Can he force you to tell him where you are?” Matt asked, treading water in the deep end of the pool.

“I haven’t answered him. I didn’t before when he told me to meet him at his blood bond’s house either. I just told you and we went there.”

“Okay,” Matt said. “So he can’t read your mind.”

“No. He can talk to me telepathically, but he can’t seem to force me to tell him what

I'm up to. And he can't make me telepathically communicate with him. But I'm sure he'll be trying to learn where I am."

"Did you feel forced to go to Heskell's blood bond's house?" Trey asked.

"I did. Not like I had to leave right that second, but I felt I had to do it. I couldn't kill him, but I actually threatened him with my sword. I couldn't believe I could do that. I keep hoping that as a huntress, I'm able to fight his control. Maybe not all the way, but enough to keep him from making me do anything against my will."

"We need to take down this bastard," Trey said, everyone agreeing.

God, how she hated that the vampire who had turned her had any control over her life. It had been turned upside down enough already!

"Maybe we should go to a vampire club and see if we can track him down that way," Dane said.

"Do you think vampires who are strictly vampires would turn on one of their own?" she asked, afraid they would just as soon tell Heskell the hunters were at the club looking for him.

"Not necessarily," Dane said. "The vampires who aren't rogues don't want to have their own names blackened. Though if friends of Heskell are there, or other rogues, they might feel compelled to tell him that we were looking for him."

"Well, also, I suspect that they won't want us in the club either because we're still hunters," she said. "I'm going to change clothes."

"See you upstairs in a minute," he said.

She vanished and reappeared in his bedroom, changed into jeans and a T-shirt and headed downstairs. “How does sea bass sound for lunch?” she asked.

“Delicious. I’ll be right down,” Dane said and vanished.

Then the brothers left the swimming pool, went upstairs to change, and they all joined her downstairs. They ended up having sea bass, fried potatoes, tomatoes, and green beans.

“Let’s go to the park and take a hike,” Jacqueline said.

Matt asked, “All of us?”

“Sure,” she said.

It was cloudy out, but for now, there was only a low chance of rain. After eating lunch, the brothers cleaned up, then they all went for a drive to a park to hike a ten-mile trail. Dane walked with Jacqueline while Matt walked way ahead of them, and Trey and Ryan walked way behind them—there for them in the event anyone caused trouble for them.

Once they returned to Dane’s house, Jacqueline said, “We ought to go to a humans’ club. We should be able to dance and enjoy ourselves at one without any incident.” She felt that she couldn’t be locked up while waiting for a chance to take down Hessel.

“Yeah, I’m ready for it,” Dane said.

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“I’m going to pick up a huntress I wanted to ask out. Hopefully, she’ll be free,” Matt said.

“Who?” Jacqueline asked before the others could ask.

“Marissa.”

“Marissa Overlander?” Jacqueline asked.

“Yeah, do you know her?” Matt asked.

“Just by name. I’ve heard she’s kind of a maverick huntress,” Jacqueline said.

Matt smiled.

She got the impression that he liked that kind of a woman.

Then Matt called Marissa and said, “Hey, this is Matt Edmonton. Yeah. My brothers and a huntress are going to a human club. Do you want to go with us? I can pick you up and take you?” He shook his head. “Okay, no problem. Maybe we can make it another time then. Sure, bye.” He ended the call.

“No, deal, eh?” Dane said.

“She said the notice was too short but that she was happy to go out some other time—if she has enough notice.”



Jacqueline laughed. “She probably had other plans.”

“She’ll take you up on the next offer, if you don’t call her at the last minute,” Trey said.

“Yeah,” Matt said.

Dane said, “I’m lucky that Jacqueline loves to do things on the spur of the moment.”

“Yeah, but truly, Marissa could have had some plans she couldn’t or wouldn’t change for a date with a hunter she has never dated before,” Jacqueline said. “I mean, if I had plans to do something and couldn’t get away for a spontaneous date. I would have said the same thing.”

“Nah,” Dane said. “You would have dropped any of your plans to go out with me.”

His brothers laughed.

“You are so sure of yourself,” she said, kissing his cheek. She realized he might be right though.

Trey said, “I’ll ask Denise if she and two of her huntress friends can go with us.” He got on his phone and called her. “Hey, my brothers and I and a huntress are going to a human club. Do you and a couple of your huntress friends want to join us?” He smiled at Matt. “Okay, we’ll come and pick you up...yeah, now. See you in a few.” He said to them, “Okay, we all have dates.”

Matt slapped him on the back. “Good going.”

“Is this going to mess you up with plans to date Marissa later?” Jacqueline asked.

“I’ve never dated her before so there may never be anything there between us,” Matt said.

But Jacqueline wasn’t sure that Marissa would feel that way if she learned that when she said she couldn’t go out with him, he just picked up another date for the night.

Then Dane’s brothers went to pick up the other women while Dane and Jacqueline dressed.

“I was going to say you’re a maverick huntress,” Dane said.

She chuckled. “I am. Okay, I’m going to wear this off-the-shoulder black dress and heels.”

“Oh, I love that. I’ve got this black shirt, black jeans, and dress shoes.”

“Perfect.” Once he pulled off his shirt, she ran her hands over his bare chest. “I guess we can’t skip out on your brothers and their dates.”

“Sure we can.”

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She laughed. “We’ll do it after we check out the human club.” She really loved dancing and she wanted to know if maybe human clubs would be the best way for them to go when they wanted a night out to dance. Humans wouldn’t know what they were, most likely.

Then they finished dressing, petted Princess goodbye, and headed out to Dane’s truck. Matt gave Dane a call on Bluetooth. “We’re dressed, have picked up the ladies, and are on our way. What about you?”

“We are too.”

“Good. We were afraid you might have gotten sidetracked,” Matt said.

Everyone in the vehicle laughed.

Dane and Jacqueline smiled.

It wasn’t long before they all arrived at the Stardust Club. The exterior was a stone building with a big green metal roof, lights in the shape of stars all outside the club lighting it up, a fountain with a fish pouring water into it sitting near the entryway. Inside, they found a couple of large tables to grab and pushed them together. Disco lights were flashing inside, and the building was atmospherically dark. Everything was a western theme in there, including the serving staff who were wearing blue jeans, red and white gingham shirts, cowboy boots, and cowboy hats.

Lasso ropes, cowboy hats, boots, paintings of cattle drives hung on the walls. The furniture was all heavy oak. It was a fun place to go.

They introduced Jacqueline and Dane to Denise, Kelsey, and Sandy. They soon had drinks and started dancing. They were having a great time.

“Hmm, you are such a great dancer,” Jacqueline said to Dane.

“You bring out the moves in me,” Dane said, holding her close, dancing to the beat, turning her on.

When she had danced with Van, it was like they were two separate people, doing their own thing. But with Dane, they were dancing nice and close, like they had been forever, like this was where they belonged. He made her feel sexy and desirable. And she could feel where she was arousing him. But then her teeth began to elongate, and she felt embarrassed. Why would they do that now? She didn’t want him to see that her teeth had come down or he might think she was mad at him.

But then they finished their dance and they returned to their table so they could drink their cocktails and she hoped she could get her teeth under control. The others all joined them and ordered fresh drinks when a blond-haired guy came over to the table and asked Jacqueline to dance with him.

“Uh, no, thanks. I’m with my partner.” Jacqueline patted Dane’s arm.

“You are lucky,” the man said to Dane. Then he reached his hand out to Jacqueline as if she hadn’t just said no to him, his blue-eyed gaze focused on her eyes.

She picked up her drink and took another sip. She wasn’t going with the guy. None of them had their swords with them since no weapons were allowed in any of the clubs. Her canines were still extended, but she didn’t want to expose them to him.

Dane said, “She said no.”

Then the man turned his attention to Dane. He was just staring at him, as if he couldn't believe that Dane would say that to him.

Then the man grabbed Jacqueline's wrist and Dane was out of his seat before anyone could see his response. He slugged the man in the jaw, knocking him back and the guy lost his grip on Jacqueline.

Then suddenly, the man backed off, rubbing his jaw where Dane had punched him, frowning. "What are you?" Then he paused. "Hell, you're hunters."

Dane smiled, but his canines were fully exposed.

"My mistake," the guy quickly said, and hurried out of the club.

"What was that all about?" Trey asked.

"I'm sure he was a vampire, probably looking for a blood bond, who was enamored with Jacqueline, and figured she was the perfect conquest. I'm sure he was trying to convince Dane and Jacqueline through vampire persuasion that she would dance with him," Matt said.

"But then he thought they were hunters," Ryan said.

"Yep, because he wouldn't have been able to control them then, but then Dane had to show off his fangs," Matt said, chuckling.

"I had to make the point that I wasn't just a hunter," Dane said.

She could have shown off her fangs also, but after her hot dancing with Dane, and then cooling off with drinking their cocktails, they were already back to their normal size. She was glad that they weren't always long fangs at least. She was relieved

Dane had shown off his fangs to the other vampire.

She smiled up at him and he kissed her. So much for safely going to a human club. But she realized that this was probably a place vampires would come to for a blood bond.

“I’m glad you showed off your canines,” she said to Dane.

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“That’s the first time anyone has made me angry enough to show them off in a confrontation. Besides, I figured he was a vampire at that point, and I assumed there might be a code of honor between non-rogues that a woman who was with me was off-limits unless she wanted to dance or be with him,” Dane said.

The huntresses with them just stared at the two of them. The one said, “You’re vampires?”

“Hunters turned, yes,” Jacqueline said, trying not to sound annoyed. Why couldn’t they have just gone dancing and enjoyed themselves like other people were doing?

Their second round of drinks were delivered to the table and Jacqueline drank some of hers, then said, “Let’s dance.”

“I’m all for it.” Dane drank some of his drink, and then took her hand and they headed back to the dance floor.

She was sure Dane’s brothers would be explaining to the women what had happened to them. Maybe even not to bring it up.

“Well, that went over well,” Jacqueline said to Dane as they danced nice and close again and she really needed this affirmation that she was all right as a hunter turned.

“You mean with the vampire?”

“No, with the women who came with your brothers to the club.”

Dane smiled down at her. “I think they were in awe.”

“I think they were in shock.”

“Well, now they know, and all that matters is that we’re having a good time,” Dane said.

“That’s true! I sure am. But yeah, the confrontation with the vampire sure went well.”

When everyone was done with their drinks and dancing, Matt said, “We’re taking the ladies home.”

“We’re headed to my house,” Dane said.

Jacqueline wanted to know what the women thought of them, though she shouldn’t have cared. That was something she was having to deal with—letting go of whatever others’ thought of her now that she was turned.

Then finally they arrived home and started making a dinner of chicken enchiladas and rice.

Not long after that, the brothers joined them for dinner.

“So what did the women say about Dane and me being turned?” Jacqueline asked Dane’s brothers at once.

Matt smiled. “They thought it was really cool. They didn’t want to make either of you mad.”

Relieved, Jacqueline said, “Good.”



Dane rubbed her back. “Yeah, if they hadn’t been cool with it?—”

“They would be history,” Trey said. “I mean as far as us dating them.”

\* \* \*

After dinner, they got ready to meet up with Stacey and take down the vampire she was after. “We’re going to let her have the hunter’s fee, aren’t we?” Jacqueline asked Dane.

“Yes. Stacey asked us to help her so I think that’s only fair,” he said.

“You took half of my bounty fee for getting rid of Axel.”

“You took half of my bounty fee for getting rid of Mabon.” He smiled at her.

She smiled back at him. His brothers chuckled.

“What do you all do when you go after a rogue together? Split the bounty money between the four of you?” Jacqueline asked.

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“When we go together, we’re usually after a gang of rogue vampires, so yeah, we split the proceeds because there’s enough money to go around. Though we get paid a lot for every case because of the danger of taking them down,” Dane said.

Trey said, “I would have given you the full bounty on Axel, Jacqueline.”

Dane laughed. “Hell, he was on my take-down list also.”

“Dane earned it. We both did. And he did pay half of his bounty on Mabon when he did all the work.” Jacqueline squeezed his hand.

Then they arrived at the grocery store. Stacey got out of her car and gave all the guys a hug first, then finally hugged Jacqueline. Jacqueline knew where she stood on the totem pole—on the bottom—because Jacqueline was into handsome guys. Dane and his brothers were all real lookers.

“Thanks so much to all of you for coming to help me with this. I thought only Dane would be, but I understand how he was stepping in to help a fellow therapy group member.”

Jacqueline was amused. Stacey really liked men.

“Okay, so I put a tracker on Italia’s car and also her mate’s. They’re at the Blue Moon vampire club. They take separate cars when they go there so they can leave when they feel like it. I thought we could wait there and watch for them to leave. If Franklin leaves first, we need to have one vehicle follow him, and then the other needs to follow Italia. She’ll probably wait for him to leave and then go right after

that,” Stacey said.

“Who of us is going after whom?” Matt asked.

“Since Italia’s the one we have to eliminate, I want to follow her and then Dane can see where Franklin goes. If he picks up a woman, he’ll be with her, then he leaves her house, the police believe he returns home and then Italia kills the woman her mate had been with,” Stacey said.

\* \* \*

“Okay, that sounds good.” Now Dane understood why Stacey had needed someone to help her with the case. They never knew how they would have to take down a rogue until they did their research. He was glad they had agreed to help her. Stacey couldn’t have done this alone.

“We’ll divide up and some of us will go with Stacey and the others will go in Dane’s truck,” Matt said.

“I’ll go with Stacey,” Trey said.

Ryan said he would go with them too.

Then Trey and Ryan got into Stacey’s car with her. Jacqueline was glad that they were there to protect her if anything went sideways. She was also glad Dane wasn’t going with her in her vehicle.

As they followed Stacey’s car, Matt said, “She’s intriguing.

Dane glanced at Jacqueline. “She’s a nice person, but I’m not interested in her.”

Matt laughed. “She would be a handful.”

“Yeah, too much of a handful.”

“Maybe I would be,” Jacqueline said.

Dane smiled at her. “My kind of a handful.”

“That’s what you think.” Jacqueline wanted to make sure he understood that them being a couple wasn’t a sure thing yet!

When they arrived at the vampire club painted a cornflower blue and featuring a large white moon, Stacey called Dane and he put it on speaker. “Italia’s car is that red Cadillac. The blue Jeep on the other side of the parking lot is Franklin’s. According to when I saw them going inside the club, they’ve been there for about a half hour.”

“We’re used to waiting to take down rogues, so no problem,” Matt said.

An hour later, Stacey called Dane again and he put it on speaker. “The man in the black jeans, checked shirt, black cowboy boots, and hat, that’s Franklin. Some say he was a cowboy a couple of centuries ago.”

“Okay, we’re following him.” Dane waited to start his vehicle until Franklin drove off. Then he followed him. “I guess he never picks up a blood bond at a vampire club while his mate is there.”

“No, he appears to be sneaky about it. Maybe it’s always a one-night stand and he never realized that his mate eliminates the woman afterward,” Jacqueline said. “But what if he’s all in on this? It spices up their life? He gets to do what he wants, and she gets to do what she wants. It’s a mutual game between them and he knows all about what she’s doing.”

“Uh, yeah, I agree with Jacqueline on that,” Matt said. “I wonder if he’s on any lists.”

“Unless it can be proven that he and his mate are in collusion, then maybe not,” Jacqueline said. “He may know exactly what she’s up to but proving it could be difficult to do without questioning both of them separately. I suspect questioning either of them isn’t going to be an option. Especially with Italia because she’s already on a list. She’ll only have one thought in mind—kill the hunters who come after her and keep from being eliminated. And if she’s loyal to Franklin and doesn’t want us to go after him next, she won’t tell us that he is part of this whole murder scheme.”

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Then they saw him stop at a home in a nice residential area.

“No,” Jacqueline said.

“Yeah, blood bonds come from all walks of life,” Dane said.

A woman came out of the front door wearing a silky, red nighty and smiled at Franklin. She was about thirty, her brown hair streaked with blond strands, and she didn’t know what she was getting herself into.

Franklin parked his car while Dane parked curbside a few houses down. “What if Franklin takes part in the killings? Maybe just his mate is blamed for them, like she’s jealous he would see another woman behind his back?” Dane said.

“That would be even more insidious,” Jacqueline said. “But it could give the human woman more of a sense of security if she thinks she’s only going to be with a male for a good time.”

“Do you think she might not even know that Franklin is a vampire? I mean, he’s a good-looking guy and she might just think he’s human,” Jacqueline said. “It would be easy for him to convince her of it.”

“Let’s make sure that he isn’t the one who is responsible for killing the victims,” Dane said.

They left the pickup and headed for the house, skirting around the right of the one-story stucco house with a large water fountain out front, a green boxwood hedge all

around, until they moved to the back door. Matt had a lockpick and unlocked the door. He carefully opened it.

They heard a man and woman talking in the living room and they headed in that direction to make sure the woman was okay. The thing was, they couldn't do anything to him if he was just having sex with her, just biting her, and giving her pleasure. But if he did it against her will? That was another story.

\* \* \*

When they saw Franklin kissing the woman, Jacqueline felt like a voyeur. She glanced at Dane. He was frowning at the couple. Suddenly, the front door was thrown open and Italia flew into the room with murder in her eyes. Jacqueline thought Franklin would stop his mate from hurting the woman, but instead he stepped back and the human woman screamed. Then the human collapsed on the couch in a faint. At the same time, Jacqueline appeared in front of the woman to stop the vampiress from hurting the human. Both Italia and Franklin looked shocked to see the group of hunters in the living room and then Dane transporting himself like a vampire.

Stacey had finally moved in the same way to reach Italia, and she quickly shoved her sword into her heart. Italia turned into a wrinkled, dehydrated prune. Franklin jumped away from the human woman and his mate's body, throwing up his hands as if he wasn't doing anything bad, and that he had nothing to do with hurting anyone.

Now Jacqueline wondered if he was just as involved but when she had stopped Italia from ripping the human's throat out, he decided to play the innocent.

Matt was texting on his phone and then he said, "You're lucky this time. You're not on any termination lists, but if you hook up with another vampire who kills humans that you're luring into a situation like this, you're going to be eliminated."

Franklin glanced at his girlfriend's body, then vanished, not waiting for the hunters to change their minds. They heard his car peel out of the driveway. The police would have Italia's car towed and impounded. A couple of officers were coming to take their statements.

Jacqueline revived the human woman, who looked horrified to see the dead body on her floor and the hunters peering down at her. "Did you know Franklin was a vampire?"

She shook her head vigorously.

"Have you met him before?" Jacqueline asked.

"On a dating site. Don't tell my husband, please."

Jacqueline raised her brows.

"He's always away on trips. I know he's seeing other women. It's...it's the first time I even tried anything like this."

"It would have been your last if we hadn't intervened on your behalf," Jacqueline said.

The police and two homicide detectives arrived then and everyone, including the woman, gave them their statements.

"We'll keep an eye out on Franklin and if he's involved in any more cases of murders of women, we'll add him to a list," the homicide detective said. "And, miss? You're lucky these hunters have been following the rogues' movements. You can never be too careful."



Lipstick was smudged around her mouth, and her mascara was running down her cheeks in black rivulets.

That's when Jacqueline saw a dollhouse sitting in the corner of the living room against the wall. "Do you have children?"

"A boy and a girl, age seven and nine."

"You're lucky we found you and rescued you before the vampiress killed you. No telling what she would have done to the kids," Jacqueline said, wanting the woman to realize the danger she had put them in even if she didn't care about her own safety.

Then the police finished up with them, and one of the detectives said to the woman, "Do you have anyone you can call to stay with you? We've notified your husband, but he can't get here any sooner than tomorrow night on a flight home."

“My...my mother.”

Jacqueline wondered how her mother would take this whole business. But that’s when she got a communication again from Heskell. “Where are you? I learned you took down a couple of vampires last night and then you just vanished. I know which vampires are on your target list still, but you haven’t gone anywhere near them.”

“It’s him, Heskell,” Jacqueline said to Dane. “He wants to know where I am again. He said he’s watching my target list of vampires, which he can’t do on his own, so he must have vampire friends or blood bonds watching them, waiting for me to show up.”

“Ask him where he is,” Stacey said.

Would it be that easy? Jacqueline doubted it. “I don’t want to communicate with him. What if he can learn where I am if I did?”

“Hmm, like GPS? Maybe. I don’t know,” Stacey said.

That was the thing. None of the turned hunters knew enough about it.

9

“I have Heskell’s home address,” Dane said to Jacqueline, Stacey, and his brothers. “We talked about his blood bonds and vampire friends—where their homes are. But what about his home? Maybe that’s where he is, believing we’ll be searching for him every place else, not believing he would be home.”

“Let’s go there,” Jacqueline said.

Everybody was agreeable. Dane sure hoped they could take the rogue down tonight.

Then they got into the two vehicles and headed to the house that Hessel owned. His home was surrounded by about five acres, half an acre in front, about four acres in the back and some land on the sides, but not that much between homes. His home was maybe about seventy-five-hundred square feet, all brick, lots of windows, but all were covered with beautiful hurricane shutters. Typical of a home that was owned by a vampire who had to keep the sun out when it was shining bright during the day.

Even Dane kept his blinds closed now that he was a vampire, and he had noticed that so did Jacqueline.

“Wow, what a house,” Jacqueline said.

“Yeah, these ancient vampires often have a lot of money. They’ve been able to save money for centuries, not like the rest of us,” Dane said.

“Yeah,” Matt agreed. “He’ll have security cameras since he can’t watch out the windows. Because there are three cars sitting in the driveway, and not in the three-car garage, I suspect those are blood bonds. Though they could be Hessel’s vampire friends.”

“I agree. And if they’re here, there’s a good chance that their master is also. At least I’m hoping so,” Dane said. “Let’s go.”

Trey, Ryan, and Stacey joined them at the car. Then they all discussed what they were going to do.

“We go in twos,” Matt said. “One person to watch each other’s back. Who wants to

go with whom?"

Dane immediately said, "Jacqueline is with me."

Trey said, "I want Stacey with me because she has some cool vampire moves. You're on your own, Ryan."

Ryan smiled. "I'm with Matt."

"Did I just get picked last for teams?" Matt asked.

Everyone smiled.

"We don't take out blood bonds," Matt said. "If there are other vampires in the house and they stand back, we leave them alone. If they come after us, they're dead. We'll go in the back way together. Even though I like the idea of going in from different directions, and not getting backed into a corner, I want us to stick close to each other so we all have each other's backs. But your partner is the one that you'll be concentrating on. Does anyone have any different ideas?"

"We need one of those infrared cameras to know where everyone is in the house," Stacey said.

"Yeah, we tried it once, but when we go into a fight, we often don't have time to use one before we're in attack mode," Dane said.

"Completely understandable. Let's go," Jacqueline said, and Dane knew she wanted to get this over with if they could tonight.

They saw some security cameras, but the hunters skirted them, while the hunters turned vampires all vanished and reappeared in the backyard where they could check

out the security cameras in the backyard. Hesel didn't have any. Score!

But Dane couldn't deny how much he worried about Jacqueline. He knew she was a good huntress, but she was also the one that Hesel could control—to an extent. They still didn't know how much if he really put his mind to it, or how much she could fight against it.

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Matt was in the lead with Ryan.

They heard loud laughter and talking inside.

How many were inside? And were they a mix of vampires and blood bonds? But mostly, would they fight the hunters and put their own necks at risk?

Matt used the lockpick and carefully opened the door, and they were all glad it didn't squeak. Dane couldn't stand squeaking doors and was always putting grease on his when they did that. But in a way, a squeaking door could act as an early warning system.

The laughter and talking was coming from deeper inside the house. The back door led into a den, and it was beautiful, the lights on in there showcasing oil paintings of ranches and cowboys, of cattle drives, and fields of Indian paintbrush. The couches were all brown leather and marble-topped tables with wrought iron legs.

Then they moved toward the room where all the conversations were coming from. They kept Dane and Jacqueline in the middle to begin with and Dane knew they were trying to keep anyone from hurting her.

"That's him," Jacqueline whispered to Dane, but Matt turned to look at her too. "In the room up ahead. I recognize his voice. It sounds just like his telepathic voice," she said.

"That's who we'll concentrate on then," Matt said.

They went slowly though, not wanting to alert everyone they were coming. Though it was killing Dane not to be able to rush in and kill the vampire to free Jacqueline from his control.

They reached the end of the hall where Matt could see what was going on, the rest of them holding back. Matt moved back to speak to them privately. It was so noisy in the living area that no one could hear them speaking.

“Five vampires—two on my list besides Hesel,” Matt said. “The one kind of in the middle of the whole group is Hesel. And it looks like about seven blood bonds are here. Ryan and I will go straight into the mess of them and target Hesel. Romanoff is off to the right near the fireplace holding a bloody cocktail and wearing a black tux. He’s a vampire on my list. Vandenburg is off to the left of the group feeding on a blood bond, both sitting on a forest green couch.”

“We’ll take out Romanoff,” Dane said, Jacqueline agreeing.

“We’ll aim for Vandenburg,” Trey said, and Stacey was ready for it.

“Let’s go,” Matt said, and he rushed into the room before anyone even noticed he shouldn’t have been there.

Stacey and Jacqueline vanished and appeared right next to their targets. Dane had to get with the program when it came to moving like that and quickly joined Jacqueline as she aimed her sword at the tux-clad vampire.

Trey was racing to catch up to Stacey as three of the blood bonds screamed out and ran away. They appeared eager to get out of the hunters’ path and live another day. As soon as Romanoff saw Jacqueline with her sword aimed at his heart, he disappeared and came around behind her. But that’s when Dane came behind him and thrust his sword into the vampire’s heart. Dane was beginning to think this was a winning way

for him to team up with Jacqueline. Romanoff turned into a baggy skinned skeleton while Matt was fighting Heskell and Ryan was fighting an overzealous and loyal blood bond.

Dane immediately flew to help Matt to take Heskell down, knowing he had to be their prime target.

Ryan killed the blood bond he was fighting, and the rest of the blood bonds rushed off through the front door and left. Trey and Stacey had managed to eliminate Vandenburg, the other three vampires who had been there quickly vanishing. Then Dane cut Heskell's arm, and he immediately disappeared. "Damn it." Dane looked around for Jacqueline, but she had vanished too.

Hell. "Jacqueline!" Dane tried to contact her telepathically then. "Jacqueline!"

The house had been vacated except for the dead body of the blood bond and the remains of Vandenburg and Romanoff. Matt was immediately on the phone with the police to verify the two rogue vampire kills.

"I'm at the house," Jacqueline said to Dane. "Heskell was trying to make me turn on you. I had to get as far away from you as possible."

"I'm coming. We didn't kill him." Dane said to Matt, "Jacqueline's at my house. I'm going to join her in the vampire way."

"I'll drive your vehicle home when we're done with the police here," Matt said.

"I'll go with you, Dane. Trey can drive my car there. What's your address?" Stacey asked.

He told her the name of the residential area and gave her the address. She looked at



her phone and found the directions for it. “Okay, I’m going with you.”

Then they both vanished and when they reached his place, he saw the whole house was dark. He didn’t like the looks of this.

He went inside and called out, “Jacqueline?” Then he tried telepathically communicating with her. “Jacqueline? Where are you?”

“At home.”

“Your home?”

“Yes, that’s what I said.”

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“Sorry, I...forget it. Stacey and I are on our way.” He told Stacey, “Jacqueline’s at her house, not mine.” Then he gave Stacey Jacqueline’s address, and they headed over there. He knocked on her door, at the same time saying, “It’s just me, and Stacey is with me.”

Jacqueline hurried to open the door for them and pulled them inside. “I’m sorry I left all of you behind, but Heskell tried to force me to turn on you, Dane. I think that when Matt was cutting at him, Heskell couldn’t concentrate on forcing me to do any harm to you, but I didn’t want to worry that I might injure or kill you if he managed to hurt your brother and attempt to gain control of me again.”

“Did he get control of you?” Dane asked.

“He tried. I was fighting it the whole time. Until he was too distracted and then that’s when he left. So he’s still alive?”

“Yeah,” Dane said with regret. “We tried to take him down, but then he vanished. We did manage to take down the other two rogue vampires on Matt’s list though. Why did you come here and not go to my home? I was afraid he had gotten ahold of you.”

“It was just natural for me to go here. Plus, I was afraid he might follow me to your house. I don’t want him to know where you live.”

Dane hugged her. “You know, you nearly give me a heart attack every time you vanish like you do and suddenly appear where the vampire is that you’re trying to take down.”

Jacqueline smiled. “You need to learn to do that so that it comes naturally in a fight. It gives us a real advantage over rogues when they don’t expect us to have that ability.”

“Yeah,” Stacey said. “I think Trey was surprised too when I left him behind to fight Vandenburg.”

“I’m sure of it,” Dane said. “He wanted to be right there with you helping to take him down, not putting yourself in danger. Do you want to go to my house, Jacqueline?”

“Yeah. Now that you’re going to be there too.”

Then the three of them headed over there using their vampiric ability. It saved on driving a vehicle places!

When they went inside the house, Princess purred and rubbed up against Dane first, then Jacqueline. “You know you can be replaced,” Jacqueline said to her cat.

Dane chuckled.

“I take it that she’s your cat, Jacqueline,” Stacey said while Dane got them all glasses of water to drink.

“Yeah, but she has fallen totally in love with Dane.” Jacqueline sat down on the couch and Princess jumped onto her lap because Dane was putting the glasses of water on the coffee table.

Then Dane got a call. He put it on speakerphone.

“Hey, we’re almost done with talking with the police here. We’re letting Stacey have Vandenburg’s bounty. You and Jacqueline can split Romanoff’s bounty,” Matt said.

“No. We agreed we would split the bounties between us. We never know who we’re going to be taking down and we’re all at risk,” Dane said.

Stacey and Jacqueline agreed.

“All right. We’ll split the money when we get there. You can tell us what happened when we arrive,” Matt said.

“See you soon,” Dane said.

“Do you usually team up with a hunter to fight vampires?” Jacqueline asked Stacey.

“Uhm, I’m more of a lover than a fighter,” Stacey said.

“Of vampires?” Dane couldn’t help frowning. Not that some hunters hadn’t fallen in love with a vampire and even been turned to be with them forever, but they hadn’t been rogues and he could see how it could happen in some cases, like with Rachael falling in love with Adonis. Then again Adonis had been a hunter also.

“Uh, no, I mean with hunters. I don’t usually go on hunts all that often.”

Which explained how Stacey had been turned by a rogue vampire while making love with him, and not when she was engaging with one in combat.

“But you looked like you really had a handle on fighting,” Jacqueline said. “We wouldn’t have put you in the position of having to fight anyone if we had known you don’t like to hunt rogues down.”

“Oh, I’m fully qualified as a fighter. I love practicing fighting with a fellow hunter. My brother usually. And the thing of it is that once I was turned and had these special abilities, I felt changed about that too. Like I wanted to help the hunters’ cause, and I

wanted to help the police take down the villains, and I wanted to help protect humans. It made me realize how ruthless rogue vampires are and how manipulative they can be,” Stacey said. “I think before that, I was kind of living in my own little bubble. Playing at being a hunter, until the vampire turned me.”

Then they heard two vehicles drive up and recognized they were Stacey’s car and Dane’s truck. Matt parked Dane’s truck in the garage and Trey parked Stacey’s car in the driveway, then Dane’s brothers all joined them in the house, everyone giving each other a hug for a job well done. Dane gave them glasses of water and then strawberry margaritas after that for all of them to celebrate.

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“At least we took two down on my list,” Matt said, “though more than anything, I wished we could have taken down Jacqueline’s vampire.”

Everyone agreed.

Then Dane got a call from Zachary Bremerton, and he wondered if he’d heard Dane had been turned. Zach had and had been so distraught when he had been turned that he had wanted to die. But that had all changed for him when he met the huntress of his dreams. “Hey, I’m putting this on speakerphone. My brothers are all here and so are two of my friends who are huntresses who have likewise been turned, if that’s what you’re calling about.”

“Yeah. Adonis, Rachael, Pasha, Michael, Danai and I are back in Dallas, and we learned what had happened to you. How are you and the huntresses doing?” Zachary asked.

“Well, we kind of have a problem. Jacqueline’s maker is still alive.” That’s all Dane needed to say. Adonis had mated Zachary’s cousin, Rachael, and had been a hunter before he was turned. He couldn’t kill his maker either, who had been trying to force him to hand Rachael over to him, but with Zachary and other members of the family’s help, they had finally eliminated Adonis’s and his sister’s maker and rescued his parents and younger sister. But his older sister, Danai, was dating Zachary’s older brother, Michael. So Adonis and his older sister had known just how hard it was to be hunters who were turned and then forced to do their maker’s bidding.

“We’ll help you with this,” Zach said.

“Thanks,” Jacqueline said. “I’m Jacqueline and met Dane and Stacey at a group therapy meeting to deal with being hunters turned.”

“We heard about that too. We’ll be at the next meeting to share our experiences, though I think for the most part, we’re dealing with it the best way we can. But if we can speak about what happened to us, maybe it will help others to realize what we have become doesn’t have to be a curse,” Zachary said.

“We were talking about going to a hunters’ club and getting drinks and dancing,” Jacqueline said.

“We will be there to back them up,” Matt said.

Zachary laughed. “Well, we haven’t tried that since all this happened. We’ve been in Florida taking down rogue vampires for the family, so, yeah, sign us up. I’m sure Adonis and the rest of us would all be for it. What’s the worst that could happen? A bunch of narrow-minded hunters kick us out? Maybe someday we’ll have a club of our own. But until then, we’re still hunters, right?”

“That’s exactly what we were saying,” Dane said.

“Well, my family will be there backing us too and they have a lot of sway in Dallas,” Zachary said.

“Okay, we’ll make it a date. Though Jacqueline wants to wait until we take down her maker,” Dane said.

“We’ll help you with that too. What’s his name?” Zachary asked.

Dane said, “Heskel.”

“Hell, he was Piaras’s friend. When Rachael killed Piaras, she had ended the rogue vampire’s reign of terror. Piaras was the one who had turned Adonis and his older sister, Danai, and had wanted to turn Rachael to be his own mate. Heskell wasn’t at Piaras’s house when the hunters went there to eliminate him. It appears, Heskell didn’t have designs on Jacqueline, like Piaras had on Rachael, since the time that she was a youngster.”

“Yeah, she had killed Heskell’s twin brother, and he caught her at it. Instead of killing her, he turned her. We’ve tried twice to take him down, but he just vanishes before we can do it,” Dane said.

“We’ll add him to our list.”

“Okay, thanks. We can use all the help we can get on this,” Dane said.

“You’re welcome. We’ll talk soon.” Then Zachary and Dane ended the call.

“That’s great news about the other hunters helping us,” Jacqueline said. “I’ve never met Zachary or his family, but his family are well-known in Dallas.”

“Yeah, when some of them were turned, it really rocked the city. Some hunters still were their friends, and others dropped them,” Dane said.

“Like what had happened to us,” Jacqueline said.

“Oh, yeah, the same with me,” Stacey said, then finished her margarita. “Thanks for helping me take down my rogue.”

“Thanks to you for helping to take down one of our rogues,” Matt said.

“If you need any help with anyone else, Stacey, just give me a call,” Jacqueline said.



“Thanks. I will.” But Stacey glanced at Dane as if she fully intended to call on him, not Jacqueline. “Oh, and if you get an idea where Hesel might be, call me and I’ll go with you. We have to free Jacqueline of the curse.”

“Do you need one of us to follow you home so you get there safely?” Trey asked.

“No, I’m good, thanks so much!” Then Stacey gave everyone a hug, Jacqueline last, of course, and then she left.

10

It was late when the brothers and Jacqueline finally retired to their bedrooms to sleep.

Princess had made friends with all the brothers and instead of going to bed with Dane and Jacqueline this evening, she had gone to stay with Trey in his bed. Jacqueline suspected the brothers had colluded with each other to make sure Dane and Jacqueline didn't have any interruptions, and she thought they were so cute to do that for them.

She sat down to pull off her boots and Dane came over to remove them for her.

"You know, we don't have an impediment to sleeping close tonight together," he said, nuzzling her face, then kissing her knee.

"Yeah, which I suspect was planned and I'm all for it." Her gaze locked with his and he smiled that arrogant kind of sexy smile that she loved.

Then he yanked off his T-shirt and worked on his boots while she pulled off her shirt.

"I had no intention of dating anyone anytime soon," she said.

"I had gotten that impression from the first time I had laid eyes on you."

She smiled. "And you ignored that. Which was the big draw to me. Except for Stacey's interest in you. I thought the interest in her was mutual for you."

“Not in her.” Dane unbuckled her belt while she unbuckled his.

“Yeah, that was soon apparent, which was your saving grace.”

He chuckled. Then he cupped her breasts still confined in her smooth, silky bra. “I’m damn lucky I went to that meeting. After fighting the vampire, I almost didn’t.”

“Then”—she ran her hands over his bare chest—“you had to show off your beautiful chest.”

“Which you were not impressed with.”

She licked his nipples, and he sucked in his breath. “Ha! You knew I was,” she said, “and you wanted me to say so.”

“I loved teasing you.”

“I loved that you did.” She really was amused that he would. Then she removed his pants.

He yanked off his socks and then slid hers off her feet. Then he pulled off her pants. She hurried to ease his boxer briefs down his hips, though his arousal was so full, she was having more of a time getting the briefs over it. Which she loved.

He smiled down at her. She looked at him and shook her head. “Next time, the boxer briefs come off first.”

He laughed. And then he was unfastening her bra, tossing it, and slowly removing her panties, tantalizing her. He skimmed his hands over her naked breasts. The pressure of his hands on her flesh made her heartbeat quicken and she sighed with pleasure. Her sensitive nipples were aroused, and she treasured his hands rubbing against them.

Never would she have thought she would be doing this with a new man in her life after she and Van had become history—like a week ago!

But Dane was tantalizingly sexy, and she loved the way he touched her, like he was enjoying the intimacy before they went all the way, and she was glad for that. She heard his heart beating harder and she felt her canines extend, just like when they had danced at the human club. It was amazing, especially now that they were here, alone, and no one else could see them. She immediately kissed him, pressing him to open his mouth to her. She wanted to see if his own canines had extended. As if he knew what she was checking out, he smiled and showed her his devilishly sexy smile and his beautiful, elongated canines.

He cupped her face, and they began stroking each other's canines with their tongues. There was just something intimate with caressing each other's canines, sharing the knowledge that they had been changed, but that they were navigating through all this with curiosity and intrigue.

She nibbled his bottom lip, and he slid his hands to her buttocks and caressed. He lifted her and put her on the bed and then he was beside her, kissing her breasts, licking her nipple, kissing it, and starting on the other. Her body responded to his gentle and passionate kisses, his mouth moving over her breastbone, his extended canines teasing her throat with a gentle touch, not cutting.

She started to use her teeth on his neck, the experience so new to both of them, but they were enjoying the exploration. Neither wanted to cut each other or drink each other's blood. Maybe later when they were more used to all this vampiric stuff. But for now, they were just embracing their new abilities.

She swore she felt more alive than she'd ever felt before. She ran her hands over his biceps, loving the feel of his strength, his muscles well-honed from all the sword fighting he did. She was so wet for him, so eager to have him penetrate her between

her legs, aching for him.

He slid his hand over her belly, lower, yes! She was so eager to have him embedded deep inside her. But he was beginning to stroke her between her legs. She was shooting to the heavens. Then she remembered his brothers were staying at the house, and she swallowed the cry of delight that nearly escaped her lips.

Then he was pressing his full erection into her and thrusting. She arched and he filled her. She moaned. Their hearts hammered at the same pace, and she felt the unfathomable connection to him. Both were now something more than just hunters and she wondered if that was what made them feel so right for each other.

He groaned with climax, staying inside her for a bit longer, and just pressed his body against hers. Loving the closeness, she ran her hands over his muscular back. “Amazing.”

“Good?”

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She smiled. “Yeah. Good.”

“Great?”

She chuckled. “Quit fishing.”

He rolled off her, pulled her into his arms, snuggled with her, and kissed the top of her head. “Great.”

After all they’d been through, for the first time since being turned and Van ditching her, she felt truly at peace and with a hunter who might even turn out to be the one for her. Only time would tell.

\* \* \*

Early the next morning, Trey surprised Jacqueline when he came into the master bedroom to wake Dane and her before they were ready to wake. “Hey, I got information of where Heskell might be. Remember Zachary telling us that Rachael had killed Piaras at his estate? Several other rogues were also eliminated. The house was sold, and the proceeds went to the hunters who risked their lives to bring the rogues to justice. The house was sold to a human, but when I was doing some research, I discovered that she wasn’t truly the owner. She was given the money to purchase the property. Heskell was behind it all. We’re all gathering to go to the estate now to see if he’s there.”

“Uh, okay, thanks. We’ll join you downstairs,” Dane said, already getting out of bed, sans clothes.

Jacqueline was so hoping they would get the bastard this time. As soon as Trey was gone, she left the bed and hurried to grab her clothes out of a drawer and Dane's closet. He'd been a sweetheart to give her so much room to sort out her clothes.

Dane was dressing and then once she was also, he hugged her. "We'll get him."

"I know we will. Either this day or another. We will." Or one of the others would, though she wished she could take him down herself.

"About last night—" he said.

"I want a repeat tonight."

Looking relieved, he said, "You got it."

Then they gathered downstairs, and she was amused to see someone had gotten a big box of fresh donuts.

"Breakfast for champions, right?" she asked, snatching a chocolate icing covered one before the chocolate donuts were all gone.

Ryan laughed. "Yeah, when Trey said we wouldn't have time to make a breakfast, I hurried off to get the donuts, hoping I got enough of a variety to make everyone happy."

"All you needed to get was chocolate-covered ones," Jacqueline said.

The brothers all smiled at her. Ryan said to Dane, "Looks like I need to make sure you both get enough then."

"Who all is coming with us?" Dane grabbed one of the chocolate-iced donuts and

smiled at Jacqueline.

“I called Zachary. He said his brother Michael, Adonis, and others would join us at the estate. Rachael wanted to, but Adonis’s and her baby girl is six weeks old so Rachael is nursing her and not hunting yet,” Ryan said.

“Oh, wow, okay,” Jacqueline said.

“I called Stacey. She’s meeting us there as well,” Dane said.

“Okay, so”—Jacqueline grabbed another chocolate-iced donut—“I’m ready.”

“Is that all the fortification you need?” Dane asked, getting her a cup of coffee.

She laughed. “Yes, that’s all I need.” Then she drank her coffee and Trey glanced at his watch.

“Let’s get armed. It’s time,” Matt said.

They all grabbed their swords, throwing stars, and daggers, and then they loaded up in Dane’s truck and headed out.

“Don’t go inside the building on your own,” Dane said to Jacqueline.

“I won’t.” She knew he was referring to her vanishing and reappearing next to the rogue vampires. But she wasn’t moving into the house on her own. She would wait until everyone was inside the house with her and then she would use her vampiric abilities to move to her advantage.



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She had been amused that Dane had been practicing moving from the bedroom to the bathroom and from the bedroom to the first floor, using the vampire way, as if he was trying to catch up to her using the ability.

“Are you really ready for this?” Dane asked her.

She smiled at him as he drove toward the estate. “You are practicing telepathically communicating with me too?”

He chuckled. “You’re so good at all this stuff. I guess I haven’t really been embracing the vampire abilities.”

“Because you were upset that you were turned,” she said, not asking a question. She had totally been unsettled by the whole business, but then she had decided that there was no way of going back to the way it was and she needed to just accept her new abilities. Maybe she could use them to her advantage in a fight against a rogue vampire.

“Yeah, but you’ve shown me how important they can be.”

“Well, just don’t get ahead of me when we’re in the house and see a rogue we need to take down.”

He just laughed and she knew then that was just what he planned to do. Not because he wanted the kill, but because he wanted to protect her. That was such a refreshing notion that she loved him for it. Van figured she could protect herself because she was a huntress. Even huntresses, and hunters, needed someone else to provide

protection for them at times.

When they finally arrived at Heskell's estate out in the country, she envisioned what it had been like when Adonis and his mate and family were there in the fight against evil. It was an overcast day, still early in the morning, and they saw six cars in the circular driveway.

An ornate wrought iron gate was open, as if it was sinisterly welcoming them in. The two-story, rambling Spanish-style mansion was surrounded by young pine trees that looked like they had been planted since Piaras's termination. Beautiful boulders were scattered around the property. Since Piaras had been so malevolent, she had expected to see a dark, vile place, but it was light and airy looking, a large fountain spilling water into a basin in the center of the circular drive.

The sides of the home were coated in ivory stucco, but exposed areas revealed pink brick quarried nearby to give the impression of an antique building. An old spoked, wagon wheel rested against a live oak. The oak was so large, she figured it had been there for over a hundred years.

"Pretty, not evil looking like I thought it would be," Jacqueline said.

"Yeah, when it comes to some of these rogues, they can really make it appear as though they are just like the rest of us. When it's the furthest thing from the truth," Dane said.

"Whereas others cloak themselves in darkness, whether it's wearing Gothic garments or living in a house that looks like it should be in a haunted horror flick," Matt said.

"Right," Trey said. "One of the worst vampires I ever took down—a female—had a pink house, literally, from her furniture, walls, drapes, and even to the outside of the house with its gingerbread style roof and pink siding. Her neighbors felt it was an

eyesore. Her garden was filled with pink roses. She wore long pink lacy dresses, pink lace gloves, pink flowery bonnets, pink high heels, or patent leather flats. Yet despite all outward appearances, she was evil to the core. After she had eliminated fifteen men who had looked at her the wrong way—her words, not mine—I terminated her. The neighbors wanted the house torn down and to leave the lot vacant. But the homeowner's association wouldn't go along with it. So some house flippers bought the house, repainted the whole place white, inside and out, and redid the entire inside with large windows, white blinds, very modern chic style. They'd had an open house, and we went in to see it. She hadn't killed anyone there. Sometimes they raze a house where so many murders have been committed, no one wants to buy the house, and it would be condemned. But it was beautiful, and it sold right away."

"I couldn't even imagine a female vampire like that. The only ones I've taken down have been more femme fatales, wearing black or red, sexy, evil. But a vampiress in pink reminds me of a witch and her gingerbread house covered in sweet treats," Jacqueline said.

"Yeah, that's exactly what she was like," Trey said.

They didn't drive onto the estate but parked out of view of the security cameras. All the hunters got out of their vehicles. The Bremertons introduced themselves—Zachary, his brother Michael, Danai, her brother, Adonis, and their sister, Pasha—all of them ready to take on any friend of Piaras who was like him in turning a hunter.

"We need to go around the fence," Adonis said, since his family had been confined here. He, Pasha, and Danai knew the layout of the estate the best, though Zachary and Michael had been there during the fight against Piaras and his friends and minions also. They skirted around the fence surrounding the property, looking for an easy way to get in, or at least for the hunters. For the hunters turned, they could just vanish and reappear on the other side.

“You can climb over here. No one can observe you from the house. Everything is shuttered and they don’t have any security on the backyard,” Adonis said. “All the cameras are focused on the front of the yard.” Then he vanished and reappeared on the other side of the fence.

Zachary, Danai, Pasha, and Dane quickly joined him. Stacey and Jacqueline appeared next to them while Dane’s brothers climbed over the fence. Then they all ran toward the back door of the house.

Urns sat on the entryway to the patio that was bare of furniture. Then Adonis vanished and the door opened. Jacqueline hadn’t expected him to do that.

They hurried into the house. It was quiet, even though there were so many vehicles parked out front. Were the occupants of the house sleeping?

Adonis said to Jacqueline, “They’re sleeping.”

She wondered then if he had told the other vampires that too, or just the ones who might not have known what was going on.

Then a man walked into the living room, and Adonis swiftly moved to him and put his fingers to his mouth, telling the man to be quiet, to not make a sound. Then Zachary joined Adonis and took the man outside.

What was he? A vampire? A blood bond?

Danai and Michael headed down a hallway. Zachary returned to the group of hunters and said to Jacqueline, “They’re checking out the wing where Danai’s parents and sister had been kept hostage.” He motioned to another wing. “That’s where vampire guests stay. Upstairs is the master’s suite.”

Dane nodded and Jacqueline realized he had told Dane, and probably Stacey, the same thing.

Jaqueline thought they should go upstairs first because they had to take Hesel out first and foremost.

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“Normally, we would take out everyone on the lower floor first,” Zachary said, “but we know Heskell is the priority just like Piaras was. We can’t allow a vampire to control a hunter.”

“I want to go upstairs and get him if he’s up there,” Jacqueline said, though she knew she couldn’t actually eliminate him.

“I’m with you, Jacqueline,” Dane said.

“Me too,” Stacey said.

Zachary said to Matt, “Can you, Trey, and Ryan take care of anyone in the rooms down this hallway?”

Matt inclined his head.

Then Adonis joined them. “The man was a blood bond. He took one of the cars and left, not wanting any part of getting himself killed over this. He said Heskell is with his girlfriend upstairs. I’ll go with whoever is headed to the upper floor and then the others will handle whoever is down here.”

Jacqueline wondered what was going on with Michael and Danai, but then Adonis disappeared, and Jacqueline did the same thing to join him at the landing upstairs.

Dane, Zachary, and Stacey joined them. The others stayed down below to take care of anyone in the hallway who might be a threat.

Once they were all upstairs, Adonis motioned to the door of a room left open.

“The master’s bedroom?” she telepathically asked Adonis.

He inclined his head. Then Adonis vanished and appeared inside the room. She wanted to go in there so badly, but she was afraid then that she would sabotage the mission. She said to Dane, “Go! I’ll help the others downstairs.”

He hugged and kissed her. “Stay safe.”

“And you.”

Then she vanished and ended up downstairs with the others. They were waiting at closed doors, and she suspected it was because they didn’t want to wake anyone and alert Heskell. She was used to going in and fighting, not this breaking into a vampire’s lair and waiting. Her heart, and everybody else’s, were beating like crazy.

She heard someone coming and turned to see Michael and Danai joining them. Jacqueline was actually glad to have some other hunter-turned vampires with her to help fight the battle if they got into it. Suddenly, all the doors began being thrown open and she heard fighting upstairs at the same time. Heskell must have alerted the occupants down below that he was in a fight, and to come to his aid. But they hadn’t expected to find hunters right outside their bedrooms.

Five of the vampires were wearing pajama shorts, two were naked, but they all were armed with swords. They immediately hissed at them, showing their deadly fangs. That was an indication they were all rogues. If they hadn’t been, knowing the ones they faced were hunters, they would have put their weapons down. Instead, they had shown their fangs, indicating they were dangerous and ready to battle it out with them.

Three of the vampires were on Jacqueline's and Dane's terminal list: Maggard, Quillon, and Paine. She went after Paine. He was a tall blond wearing black PJ shorts and he immediately thrust his sword at her. She vanished and struck at Quillon, a redhead, who was just as shocked as the other rogues who hadn't expected any of the hunters to be vampires too.

Just as quickly, Paine came at her back, and she vanished. Paine struck Quillon in the heart with his sword, not anticipating she was going to hear Paine behind her and that she could move like that. Now that was the perfect tactical move!

Trey and Ryan had already taken down a vampire each as she fought Paine, who was so angry that she had outmaneuvered him that he was slashing at her without using the control he needed to be successful. She was alternately striking his sword and vanishing and appearing in a new location, which meant he was constantly trying to anticipate her moves and he wasn't doing a good job of it.

Matt took down Maggard, who was one of the guys on her and Dane's list. It didn't matter. They had to just come out victorious, no matter who took down which rogues.

To her shock, Heskell suddenly was in front of her, and she thought Paine was going to stab him like he had Quillon accidentally. But then Heskell said, "You're coming with me," and he grabbed her wrist and vanished.

"He has got me," Jacqueline said to Dane, knowing he would tell the others.

"Where are you now?" Dane sounded levelheaded and not panicky, which she was glad for because she was panicking.

"I think somewhere else in the house. A...a cell."

"Adonis said that's where his parents and his younger sister had been locked up.



We're on our way." Dane showed up in the room where a cell was located.

Heskel smiled wickedly. "Kill him," he commanded Jacqueline as soon as Dane came to fight him.

But a whole swarm of hunters showed up and Dane thrust his sword into Heskel's heart before the rogue could vanish, instantly breaking his connection over Jacqueline. Heskel's body wizened like a grape wizened into a raisin. Jacqueline likewise collapsed and Dane rushed with his vampiric speed to gather her in his arms before she hit the floor and kissed her. "Are you okay?"

"God, yes. He was trying to force me to kill you and I was fighting the command. I would never have forgiven myself if I had hurt you. When you terminated him, his control over me was broken, but at the same time, I blacked out briefly."

"We need to call this in," Matt said, usually the one to call the police and have them come for statements. "Do we know who all of the vampires were?"

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“Yeah, three of them were on my termination list,” Jacqueline said, Dane helping her to her feet.

“Hmm, that means three of them were on my terminal list,” Dane said, a twinkle in his eye.

“There were eight in total,” Matt said.

“Well, four were ours,” Jacqueline amended. “Heskel was on our list too.”

“Right,” Dane said.

Joining them, Pasha said, “I got one.” She was wiping blood off five throwing stars.

Trey said, “The one I took down was on mine and so was the one Ryan eliminated.”

“I took down one,” Matt said. “He had been on Ryan’s list.”

“I got another one. He wasn’t on my list yet, but he wasn’t going to give up,” Stacey said.

“There were two more in the room off the cell,” Adonis said. “Danai and I took care of them. They were part of Piaras’s former staff. We thought we had eliminated all of them, but those two must have escaped and slipped back here when Heskel took over.”

“Good,” Zach said. “We eliminated the vampiress who had been in the bedroom with

Heskel, and we were fighting Heskel, until he realized Jacqueline was nearby and vanished. We thought he had just fled like you said he had done twice before, until Jacqueline warned Dane that Heskel had grabbed her.”

While they waited for the police, Matt said, “Man, I feel like this place is just a vampire haven.”

“Yeah, since the rogues keep setting up housekeeping here,” Adonis said.

Trey said, “All I’ve got to say is the hunters who have been turned are unbelievably good at fighting the vampires. You should have seen Jacqueline. Two vampires had her pinned down. I wanted to go to her aid in the worst way. One came at her back, but I was still fighting one and he wasn’t letting me move. Then Jacqueline just vanished, and the rogue killed the other one she had been battling. The look on his face was precious until she came back to fight him some more.”

“Yeah,” Stacey agreed. “I told you guys at the therapy meeting how much I love the new abilities we have. I probably would have been a gonner if I hadn’t been able to move like they do.”

“I need to practice so that it comes naturally to me,” Dane said.

“We can practice fighting each other like that,” Jacqueline said.

“I’m game.” Stacey smiled at Dane.

Jacqueline wasn’t including Stacey, but then again, if they could all help each other, it could be worth it. “Hey, maybe some of the hunters who have been turned quite a while ago can help us navigate this new world we belong to.”

“I’m all for it,” Adonis said. “Though we’re here just for a visit.”

“So about going to the hunters’ club,” Stacey said.

“Oh, I want to do it early, like five? I think this calls for a celebration. I’m free from Heskell’s control now,” Jacqueline said.

“At five then. We’ll meet at the Starlight parking lot,” Adonis said.

Then the police arrived and took all their statements, but just as they were doing it, Van and Jacqueline’s best friend, Lettie, and Van’s two brothers showed up to fight the vampires in the house.

“You’re too late,” Jacqueline said, glad they beat them to the bounties. But mostly, she was thrilled Heskell was no longer a problem. Even though her life was still topsy turvy, at least that very major issue had been taken care of.

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When Jacqueline’s ex arrived at Heskell’s house, Dane wanted to slug Van for abandoning Jacqueline after she had been turned when she’d needed him the most. But now Dane realized that since Heskell had been eliminated, Jacqueline no longer had a reason to stay with him at his house. He was disappointed about that. Though getting rid of Heskell had been tantamount.

Once they were done there, Van learned who all they had taken down, and looked mighty pissed for missing out on so many bounties. Jacqueline’s former best girlfriend appeared sheepish, trying to avoid eye contact with Jacqueline all the while. Dane and the others with him left the house.

Stacey shook her head. “Boy, if that had been my fiancé, I would have had some choice words to say to him.”

“He’s not worth it,” Jacqueline said.

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“Was Lettie your best friend?” Stacey asked.

“Yeah, she isn’t worth another thought either.”

“She needs to be turned,” Stacey said.

Jacqueline smiled. “Wouldn’t Van be upset? And Lettie too.”

Stacey shook her head. “She wouldn’t be welcome in our meetings either. Not after betraying you and taking up with Van.”

Dane didn’t want Stacey bringing all this up if it was upsetting Jacqueline, but she didn’t seem bothered by it, for which he was thankful. He guessed it was such a relief to get rid of Heskell, nothing else mattered at the moment.

“See you at the club,” Adonis said, and he and his kin left in their van.

“See ya,” Stacey said.

Then Dane and his brothers and Jacqueline got into his truck.

“We’ll grab our bags from your house and head to our homes then,” Matt said.

“Yeah, and we’ll see you all at the club at five,” Trey said.

“Everyone did a great job. We need to go on more hunts like this as a group,” Ryan said, everyone agreeing.

Dane didn't bring up Jacqueline returning to her house, but when he drove into his driveway, Matt said, "We can help you take all of Princess's things to your place, Jacqueline."

"You can just grab your own bags and I'll help her," Dane said to his brothers. "It won't take any time at all."

"Thanks to everyone for all your help with this," she said.

"We wouldn't have left you alone to deal with this on your own," Dane said.

When they arrived at the house, his brothers helped him pack the cat's things into her car while she was gathering her clothes upstairs. Dane really figured his brothers would just grab their own bags and leave, but they wanted to help more.

Dane figured he would just ride with her, help her get everything settled, and then use the vampire way to get back home. He had to keep practicing at it.

While Jacqueline was upstairs, Princess had gone up there with her.

"She needs time to be one with what she's become, just like you need to before you get into a relationship that means forever," Matt said to Dane.

His brothers didn't understand that Dane and Jacqueline had a connection that no one else would have unless they'd been turned against their will. And both had lost their future mates over it.

Then again, Dane didn't need to prove anything to his brothers. They would eventually see that he and Jacqueline were really suited to each other, hopefully for the long term.

“And then there’s Stacey,” Trey said, chuckling.

Smiling, Dane shook his head. The woman might be interested in him, but the feeling wasn’t mutual.

Then Jacqueline appeared next to her car with her bag in hand. He swore he would never get used to her vanishing and reappearing like that.

“We’re dressing formally for the club, right?” she asked.

“You better believe it.” Dane would love to see Jacqueline in a slinky gown, and he really wanted to dance with her.

“We’re dancing all the dances, right?” she asked Dane.

He smiled, but before he could say anything, Matt said, “I would be happy to dance with you when Dane gets tired.”

Dane quickly said, “I won’t get tired.” He wanted to be the only one dancing with her. On the other hand, it wouldn’t hurt for other hunters to see that his brothers, who were purely hunters, would be interested in being with her. Not that he really wanted anyone else to be with her. He realized how possessive he was already feeling about her, but still, for her own feelings of acceptance and fitting in, he wanted her to be able to dance with hunters and prove she wasn’t a blood-thirsty vampiress now. He would do anything to help her feel accepted by hunters again, if that was something she really needed.



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Trey smiled finally and said, "I'll dance with you."

"So will I," Ryan said.

She laughed. "Good. I'll hold each of you to it."

"Hot damn," Ryan said.

They agreed to meet them at the club at the appointed time and they gave her and Dane hugs, then left.

Dane said to her, "I'll go with you and help you unload your car at your place and then return home, via the vampire way to get in some more practice."

She agreed to the deal. "You know I only want to dance with your brothers at the hunters' club to prove how nice they are to us when other hunters might not treat us well."

"Yeah, and I want you to dance with them for that reason too."

"But no other hunters, right?"

Dane laughed.

"I'll grab Princess and then we'll head over to my place." She vanished and returned with Princess in her arms, then she handed her to Dane.

They climbed into her car and drove over to her place. “I won’t lie about it. After no one came to your aid, I feel the hunters don’t deserve you,” Dane said.

She smiled. “If it hadn’t been for your brothers being so helpful and to prove a point to the other hunters, I wouldn’t be dancing with anyone but you tonight.” Then she glanced at Princess curled up on his lap. “She’s going to miss having you to cuddle with her tonight.”

Dane smiled. “You might be right, but I believe it was only because both of us were there together.”

She scoffed. He laughed.

Then she drove into her garage, and he took Princess into the house while she rolled her bag inside. He carried the cat supplies inside while she put everything where it belonged. Princess was checking the place out as if she hadn’t been there in eons and something might have changed.

After they were finished, Jacqueline pulled Dane into her arms. “Thank you for saving me earlier today.”

“Thank you for not skewering me.”

She sighed. “I really was fighting Heskell’s commands. I think it made him even angrier that he didn’t seem to have the control over me that he thought he would have.”

“Adonis was the same way. He couldn’t kill Piaras, but the rogue vampire had told Adonis that he couldn’t fall in love with Rachael, that she was Piaras’s. Of course, Adonis was in love with Rachael from the moment he laid eyes on her and Piaras had no control over it.”

“Wow. I didn’t know that.”

“Yeah, so I don’t think they can completely control hunters like they can humans. But it elevates them in the rogue vampire community to say they have a hunter at their beck in call. In Piaras’s case, two, Adonis and his sister, plus he was holding their parents and younger sister, Pasha, hostage. Non-rogue vampires, had they have known, would have wanted to have taken Piaras down themselves. They don’t want their reputations sullied by a rogue like that. But the rogues? They really looked up to him,” Dane said.

“I would have helped them if I had known.”

“Adonis couldn’t tell anyone. Not even Rachael’s family. They were all hunters, and they wouldn’t have been happy if they had learned a hunter turned vampire wanted her for his mate. Worse, that he was supposed to turn Rachael over to Piaras who promised to release the rest of his family.”

“But I suspect Piaras wouldn’t have,” Jacqueline said.

“No, you’re right. He would never have released them. He figured Adonis and his family didn’t have any hunter friends here, no one knew anything about them since they were from Florida, so no one would come to their aid. You know how it is. Hunters are territorial just like vampires are. So when they came here looking for a friend who had disappeared and they had gotten involved with Piaras, they hadn’t had the local hunters’ approval.”

“Ahh.”

“Anyway, I’m sure Adonis felt the same way about you when he heard what you were going through. Danai also.”

“She’s dark, and sultry and beautiful,” Jacqueline said.

“Yeah, she seems to have come out of her shell for Michael, though she’s still cautious about meeting people she doesn’t know.”

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“I can understand that after all they had gone through. Well, I hope she comes to the dance tonight too. I would love to get to know her. Maybe she would come to the therapy sessions too.”

“Maybe. Well, I’m going to let you get on with your day. I need to check into some things.”

“More vampires on your terminal list?” She wondered why he wouldn’t take her with him. Maybe he wasn’t comfortable fighting with her as a team on all the cases he was going after.

He shook his head. He looked so serious, she wondered what would be more important than that.

“My parents,” she finally said.

“Yeah. I’ll let you know how it goes.”

“Do you want me to go with you?” she asked.

“No. Unless you insist you have to go. But I would prefer talking to them alone.”

“Okay, just don’t make them so mad that they’ll want to terminate you because they believe you’re a rogue.”

“No one else will believe it and they’ll be up on charges of killing an innocent vampire.”

“Just don’t make them too mad.”

“I’ll try not to.” Then he kissed her and said, “Off I go.” And he vanished.

She loved surprising him and rogue vampires by doing that herself, but she realized she didn’t like it when he did it with her. But he needed to so that he could protect himself better. Then Princess was meowing, telling her she hadn’t fed her yet.

“Demanding kitty, aren’t we?”

Princess continued to talk to her until Jacqueline poured some food into her bowl, and she filled up her water dish too. Jacqueline headed into the laundry room to do a load of wash, and prayed Dane didn’t really aggravate her parents too much. Though she had to admit a little bit was fine with her.

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Dane probably should have taken Jacqueline with him to see her parents, but he wanted to get this off his chest. He was afraid they might think he planned to mate her and wanted their permission, which was the furthest thing from his mind. Not that he hadn’t totally considered a union between them, but he didn’t have any intention of asking her parents’ permission after the way they had treated her once she had been turned. It might have helped if he had taken Matt with him to show them that family stuck together. But he figured he had this on his own and he really didn’t need to get his family involved. It might cause more tension.

As soon as he arrived home, Matt was waiting for him. Dane frowned at him. “What are you doing here? Did you leave something important behind?” Dane couldn’t imagine Matt had any other reason for being here.

“You. I’m going with you to see Jacqueline’s parents.”

Dane's jaw dropped.

"Come on, Bro. I hadn't gotten very far when Jacqueline called me and said to return to your house where you were planning to drive your truck to see her parents. So I'm going with you to keep you out of trouble."

Dane shook his head. "I had considered taking you." But he'd then discounted the notion.

Matt didn't look like he believed him as he dipped his chin down and lifted his brows.

"I'm serious. Come on then."

"We'll take my car," Matt said. Then they left in his car. "Do you miss them?"

"Hmm?" Dane asked.

"Princess and Jacqueline," Matt said as he drove out of the housing development.

Dane smiled. "Yeah, you know it. They both add a lot of warmth and fun in my life."

"I could tell. So you don't want to screw things up with her parents if things work out between you."

"I don't care how her parents feel. They don't care about her."