

1. Forrest

I had no idea what made my idiot and sometimes harebrained mother waste most of our savings and buy a house in an extremely small town that held no interest for me.

I huffed like the teenager I was and crossed my arms, looking out my new bedroom window in a sulk. The room itself was a pale yellow, tiny with a built in wardrobe to my right and all my stuff to the left next to the bedroom door. It was a good thing I didn't have a lot of things or there was no way it all fit. Turning around, I spotted a bag and walked over to it. I unzipped it and sitting on top was a photo of mum and I that was taken on my sixteenth birthday with me looking happy for once.

My father, Saul Morrison, had decided to walk out on us when I was very young. That was the last time I saw him. Mum had used the money that he had to pay her in child support to save up for a house and working two jobs had helped a lot. Otherwise, we would have been in a lot of trouble when it came down to the punch. Mum relied on the help of my grandparents to look after me while she worked her heart out just to put food on the table and money for a home deposit.

Which brings us to this small town Forrest; population: around 170 people. Apparently, the cheapest houses were in this town and we couldn't afford much. Either that or mum didn't have enough money for a better and *bigger* house that might have made me happy about living in this small upon small town.

"Brianna, can you give me a hand with some of this stuff?" mum called down from the living room.

"Just a second," I shouted back.

Mentally I thought that she should do all the work on her own since she dragged me to this place with nothing but force, but she had done enough in her life time and I wasn't that type of person. Everything was dumped everywhere as I walked down the hall way. It was a miracle that I didn't trip and land flat on my face from all the clutter and mess that was everywhere.

“What do you need help with?” I asked when I walked into the room.

“Unpacking all these boxes,” she replied. “They are starting to do my back in and I have to work in the morning.”

“Great,” I muttered, tempted to now fake an injury so I didn’t have to really help, but I wasn’t that type. I was raised to help someone when it was needed.

As I got further down the box; I found an old picture of mum and dad in happier days in a photo frame. Looking at mum in it, I realised that I couldn’t see a single bit of my father in me. I had mum’s almost forest looking green eyes, extremely pale skin complexion with a dusting of freckles, thin nose, pouty lips and auburn coloured hair that everyone thought I secretly dyed to get such a vivid red colour. It was freaky seeing so much of me in a younger looking mum. And that was just looks. I got her 5’5 feet in height, and basically no fat on me.

I knew that everyone thought I had an eating disorder of some sort to be so thin, but I didn’t. I just couldn’t put weight on.

“What are you looking at so intently?” she asked, looking over my shoulder.

The only difference was now in mum that she was older and had laugh lines and dressed for her age. When she saw what I was looking at made her eyes turn hard and tense up. I didn’t blame her.

“I forgot I even had that,” she said and went back to doing what she was doing, trying to forget the pain that the photo brought up.

“He left because I looked so much like you and there is nothing of him in me. He couldn’t handle that his daughter had more Clarkson genes in her than Morrison,” I stated and placed the photo back in the box, where it was going to stay.

“Your father doesn’t realise what he is missing out on now. He didn’t get to watch you grow up into a beautiful girl that you are now and he won’t have anything to do with grandchildren if you have any one day,” mum told me.

She turned her back and started on another box, but I wasn’t finished talking about this yet. Why did she still have this photo for after all these years? Did she still love him? Would she forgive him if he came

begging for a second chance? There were a lot of questions that I had, but I knew that I wasn't going to get a proper answer that I wanted.

"Then why don't you just burn it in the fireplace? You can save yourself from all the hurt and anger that he has caused you over the years and forget about him and everything that has happened with him. You can forget about the past," I said, staring at her back, but got no response from her.

I sighed, trying to find it in my heart to find some love for him, but I couldn't find it. There was another emotion I couldn't place. Anger or hurt. He was the one that missed out on all the good things in my life and was never going to see them again. Most things that I did involve my grandfather to support me. Saul Morrison wasn't my father in my eyes. He was nothing to me anymore.

"I try to find some sort of emotion inside me about him, but I can't. All I can feel is coldness towards him," I told her and clenched my fists.

"He is the one that is going to realise what a huge mistake he has made when it's too late for him to fix the problem. Anyway, you should finish up your room and get to bed. You have school in the morning and I want you refreshed in the morning, not looking like a corpse like you do today," mum said and walked towards the kitchen.

Gee, thanks for the self confidence boost. I really appreciate that.

"It's too late for him to fix the problem now. And I can't I have just one more day off school?" I asked and followed her into the room with a hopeful look on my face.

"Nice try Brianna," she said, smirking at my attempt of getting my way.

Grumbling to myself, I walked back up the hall and into my room. Most of my things were up in place within twenty minutes. A lot of my things were hand me downs, since we couldn't afford much as it was and I was grateful for the things I did have. It was a good thing mum took a job at the chemist in Colac. We needed money so we could save for other things.

After eleven o'clock, I made my way to bed, but I couldn't get to sleep. My mind was active and I was full of dread and worry for school. Since I was going to be the new girl, everyone was going to be in my

face, trying to make me feel welcome and seeing who can befriend the new girl first but not knowing what this redhead was capable of doing or the temper she unleashed when pushed enough. They were going to be all over me like Magpies swooping humans when protecting their young ones.

Morning came around fast and before I knew it, we were on the way to Colac. The whole drive, I looked out the window. I was in no mood to talk. The only time I became alert was when we pulled up to the school. Colac senior secondary college was a light grey brick building. It was two stories high with other buildings that extended out around it.

“Brianna, I know this isn’t going to make any difference but good luck today. I know that you will be fine,” mum said, her eyes tearing up.

“This reminds me of prep. You trying to hold it together for me and for you,” I said and tried to smile.

I didn’t know why I was getting so emotional for. It was just school. It wasn’t like I was leaving for university or something. Grabbing my school bag, I got out of the car and walked towards the main office. I was lucky that you could dress in plain clothes, and not have to wear a uniform. I don’t think I could have gotten use to a uniform for the whole school year.

When I walked into the room, everyone looked at me and started whispering. One thing I hated about small towns; they gossiped. It was like they had nothing better to do with their time. I approached the main desk, clearing my throat.

“Can I help you?” a woman asked at the desk, looking up from the computer monitor.

“I’m the new student that is meant to start here today and I was told to come to the office on my first day,” I said, hoping to jog something in her memory.

“Oh yes of course,” she said and started looking for something.

She handed me a bunch of books and a time table before calling over someone. She had light brown hair with brown eyes and a tan complexion and was a bit shorter than me and looked to be the same weight as me. She grabbed the strap of her school bag and held onto it.

“Hudson could you and I’m sorry, I didn’t catch your name,” she said

and looked at me.

“Brianna,” I told her.

“Could you show Brianna around today since she is in all your classes?”

“Sure,” she replied and looked at me.

I grabbed everything and walked over to the chairs so I could sort out everything so I wouldn’t be pulling my hair out come lunch time.

“So as you know I’m Hudson Mahoney. I’m sure that you have heard about me in Forrest by now,” she said, making me look at her.

“Actually, I haven’t. We only moved there yesterday and I haven’t had the chance to meet the locals or catch up on the local gossip,” I told her.

“Well, I can already see that we are going to be great friends,” Hudson said and smiled warmly at me.

We walked out of the office where she waved at someone. I glanced over before doing another take. The boy was breathtakingly beautiful. He looked about over six foot in height with a lean body. His skin was very pale and from the distance, I could tell that he had features that the girls in Hollywood would crave. How he didn’t have girls hanging off him, I didn’t know.

“Do you know him?” I asked Hudson.

“Yes and you will soon also. His name is Brandon Johnstone and we are currently dating,” she said. “Come on, we have classes soon and we don’t want to be late on your first day. That wouldn’t leave a good impression.”

Taking one last look behind me, I followed. Hudson showed me my locker, which was right next to hers. I looked around me to make sure that no one was close by and opened it up and placed everything inside of it. I didn’t need them knowing what things I had and didn’t have

“You are going to need your English book and pens,” Hudson said.

I nodded and grabbed what she told me. Walking to class, everyone was looking at me. I was started to feel intimidated. I didn’t like all the attention on me and I didn’t know how long it was going to last here.

“So, I hear that you are from Melton,” Hudson said, making small talk.

Well, it was good to know that I hadn't been here for twenty-four hours and already my life story was beginning to show.

"Yes I am."

"What does your father do?" she asked suddenly when we came to our class room.

Crap, was my first thought. How on earth was I meant to answer that? I didn't want anyone knowing about my father and I had planned on keeping it that way. But what made her ask that question? Was that gossip about my father not being around going through the town also?

"I really don't wish to talk about that," I said in a clipped tone.

I pushed open the door and walked inside the classroom. Some students were already there and didn't bother to look up when I entered the room. I noticed the teacher and could tell that she was beautiful. She looked up and I saw that she didn't have any aging lines or anything on her face. Her eyes were a pale blue that were welcoming. She was also wasn't very tall.

"You must be Brianna," the teacher said and walked up to me. "I'm Mrs. Franklin, but you can call me Aubrey."

I smiled and looked around for a spare seat. I didn't want to take someone else's by mistake.

"You can go take a seat next to Alexander as that is the only spare in the class," she said and walked back over to her desk, grabbing a piece of paper.

I was frozen solid in my place. Either I needed glasses or that was my cousin I was looking at. The blonde hair was the same and so was the face. He had my face as he got that feature from his mother. I placed my books down on the table, making him look up and open his mouth in shock when he realised that I was standing there.

"Brianna," he whispered in shock.

"Hello Alex," I said and sat down.

"What are you doing here? I thought Melton was the rage for you and that you had no plans on leaving?" he asked, still in shock that I was in front of him.

"Mum decided to buy a house in Forrest as the memories were starting to get the best of us so we left and you know that I have never

really had a say in stuff that involves this sort of stuff," I muttered.

"I take it that he still hasn't bothered to have a relationship with you yet?" he asked, already knowing what the answer would be.

"I believe that he is counting down until I am eighteen so he doesn't have to pay any more money to mum for me. He has missed everything that has happened in my life, so it's best if I stop trying to find him and just forget about it."

Mrs. Franklin clapped her hands to catch our attention. During my chat with Alex, the class filled up, except the empty seat next to where Hudson was sitting. Hudson kept on looking at the door, before narrowing her eyes and shaking her head. I had a feeling that it involved the person that sat next to her.

"Okay class, before we do anything today, we have a new student, Brianna so I expect all of you to treat her like you do with your fellow classmates and not any differently," she said and looked straight at me.

"That's you, my dear cousin," Alex whispered, earning himself a glare from me.

Everyone's attention was on me, making me slither down the chair until I had almost fell off it. Attention was not a strong point with me and it would never be. Hudson smiled at me in sympathy, but then shot a look to Alex basically telling him to back off and leave me alone. She didn't know that he was my cousin and wouldn't do anything to hurt me. This was going to be an interesting lunch break when it came up.

The classroom door opened and my mouth dropped open. A gorgeous teenage boy walked into the classroom. His skin was paler than mine but flawless, pouty lips with light honey coloured hair. He looked up from the ground and made eye contact with me. He had high cheek bones and light green eyes. They reminded me of emeralds. Another thing I noticed was that he was tall.

I felt my heart rate pick up and couldn't understand why. I mean, he was gorgeous, but why would that make my heart rate speed up? I looked at Alex and saw that his eyes were narrowed at this boy. Straight away I knew that Alex wasn't a fan of him and now I wanted to know why.

"Nathaniel, I am so glad that you finally could join us in learning but

you have missed the introductions and I have no plans on redoing them again to please you,” Mrs. Franklin said, glaring at him and crossing her arms.

“I don’t even want to hear them as you should know that they don’t hold any interest for me,” he muttered, glaring back at her.

He walked over to where Hudson was and sat next to her, but he never broke eye contact with me until he was seated. Hudson whispered something to him but quickly glanced over to where I was and turned her attention back onto Mrs. Franklin.

“Alright, I want you to take out a piece of paper and write down what you got up to in the holidays. You will be having an easy week this week until I throw you into the deep end starting next Monday,” she said, smirking when everyone but Nathaniel and I groaned.

“I hate when she does this,” Alex muttered.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because you can bet that she will have something up her sleeve that we all won’t like,” he replied, shaking his head.

I didn’t say anything in reply. I liked being challenged with things, not like my cousin. Sighing, I grabbed my pen and started writing. The bell rang an hour later, signalling that the class was over. As I was packing my things, Hudson got up from her seat with her bag and walked over, glaring at Alex.

“You couldn’t help yourself, could you Alex? Why don’t you just stay away from Brianna?” Hudson asked; her voice laced with venom.

“What are you talking about?” he asked.

“You know what I am talking about, so don’t you go playing dumb with me. Brianna doesn’t need you hovering and getting obsessive over her, so I wouldn’t even think about it,” she said, her eyes narrowing.

Had my cousin changed for the worst and I wasn’t aware of it? Or did she always do this when a new student had arrived? She didn’t know him like I did and basically didn’t have the right to judge.

“Hudson, Alex is my cousin,” I said, putting an end to this fight.

“What?” she asked.

“You heard what she said Hudson. I am her cousin and I do have a right to hover over her if I have to. It is my job to protect her and I will

be doing that, no matter what you say. No one can keep me away from my cousin.”

Hudson walked out of the classroom, leaving me alone with Alex. I grabbed my books and started to walk, Alex by my side.

“What was that?” I asked after a while.

“What was what?” he asked.

“What was that back in the classroom?”

“Brianna, I was just standing up to Hudson for my own sake. If she got her way, we wouldn’t be around each other while she was in the same room. She would stop it, thinking she was saving you from going down a dark path, but you already have.”

I stopped at my locker and yanked it open before looking at Alex. “How did Rachel raise you?” I asked.

My whole life, I had never heard Alex speak like that to anyone and never about me. All he told people was that I was his cousin and that was usually it. I didn’t know if Rachel had said anything and he was listening to her.

“My mother raised me fine thank you very much.”

Rolling my eyes, I placed my books in the locker and grabbed my school bag, before shutting it and turning to walk away, but I hit something hard. I grabbed onto Alex for support and looked up. Looking down at me was another beautiful boy. How many were there in this school? He had sandy blonde hair and dark blue eyes that laced amusement in them. He was tall also, but not as tall as Nathaniel and his features weren’t as full.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I was in my own world and didn’t even see you,” I said, trying not to fall to a puddle of goo on the floor.

“It’s quite alright. I just happened to look over and see a very beautiful girl standing here with this idiot and had to introduce myself before she got away,” the good looking man said.

“James, quit flirting with my cousin, Brianna. Amylia would have your neck for it if she was here today and saw you doing that,” Alex said and smirked.

“I can handle Amylia,” James said, looking at my cousin.

“Why do I have a feeling that you both are trouble when in the

same room?" I asked suddenly.

James looked at me and smirked before looking at Alex. "She is very smart."

"She's a Clarkson. We figure things out very quickly."

"Well, as much as I would love to stay and talk, I have a break that I wish to enjoy. James, it was nice meeting you and Alex...just...forget it," I muttered and walked away.

I pushed open the door and stopped when I noticed a boy with bleach blonde hair looking straight at me. He was looking at me like I was his prize that he had won. Great, that's what I needed; a stalker and on my first day, too. He started to approach me and his brown eyes looked dirty, but it was just the colour of them. It matched his creepiness

"Hello," he said, stopping in front of me.

"Hi," I said, unsure of what he even wanted.

"I haven't had a chance to introduce myself. My name is Jason and saw you all alone and thought that you might have wanted some company."

"Brianna, and I'm sorry, but I have to go," I said and tried to walk away from him, but he wouldn't let me as he grabbed onto my arm.

My skin felt like it was crawling from Jason's touch and I didn't like it at all. I looked down and forced myself not to shudder from his touch. That wouldn't have been a good thing, and he might have taken it the wrong way.

"Why? Are you in a hurry?" he asked, not giving up.

"Of course I am," I muttered.

"Well, that's a pity. I'll see you around beautiful," he said and walked away.

Something about him gave me the creeps. Hudson walked over to me with; I believed to be Brandon, behind her. She looked over towards Jason and glared.

"Stay away from Jason Hargreaves. He isn't someone that you would want in your life for any reason," Hudson said and looked at me.

"He came up to me," I said, feeling offended that she thought I would have gone up to someone like that.

“Hudson, let the girl breathe,” Brandon said, crossing his arms.

I looked at him and half smiled, trying to gauge his reaction on me, since I was new and wasn’t sure that he even liked me. He looked me up and down before muttering something to Hudson and walked away.

“Don’t worry about Brandon. He isn’t too sure about you at the moment because you are new here at the moment,” Hudson said.

“Does he think I am going to murder you or something?”

“You’re the new kid whose father no one has seen. Everyone is a bit jumpy.”

“Oh, so everyone is judging me because they haven’t seen my father? Well, for your information and you can pass this along to everyone else also, I haven’t seen my father for a very long time, since I was eighteen months old,” I said in a calm voice.

“Why didn’t you just say that in the first place?” she asked.

“Because it’s none of your business to know where my father is or not, I don’t want anyone knowing anything because I don’t want questions fired at me all the time,” I replied and walked away, leaving her standing there.

I walked down to the football oval and sat down on the grass. I pulled my knees up to my chest and sighed. I should have just done home schooling and been done with it. I didn’t need the stress from everyone and this wasn’t going to help my mood at all. James looked over to where I was and walked over to where I was sitting.

“I thought it was you sitting here alone Brianna,” he said, making me look up.

“Who else would it be?” I asked in a dead tone.

He sat down next to me, looking concerned. If he was putting on the niceness for more information about me and my life, he wasn’t getting anything. He did look concerned for me though, so maybe he did care and wasn’t acting.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“Do I look it? I haven’t even been here for twenty-four hours and everyone wants the gossip on me,” I said, feeling frustrated and upset that everything about me couldn’t be left alone.

“We had that problem when we moved here also. They are like

leeches that want to suck your blood all because they want to know everything about you,” James told me.

“How did you put up with it?” I asked and sniffed, trying to fight back the water works that wanted to break free. “Because I am ready to hurt the next person that has something to say about my life or at least scream,” I finished.

“We ignored them and now all but three people are still trying to make our lives a living hell and one of them has already spoken to you. I can tell whatever they want to know and saying is upsetting you,” James said and wiped away a tear that fell. “Don’t let them get to you and don’t ever let them break you. That is what they want to see Brianna. They want to see the vulnerable side of you so they have something to bully you about.”

His skin was cold, but it wasn’t enough to make me shiver. It wasn’t a cold day though, so why would he be cold? I decided to let it go and didn’t say anything. I took a shaky breath and didn’t say anything for a while.

“All I want is a friend that won’t want to know everything about what happened in my past and why I won’t tell anyone because I don’t want them knowing everything about me but that will never happen,” I said and looked down at the grass.

“Brianna, you do. I’m your friend, though I hardly know you, I still care about you even though I have only known you since this morning, and Alex would kill me if I did something bad to you and mind you, he fights like a girl sometimes,” he said, making me laugh.

“That’s my cousin for you.”

There was something about James that made me feel I could trust him. It was like he sent off this calming vibe, but I couldn’t understand why though. Sighing, I got off the ground, and turned around to look at James.

“I’ll see you around,” I said and walked away.

I stopped walking and turned around, seeing that James was still sitting where I left him. I cleared my throat, making him look up from the ground. “James, thank you for caring about me,” I said, earning a smile off him.

“You’re welcome, Brianna.”

I kept my head down as I walked towards the classrooms, hoping that no one would pay any attention to me. When I got back inside, Brandon was waiting at my locker. What did he want? He must have sensed that I was approaching as he turned and looked at me, standing still in my spot. I walked over and didn’t look at him.

“Hello,” he said and gave me a tight lip smile.

“Are you here to judge me like usual?” I asked and looked at him.

“You are as feisty as your cousin said you were,” he snapped.

He was getting on my nerves and I really didn’t want to lose my temper. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, then reopening them.

“Listen glamour boy, just tell me what you want because if you are here to annoy me, don’t even bother about it,” I snapped, glaring back at him.

“No Brianna. I just want you to know that I am protective of Hudson and if I came across judgemental, I am sorry,” he said.

“Did Hudson set you up to this?” I asked and crossed my arms.

“What makes you think that?” he asked.

“Why else would you say sorry for? It isn’t like that you would come up to me for no reason and apologize. There has to be a motive behind this.”

“I can be nice when I want to be.”

“Look, is there a reason why you are here for? I thought I would be too plain for your liking and too secretive,” I said and opened my locker, pretending that I was looking for something when I clearly wasn’t.

I just didn’t want to look him in the eye.

“Brianna, I want to be your friend for Hudson’s sake. You are the only person that she has to class as a friend besides the Pryor’s and I don’t want to ruin that for the woman I love,” he said and looked down towards the floor.

I laughed to myself and cleared my throat, catching his attention again before shaking my head and speaking. “I guess we can try for Hudson, but I am not holding any promises.”

“Neither am I,” he said and smirked. “So you are from Melton?”

“I thought my dear cousin would have filled you in on all that by

now,” I replied.

“Alexander really hasn’t said a lot about you. He has been secretive. When someone asked a question about you when we all found out that you were coming here, as we had questions, but he never really gave us an answer and now I can understand why. You don’t like people knowing about you or anything about you. It’s like you are hiding something that you don’t want anyone knowing.”

I stopped stiff and looked Brandon in the eye. “You make me sound like I am the wicked witch of Colac and Forrest for having secrets,” I replied.

“Leave that to Augusta. Once she gets wind that you are the interest of the day, and she hasn’t yet, she will unleash her Tornado of fury and I will tell you this now, it isn’t a pretty sight to be around when she does.”

Hudson came up and looked between us with a glint in her eye. She grabbed Brandon’s hand and smiled at me. I smiled back before looking at Brandon.

“I see that you both are getting along?” she asked in a happy tone.

“Hudson,” a cold, icy voice said behind Brandon.

They both looked at each other with the same look of hatred in their eyes. This must have been someone they didn’t like. I shut my locker and leaned against it.

“Augusta, what do you want? Haven’t you caused enough pain and trouble in my life without adding to it?” Hudson asked and turned around to face her.

I stood behind Hudson so I could get a look at this Augusta. Her hair was black as midnight, her skin, covered in white foundation that you could actually see under the lights to try and fit in with someone, but I didn’t know who. And her eyes were ice blue and held a glare towards Hudson and myself, but not towards Brandon. That was strange.

She was just a bit taller than I was, but was clearly intimidating and vain towards most people. The look in her eye was murderous. The words if looks could kill sprung to mind and if that was true, both Hudson and I would be dead.

“What are you doing with this new person?” she asked, raising her eyebrows.

“Being nice; that is something you wouldn’t know how to do,” Hudson replied. “By the way, the black clothes match your black heart and stone soul.”

“Brandon, I haven’t seen you around for a long time. I thought you would have moved on from the plain Hudson Mahoney by now and find someone else that will suit you, like me,” Augusta said in a sickly sweet voice.

I looked at Hudson with questions in my eyes, but hers were glued onto Augusta. I started to wonder to myself if this was the reason they didn’t get along. It seemed like she tried to move in on every guy in the school. Straight away, I felt sorry for James and this Amylia that I hadn’t met.

“Augusta, you know that I am in love with Hudson and nothing is going to change that,” Brandon said.

“Honey, you are still only young. You wouldn’t know what love is...unless you went out with me, of course. I could and would show you a good time. I don’t have values like she does,” she said and placed her hand on Brandon’s arm.

I grabbed onto Hudson’s arm to stop her from killing her in the middle of the school hall, and I wanted to do the same thing and I didn’t even know this person. I removed my hand from her arm and looked at her.

“Are you going to be okay by yourself?” I asked Hudson in a quiet voice.

“I will try not to hurt her, but I want to pull those hair extensions out of her head one by one just to see her in pain for once and not causing it,” she said through gritted teeth.

I nodded and walked away, going back to my locker before heading off to finish the rest of my break before lunch time. As I walked outside, Alex came running up to me, almost knocking me over onto my back and making me drop my school bag onto the floor.

“Where’s the fire?” I exclaimed and grabbed my bag.

“Am I not allowed being excited to see my cousin?” he asked and pouted like the child he was at heart.

“You saw me this morning when I arrived, Alexander.”

“Which, I didn’t even know that you were moving to Forrest until I saw you before. Did mum know about it?” Alex asked.

I sighed and rubbed my temples, hoping to ease some of the throbbing that started to form with Alex’s game of twenty questions.

“No, Aunty Rachel did not know that we found a house until mum told her last night over the phone,” I replied and crossed my arms, waiting for the rest of his questions.

“I have more questions for you another day to answer, Brianna Christina,” Alex said, smirking at the look I gave him.

“Ok Alexander Tyler,” I shot back, earning a glare from him.

The bell rang, signalling that it was almost lunch time. Alex went off in a different direction while I slowly made my way to the lunch room. I was looking down at the ground when I walked into someone. I looked up and was face to face with Nathaniel. He was even more beautiful close up.

I noticed that he was slightly muscular and when I looked into his eyes, they were cold, hard and extremely unfriendly towards me. I was tempted to take a step back, but I couldn’t move from the spot I was in.

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t paying any attention to where I was going,” I said, hoping to break through some of his icy exterior.

“Just stay out of my way and look where you are going next time,” Nathaniel said in a harsh tone and walked away from me.

I turned around and looked at his retreating form, speechless. Is that how he spoke to everyone? I slowly walked away and shook my head. I would have to ask Hudson about that later on. When I made my way into the lunch area, I saw Hudson and Brandon already sitting at the table, looking towards the door. Hudson got up and smiled when she saw me walk into the room. I placed my school bag on the floor and smiled back, hoping that it wasn’t a grimace.

“We were starting to think that you got lost or something since you are new,” Hudson said, earning a smile of Brandon.

“Ha-ha I didn’t get lost, but thank you for your concern. I ran into my cousin outside and had a not so nice meeting with Nathaniel in the hall way before making my way over here in one piece surprisingly,” I said, grabbing Brandon’s attention.

“What happened with Nathaniel?” he asked, his grey coloured eyes showing interest for a change.

“I ran into Nathaniel by mistake as I was on my way here, and he spoke harshly to me. Told me to stay out of his way and to watch where I was going. I just don’t understand what I could have done to earn such a cold response off him,” I said and leaned back into my chair.

“Speak of the devil and he shall appear,” Hudson muttered and looked over my shoulder.

I turned around and saw Nathaniel walk in with James. They both looked over to where we were, before picking a table near us. I automatically looked the other way so I didn’t have to see Nathaniel’s hard, cold stare again. That was something that would get etched into my mind permanently

“Don’t worry about him. He sometimes gets like that, and for all you know, he could be nice next time you speak to him and might apologize for lashing out like that,” Brandon said and grabbed Hudson’s hand.

“I don’t really have plans on speaking to him again if he is going to be like that towards me all the time. I don’t like being treated like dirt when I haven’t done anything wrong,” I said and looked down to the bare spot on the table.

Throughout the whole lunch break, I could feel Nathaniel’s hard and cold glare on me. I fought the urge to look at him and ended up winning. Hudson ended up looking over at him and glared, making him look at James. In the end, I got up and grabbed my school bag, catching the attention of both tables. I didn’t want to be around this environment any longer than I had to be. It was starting to make me feel unhappy.

“Where are you going?” Hudson asked.

“I need some air,” I said and started walking away.

“What about your lunch though, even though you didn’t get anything?” Brandon asked.

“I lost my appetite,” I said back, looking over my shoulder at him

“You and your hostile reception, Nathaniel. You will never learn, will you?” I heard Hudson say.

“Why are you blaming me for? Why do I have to be nice for when I don’t even know the girl? I mean, for all I know, she could throw herself

at me like every other girl in the school and I don't want that from someone else," I heard him say, in a husky voice that held anger.

I stopped walking and turned around, making Nathaniel look towards me. Hudson crossed her arms and bit her lip, while Brandon glared at Nathaniel.

"You don't need to talk like I am not in the room, when you clearly knew I was still in hearing range and for your information, I had no plans on throwing myself at you. I don't even know you so why would I want to do that? I'm not even that type of girl. I should have just stayed in Melton and none of this would be happening right now," I said and walked away, not bothering to hear what his response was.

As I went outside, I felt like I was being followed. I turned around and noticed that Jason was there, smiling at me, like he was up to something. He must have followed me out here, as he was inside when I left. He was giving me a bad feeling.

"What do you want?" I asked, not caring that my tone wasn't friendly. I didn't even want to talk to him.

"I couldn't help but hear that you and Nathaniel had clashed twice in one day. I thought I should tell you that you shouldn't hang around Nathaniel, his family or Hudson and Brandon. They are trouble and think that they are better than everyone else and I wouldn't want you to fall into the trap they have set of lies and betrayal," Jason said and got into my personal space and grabbing a strand of hair that was around my face. "You have beautiful red hair and lovely green eyes. They remind of the forest."

"Thanks," I replied and looked away from his greedy eyes.

He was starting to freak me out even more. During the clash in the lunch room, we had spoken quiet so no one would be able to hear us or make a fuss and yet Jason had known about it. The lunch room door opened and Augusta walked outside. She looked over to where we were and smirked at Jason, but glared at me. I then knew that she had told him that I left the room and that gave him a chance of getting his claws into me.

Or hoping he could brain wash me into joining a cult or his group of friends, who I hadn't even met and didn't plan on either.

“Is there something you want, Jason? Or do you just like wasting my time and energy talking to you when I really don’t want to?” I asked, hoping to insult him and give him the hint that I wasn’t interested in him one bit.

“How about we go somewhere more private and talk without any interruptions?” he suggested and smirked, completely ignoring what I just said.

This was just great. First I had Augusta sending death stares my way throughout most of the day, Nathaniel being cold and hostile towards me, but now I had Jason Hargreaves to deal with. I did not want a stalker at my age.

“No thank you. I am happy right here,” I said and tried to walk away from him, but he wouldn’t let me as he grabbed my arm.

He didn’t even know me and it seemed like he was obsessed with me. And that frightened me. I needed to plan things a lot better from now on so I didn’t meet Jason face to face all the time.

“Jason, what are you doing with the red head, Brianna?” I heard Augusta ask in her cold voice and walked up to us

I looked at her and noticed that she was looking smug about something. Whatever it was, I didn’t want to know. She whispered something into Jason’s ear making him nod and walk away, leaving me alone with her. Her smugness had something to do with me. She knew something that I didn’t want her knowing.

“So, everyone is wondering why your father isn’t around,” she started. “What is the reason for that?”

“You don’t need to know that. How do I know that you won’t spread it around the school?”

“Alright, you listen to me, pasty skin. I don’t like you and I don’t want you hanging around Jason, me or my boyfriend Daniel and Nathaniel because if you do not listen, I will make your life a living hell,” she told me.

“Is that a threat?” I asked.

“Damn straight it is and also, I know why your father isn’t around. He couldn’t deal with the fact that you looked like your mother and fled when you were eighteen months old and that you haven’t had any con-

tact since and you don't want anyone knowing about it. It was like he doesn't love you because he doesn't. I wouldn't want that getting around and ruining your life in Forrest and everything you have built with your mother, would we?" she asked, raising a perfectly waxed eyebrow at me.

Augusta was trying to ruin everything and I was only new in this town. If she told anyone what she knew about my father, I wouldn't be able to handle all the questions thrown at me and it would be the same for my mother. She smirked, happy with what she had done and walked away, shoving me out of the way in the process. I felt a tear run down my cheek and wiped it away, but more followed. I turned around and saw Nathaniel standing there, looking at me with hard eyes until he saw my tears.

I turned on my heel and walked away, not wanting anyone to see the vulnerable side of me. I spotted Alex and walked over to him, not caring that he was with someone else, but I needed to talk to my cousin. He was too busy talking to another teenage boy to notice that I was behind him.

"Alex," I said, making him turn around to look at me.

"Brianna, don't you know how to wait until I have finished speaking?" He asked; annoyed until he saw what state I was in. "What happened?"

"I need to talk to you alone," I said, ignoring everyone else.

He grabbed my hand and led me away from them, explaining that he would be back. He waited until we were out of everyone's hearing range before stopping and looking at me with concern in his eyes.

"Okay, what happened?"

"I haven't even been here for two days and Augusta has already threatened me and she knows," I said.

"What does she know?" he asked.

"About my father; she knows the real reason why he left and I don't know why she does. I don't want it getting around and the only way she won't say anything is if I stop hanging around everyone, including Nathaniel, Jason and her boyfriend, whom I haven't met. How did she find out about my father?" I asked, getting frantic with every word.

Alex placed his hands on my shoulders and told me to take deep breaths. Once I was calm enough and wasn't going to faint from lack of air, I told him to start talking.

"She is going to try and manipulate you into doing things her way, so she can try and take Nathaniel and she doesn't want you hanging around her group as you don't have much money to your name. Because no one knows much about you, she wants to find out everything and expose it, causing maximum damage so she can get what she wants and making you want to curl up into a hole and die," Alex told me.

"So she only has the time for people who have money?" I asked.

He nodded and waved someone over. A boy with black hair and grey blue eyes came over and looked me up and down. I crossed my arms and waited for someone to start speaking. There was no way I was starting this conversation. I was slowly getting sick of getting my head ripped off for no reason.

"Daniel Delamare, meet my cousin, Brianna Morrison-Clarkson. She is currently your girlfriend, Augusta Nicholson's, rival for doing nothing but minding her own business like Brianna usually does," Alex said.

"How can you put up with someone as cold and heartless as Augusta?" I asked.

"I don't see her enough to see the trouble that she causes. She is too busy trying to cause trouble between Hudson and Brandon and with every other couple in the school. Oh, and trying to impress Nathaniel Norwood-Pryor but that hasn't worked which is good," Daniel said.

I nodded and looked at Alex before walking away, hopefully trying to beat the bell. I got to the music room with five minutes to spare. I knocked and opened the door to see an empty classroom and a teacher setting everything up. He looked up and over to where I was standing.

"Oh hello," he said and walked up to me.

"Hi, is this the right room for music?" I asked.

"Yes of course. I am Joseph Franklin, your music teacher," he said and held out his hand.

"Brianna Morrison-Clarkson," I replied and shook it, ignoring the coldness of it.

The door opened and both James and Nathaniel walked into the

room. James came up to me and smiled, while Nathaniel kept his distance from us, or from me. I couldn't tell.

Mr. Franklin placed me with James and Nathaniel until he could find someone else to place me with in this class. James was talkative, but Nathaniel wasn't. He stayed quiet the whole time and only spoke when James asked him something, totally ignoring me. It was like I was invisible to him and I couldn't understand why. At one stage I looked over towards Nathaniel and saw that he was looking straight at me. Our eyes locked and he quickly looked away.

"Nathaniel, you are meant to be helping us, not staring at Brianna for ten minutes straight. I know that she is a beautiful girl, but some help would be nice so we can pass this subject," James said.

"James, I am not in the mood for you or your insults so just leave it alone for once in your life," Nathaniel said in his husky voice and glared directly towards him.

"And I don't want to hear any more of your sulking or your PMS because mother won't be happy when I tell her about the day you are having today and how you spoke to the new girl also. You know how she likes us to treat people with respect and not the way you are right now so you will be in big trouble off her and off Jack," James retorted back.

I looked between the two of them, but didn't say anything. I didn't want a lecture from Nathaniel after Augusta ruined my day and was going to try and ruin the rest of them or die trying. All I just wanted to do was go home and hope that tomorrow was going to be a better day. The bell rang, signalling that it was time to leave the school grounds. I got up and grabbed my bag before noticing that everyone had rushed to the door in a hurry. I hung back and waited for the rush to even out. James and Nathaniel stood next to me, doing the same.

"So what did you think of your first day here?" James asked me and smiled warmly at me.

"Different to what I expected," I replied and smiled back at him.

"So in other words, not enough drama," James replied and looked at Nathaniel with a hard glare.

"Too much for my liking; I like to keep to myself and not being the centre of attention, but I am here and then there is the trouble with

Augusta that she obviously wants to start causing for me and some other things that are starting to happen to add to my drama laced first day at this school,” I said, trying not to look at Nathaniel.

James nodded and placed a hand on my shoulder for comfort. I could tell that James was going to be a good friend towards me, but I didn’t want that. For some strange reason, I wanted Nathaniel to like me more than James. I had never felt that urge before and it freaked me out. And I didn’t want to throw myself at him as I wasn’t that kind of girl. I would leave that to Augusta and some of the other girls in this school.

“You will get use to Augusta and her schemes after a while, but it will take you a long time,” Nathaniel said to me since our issue in the lunch room.

“I hope so. I don’t think I would be able to handle her and trying to stay sane at the same time. It’s hard enough without her helping,” I replied and walked out of the classroom, leaving them standing there, staring holes into my back.

Alex was talking to some girl when I walked outside and I could tell by the look on his face, he had strong feelings for her. Making sure my school bag wasn’t going to fall off, I started walking into town. Hudson and Brandon quickly caught up to me and decided to walk with me.

“What was with Nathaniel today? Is he always like that to everyone that he crosses?” I asked after a minute of silence.

“Well, after you left the room, we had a discussion and Nathaniel left halfway through it and didn’t come back. James followed him and said that he was saying something about Brianna, tears and Augusta, but he couldn’t place the rest so he left him in his own thoughts. If James pushed Nathaniel, it wouldn’t have ended well for either of them,” Hudson said.

“Augusta threatened me and Nathaniel saw me in tears from it. That’s what he must have been saying when James got to him but I don’t know why it would bother him for. It’s not like he cares about me or anything, especially after the way he spoke to me in the hall,” I said.

Hudson raised her eyebrows and shot Brandon a look, thinking that I would miss it, but I didn’t. It was obvious they knew a lot more about

Nathaniel and why he was acting like that with James then they were letting on. I let it pass and decided not to say anything about it. I don't think they would tell me if I asked anyway. They were secretive about certain things and Nathaniel would be no different. They would protect their friend and his secrets.

"Don't worry about Augusta, Brianna. She is always trying to manipulate people, and she sees you as someone that will be easy as you are new and don't have anyone to protect you, like I do with Brandon, but then that doesn't even stop her making my life a living hell also. You saw what she did before, trying to steal Brandon and everyone else's boyfriend who has beauty and a lot of money so it would raise her profile at school and fund her spending habit for expensive things that is running her father into the ground. The only thing Augusta cares about is wealth, being selfish and getting everything that she could ever want, not caring about the trail of bodies that is left behind in her wake," Hudson said.

Brandon wrapped an arm around my shoulder and grabbed Hudson's hand. That I wasn't expecting. I soon realised why he did it. Jason, Daniel and Augusta walked past us, but didn't say anything to us as they walked past.

The day slowly went by and both Hudson and Brandon waited with me until mum had finished work. I saw her approach us, which made me, get up from where I was sitting.

"Hello honey," mum said and hugged me.

She pulled back and looked at Hudson and Brandon with questions in her eyes. I don't think she was expecting me to bring anyone to keep me company and it shocked her. She looked at me with questions in her eyes, but I shook my head, not wanting to explain anything just yet.

"Mum, this is Hudson and Brandon," I said, making the introduction. "This is my mum Marie."

Hudson said hello, but Brandon didn't say anything. His mouth had dropped open and was looking between mum and myself. Hudson waved a hand in front of his face, knocking him out of his own world.

"You are both identical," he breathed. "You can tell that Brianna is your daughter as I can see where she gets her beauty from."

“Thank you,” mum said, flattered from this young boy. No wonder Hudson fell for him.

“Why don’t you say things like that to me anymore?” Hudson asked and crossed her arms, raising an eyebrow at him.

“Hudson, you know that you are very beautiful in my eyes,” Brandon said, trying to get out of Hudson’s anger.

The look on Hudson’s face made me laugh to myself on the inside so they wouldn’t hear. Hudson rolled her eyes and crossed her arms, huffing, making Brandon whisper something in her ear. Whatever he said made her happy as she smiled.

I bid my farewells and walked to the car with mum. As we made our way back to Forrest, I noticed Nathaniel in the street with who I assumed to be Chase. Nathaniel looked up and locked eyes with me again. He had a look on his face that I couldn’t place, but I couldn’t get past his changing moods. It was like he had a personality disorder or something. It was strange.

While on the drive back home, I slipped into my own world of thinking about Nathaniel. He was a very attractive teenager and he was someone that I could easily see myself starting a relationship and falling in love with; besides the cold natured vibe he gave off to me and the fact that he seemed judgemental in the process. Maybe he was just protecting himself from something, but what and why?

“Brianna, are you alright? You aren’t your usual self and that is not normal,” mum asked, snapping me out of my thinking.

She only asked me things like that when I wasn’t talking and the quiet got on her nerves. I had two choices. I could lie to her and say it’s nothing, or tell her that I clashed with a few of the students. I picked the second one, knowing that if I picked the first one, it would come back to bite me and I didn’t want that.

“Just thinking about someone I met at school before and that how I am not going to fit into this school like I did with my last one. I should have just left or just did home schooling to save my mind from all of these thoughts that are starting to run through it,” I said my tone flat.

“What happened?” she asked, worry lacing her voice.

“I met someone named Nathaniel Norwood-Pryor today and you

could say that we didn't get along," I said, leaving out the part with Augusta and her knowing about my father. Mum didn't need the extra stress from her making my life a living hell.

"I work with his father, Jack Pryor and he seemed very nice, so I can't understand why Nathaniel would be so cold for. I mean, Jack told me during lunch that his daughters, Amylia and Dakota are always giving to charity or doing something nice for charities, while his sons, Chase, James *and* Nathaniel are friendly and helpful when they have to be, but they don't get close to anyone. Unless there something was on Nathaniel's nerves and he took it out on you by mistake is the only thing I can think of. He could apologise to you tomorrow for all you know," mum told me.

"The only one out of that family that took the time to talk to me and make me feel welcome was James and that might have been because he is friends with Alexander and felt that he had to befriend me because of Alex. For all I know, Alexander could have told James to befriend me so I wouldn't be alone or something crazy like that," I said and crossed my arms.

Mum didn't say anymore after that and left me in my own world to think. The night went fast and by the time I got to bed, I was mentally exhausted, but not physically. I spent most of the night wide awake thinking. I didn't know what to expect from Nathaniel at school. I didn't know if he was going to be icy and cold, or nice and warm. For all I knew, he could avoid me or pretend that I didn't even exist in his world. I could just become a shadow hiding in the corner and he still wouldn't notice anything. I was nothing but an annoyance in his eyes at the moment and that was something I wanted to change.

"Why is Nathaniel making me feel like this and I don't even know him enough to stir up these feelings and emotions inside of me?" I asked aloud, wanting the silence to give me an answer to the question, but knowing that it wouldn't and couldn't.

An unopened box in the corner of my room caught my attention. I grabbed it and ripped off the tape and looked inside of it. Gasping aloud, I pulled out a photo of me and my father from when I was born and looked at it. The emotion in his face showed that he didn't even

love me as a newborn baby. It looked like he was only holding me because he had to for the photo and that if it wasn't taken, he wouldn't have bothered. He would have left the work for someone else to do when it came time for him to do something. I flipped the frame over and opened it up from the back and pulled the photo out.

I just stared at it for a good five minutes, thinking about what I could do with it and stopping it from reminding me about all the pain and hurt this man was putting me and my family through.

Time for closure, I thought to myself and ripped it up into a thousand tiny pieces before placing it into my bin next to the desk. It didn't even make me feel any better like I had hoped it would. The anger and hurt still ran through my veins and stabbed into my heart like it was a shard of glass. The pain my father caused both my mother and I wasn't going to heal, and even if it did, it was going to take a long time for it to go and leave us alone. It had haunted us in Melton and it had followed us here. And it always felt like it was my fault that it happened in the first place. I had always thought that maybe if I wasn't born, none of this would be happening.

It was just like a ghost that had followed or haunted someone and didn't want to leave them alone. Even if my father thought about entering our lives and tried to make us act like a happy family, it wasn't going to work. There was too much pain and not enough trust from either of us. And besides, my mother would have to be crazy to take him back after everything that he has done to us.

I looked over at my alarm clock, squinting at the brightness from it. Four in the morning and I was still wide awake. I tucked a piece of hair behind my ear and sighed. The moon was shining through my bedroom window, making me walk over to it and look at it. It helped me stop thinking about Nathaniel and my father, but I had no clue how I was going to cope at school half asleep, since I was still wide awake and did not like this current situation I was in one little bit.

But what I did know was that Augusta wouldn't want to have spread or told anyone anything about my father, but I couldn't trust her. She seemed to be controlling and basically, pure evil who didn't care about whom or what she hurt to get what she wanted. That would have been

the breaking the point for me and my mother once she found out about it. I didn't want any more pain than I had already, especially caused by the witch of Colac and Forrest, Augusta Nicholson and her wicked ways.

2. Friends

I sat hunched over on a bench, trying to hide away from everyone.

I just wanted to be invisible for a change.

It wasn't going to work. Everyone kept on looking over towards me, wanting to know the new girl or to see what they could get out of me, making me feel intimidated and small. I saw a pair of feet appear in front of me, making me look up. Nathaniel stood there in his usual black dress code and attractive beauty. The look on his face told me that he didn't want to be around me, but had no choice.

"Hello Brianna," Nathaniel spoke and sat next to me.

"I thought you don't like new people or at least don't talk to them and treat them like dirt?" I asked and looked over towards him.

He narrowed his eyes at me and took a few deep breaths. I could tell that he still wasn't a fan of me, but why was he talking to me for? Did someone set him up to talk to me or did he have a change of heart?

"I thought that I better be nice to you for Hudson's sake as I have no other intention to talk to you," he said, making me get up.

"Well, when you have the time and the energy to be nice to me on your own accord, let me know then because right now, I don't want nothing to do with you," I seethed and tried to leave but he grabbed my arm, stopping me.

I ripped my arm out of his grip and started walking. My lack of sleep hadn't put me in the best mood, and Nathaniel had made it that bit

sourer. I heard Nathaniel call my name, but I didn't respond back. I just wanted to be left alone and it seemed like I wasn't going to get my wish today. I never got my wish on any day.

"Brianna, can we please just talk?" Nathaniel asked behind me, making me grind to a halt.

I spun around and looked the pale skin, honey coloured hair, emerald green eyed god square in the eye. He took a step back when he saw I wasn't playing friendly. "Why do you want to talk for Nathaniel? I have had enough already and I don't need you adding to it, making it worse," I said and waited for him to start speaking.

"Look, I know that we haven't got off to the best of terms and that my temper got the best of me yesterday twice and I am sorry for that, but you need to understand something," he said and got close to me.

"And what's that?" I asked.

"You are getting to close to Hudson for my liking and I want you to back off because we know nothing about you and I don't you hurting anyone in my circle, especially Hudson," he hissed.

"You actually think I am going to hurt *her*? What about the fact I am on Augusta's wanted list of lives' to ruin? What about the fact that I had no plans on getting close to anyone here to save myself from more hurt, and more pain that I am already going through? So if you think I am going to hurt Hudson or anyone for that fact, you are dead wrong as it is me that always ends up with the broken heart and being hurt without everyone realising that they are doing it, until it is too late for me to forgive them," I said through clenched teeth.

Nathaniel looked blankly at me after I finished that. It seemed like he didn't expect me to fire back at him. I shook my head and walked past him, leaving him standing there. I walked over to where Hudson was. She took one look over at me before running over.

"What happened?" she asked and pulled me in for a hug.

I couldn't answer her. If I opened my mouth, I would have started crying and I didn't want that happening again. I didn't want to be weak or seem like I was. I wanted to be strong like I had been raised my whole life. Hudson pulled back and looked at me and I couldn't help the wave of emotions that came over me that time. I started crying softly, making

her start to rub my back and try and calm me down.

“Talk to me Brianna,” she whispered and led me over to where I previously sitting. “What happened?”

I looked at her and turned my eyes onto Nathaniel, who was standing behind her with a cold look on his face. Hudson did the same and realised that he caused this. Her eyes narrowed and became hard towards him.

“Nathaniel said that I was getting to close to you and that I needed to back off because I haven’t told no one nothing about me and that I would hurt someone in his circle of friends,” I said, my voice breaking.

“If he knew better and he usually does, he would have said nothing like that to you. I know for a fact that you won’t hurt me because I trust you and we are friends after all. I am more worried about saying something that will hurt you by mistake,” Hudson told me.

“You know, I had thought that today would have been a better day, but it isn’t. In fact, it is a living nightmare that I didn’t want to happen,” I muttered and got up.

Hudson did the same and looked back over to Nathaniel, who was talking to Brandon. “Stay here,” she told me and walked over to them.

Sighing, I crossed my arms and slowly started to walk the other way so I could hopefully go into hiding. I made my way to the girls’ bathroom and pushed opened the door, seeing that I was alone. I caught my reflection in the mirror and saw that I looked like death. I should have just stayed home. The door opened and Hudson walked in. She looked at me, but didn’t say anything.

“What?” I asked.

“Are you going to be able to go to class or are you going to ditch until you feel better?” she asked.

“Hudson, you can go. I am just going to stay here until I calm down a bit more, but tell Mrs. Franklin that I will be late,” I said and turned around so I didn’t have to look at her.

“What am I going to tell Nathaniel when he sees me? You do know that we sit together in class for the time being.”

“Crap. I totally forgot about Alex. He is going to worry about me,” I said, remembering my cousin when she mentioned Nathaniel’s name.

“I will talk to Alex about what happened. I still can’t get over that he is your cousin. Alex is going to be so angry once I tell him about what happened.”

I turned around and looked at her. What did she mean by that Alex would be angry about what happened? Hudson had a smirk on her face, but didn’t say anything. “What do you mean Alex will be so angry for?” I asked.

“Alexander and Nathaniel don’t get along. They haven’t like each other since the Pryor’s first moved here. Nathaniel thought Alex was a rebel, while Alex thought Nathaniel was a spoilt brat and they haven’t got along since.”

Would Nathaniel be treating me the way he was because of Alex? Did he really think that I was the same as my cousin? Hudson walked out of the bathroom, leaving me in my own thoughts. I screamed in frustration, before grabbing my school bag and walked out of the bathroom, stalking back towards the building.

Hudson wasn’t anywhere to be seen when I entered. I walked over to the classroom and opened the door. Mrs. Franklin looked up and relief shot across her face when she saw me standing there. I looked at Nathaniel and noticed that he wasn’t looking at me. He was looking at the table, gripping it with his bare hands. If he gripped it any harder, it looked like that he would have taken chunks out of it.

“You need to apologise to Brianna, Nathaniel. I don’t want to lose a friend because of you,” I heard Hudson whisper in an angry tone.

“I apologised to her this morning, and look what happened,” Nathaniel hissed back.

“Do you think I care? Brianna is my friend and I will be damned if you dare drive a wedge between us over you and your freaking temper tantrums. You need to fix this,” she hissed back.

“Since when do you run my life?”

“Brianna isn’t like Alexander and what right to do you even have telling her to back off? You don’t even know her and you are ruining your chances of doing so.”

I kept my eyes trained on the floor as I made my way to the table. Alex looked at me with questions in his eyes.

“Don’t ask,” I muttered and grabbed everything I needed.

“At least, can you please explain why Nathaniel and Hudson have been fighting since she walked into the classroom and passed me a note saying that she had something to tell me later?” Alex asked, not giving up.

I looked at cousin and puffed out my cheeks. I was getting frustrated and I knew it wouldn’t be long until I blew up and lost my temper. Alex dropped it once he knew that my temper was about to let go. Most of the lesson, I kept my eyes trained on Nathaniel’s back, burning holes into it. Hudson looked over her shoulder at me, before saying something to Nathaniel.

“Mrs. Franklin, can be excused?” Nathaniel asked suddenly, his tone hard and not giving away much emotion.

“Of course, but don’t be too long,” Mrs. Franklin said, glancing at him.

Nathaniel walked out of the classroom, but took one last glare at me. That was it. Grabbing my bag, I got up and walked over to Mrs. Franklin’s desk and looked at her. I placed my hand on a piece of paper, making her look up.

“Brianna, what can I help you with, my dear?” she asked, smiling up at me.

“Nathaniel is what you can help me with. Can I go see what his problem is, as he seemed upset when he left?” I asked.

She sighed and didn’t say anything for a few seconds. “I don’t know if that is wise,” she finally said.

“If he has a problem with me, don’t you think I have the right to know what it is so that we might be able to fix it?” I asked.

“Honey, you don’t know Nathaniel like I do. When he is like this, he snaps at anyone who pesters him and it is better that he is left alone until he can calm down and wants to talk. His temper isn’t really the best and I don’t want you getting hurt because of him.”

We would make a good couple. With my temper and his cruelty, we would be a force to be reckoned with.

“If you want to risk it, you can,” Mrs. Franklin said.

I nodded and walked out of the classroom, and towards the exit.

When I got outside, Nathaniel was leaning against the bricks, looking straight ahead with a dead look on his face. I walked over to him and cleared my throat.

“What do you want?” he asked with his tone harsh and cold.

“I want to know what your problem is with me. Have I done something to you that you don’t like or do you just like treating me like this for the fun of it?” I asked.

“Did Mrs. Franklin send you to check on me?” he asked suddenly.

“I sent myself with her permission and you still haven’t answered my question Nathaniel. I need to know what I have done wrong.”

He laughed, making me cross my arms and look up at him with anger in my eyes. He slowly started to walk away from where I was standing. There was no way in hell that he was getting out of this one.

“Where the hell do you think you are going?” I asked and followed him.

“Away from you,” he replied.

“Once you answer my question, maybe I will leave you alone,” I shot back.

“You want to know what you have done to me?” he asked and I nodded. “You are Alexander’s cousin and you seem the same as he is.”

I took a step back and laughed. How dare he think that I am the same as my cousin? Did I say to him that he was nothing like James and he should start acting like him just to see how he liked it?

“For you information Nathaniel, I am nothing like my cousin and I would never will be even if anyone wanted me to.”

“Then why do we know nothing about you?” he asked.

“That’s for me to know and for Augusta to spread once she gets wind of me talking to you,” I snapped, regretting saying it straight away.

“What did you just say Brianna?” Nathaniel asked, taken aback.

“Do I need to repeat what I just said? Augusta plans on making my life here a living hell and I don’t even really know what she is capable of doing to me, but I do know that it won’t be pretty.”

Nathaniel walked over to a bench and sat down, leaving room for me to do the same. He leaned forward and placed his face in his hands. I could tell something was bothering him since I snapped about Augusta.

“Is that what you meant yesterday about Augusta wanting to cause trouble?” he asked and looked at me.

“Would I make up something like that just for the fun of it?” I asked.

“And I have cruel and cold for no reason thinking that you are just like every other girl here trying to get my attention when you haven’t,” he muttered.

“Wow, who would have thought that Nathaniel Norwood-Pryor would realise that he was wrong?”

He glared at me, but I didn’t care. He needed to be told that he was wrong, but he didn’t seem like the types that like being told that.

“I guess I have to say sorry.”

“You guess?” I asked and got up. “You need to. For the past forty-eight hours, you have made my life a living hell and all I wanted was to be your friend Nathaniel. I couldn’t figure out how someone so cold, so selfish and so vain could make me only get two hours sleep from trying to figure out why you hated me and it was only because of Alex, which is stupid. You might have your opinion on Alex, but there is no way you can think I am the same because we are two completely different people who are only related by a blood bond.”

Nathaniel didn’t say anything during my rant. All he did was look at me with an emotion I couldn’t place.

“What are you looking at?” I asked.

“You,” he replied and got up, walking over to me.

“What about me?” I asked, taking a step back.

“I never noticed before, but you are a very beautiful girl. I have never seen a hair colour like that before,” he said and moved a piece of it from my face, tucking it behind my ear and his touch lingering.

When he did that, my heart rate decided to pick up. It was like he was trying to flatter me so he didn’t have to apologise.

“If you are trying to distract me from you apologising, you have another thing coming,” I said.

“I’m not,” he whispered, coming back in closer to me

“We need to get back to class before they send a search party for us,” I said and stepped away from Nathaniel.

Nathaniel’s jaw clenched before he nodded and started walking

away. I didn't know if he wanted me to walk with him or not, so I kept my distance. Suddenly, he stopped and turned to look at me. I picked up my pace and walked with him.

"So where does this leave us?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" I asked, confused.

"Are we friends or not? And I am very sorry for being mean at the beginning. I won't be like that anymore, I promise you."

I sighed and placed my hand on the doorknob before looking at Nathaniel. He had a hopeful look on his face and I couldn't find it in me to reject him.

"Yes, we are friends, and you are forgiven for treating me the way you did but don't even think about doing it again," I said and opened the door.

"Scouts honour," he said, making me laugh.

As we walked back to our classroom, Augusta walked past in her usual revealing clothes get up, but froze when she saw that Nathaniel was walking close to me, and not avoiding me. I stopped, making him look behind before he noticed Augusta standing there.

"You just couldn't help yourself, could you?" she asked, her voice as hard as ice.

It was safe to say that she was filthy at me for making friends with Nathaniel. The murderous look on her face told me everything.

"Augusta, leave Brianna alone. You don't have the right to tell her who she can be friends with," Nathaniel said, sticking up for me.

I wasn't expecting him to do that. I shot him a smile of thanks before looking at Augusta. Her arms were crossed, but she wasn't looking at me for a change. Her eyes were glued onto Nathaniel and it looked like she was up to something.

"Nathaniel, I told her to stay away from you since we could be together and Brianna could ruin that for us by stealing you and I don't want that happening," Augusta said, in her sickly sweet voice when she wanted someone or something.

"You have a boyfriend and also, if Brianna and I decide to start a relationship one day, you won't be able to stop us from doing so do us both a favour and leave us alone," Nathaniel said before grabbing my

arm and dragging me away from Augusta.

When Nathaniel mentioned the word 'relationship', my heart skipped a few beats. What was he doing to me? I felt like a school girl who had a crush, and I swore to myself that I did not have a crush on Nathaniel.

"I warned you Brianna. Stay away from everyone else or be ready for everyone to know about your secrets, including Nathaniel," she said behind us, making the colour from my face drain.

Nathaniel opened up the classroom door, making everyone look up. Mrs. Franklin walked over to us and placed a hand on Nathaniel's arm. He looked at her and nodded before walking back to his seat and muttered something to Hudson.

"What happened?" Alex asked when I sat back down. "Hudson told me what happened with Nathaniel when you left but as usual, she wouldn't go into detail on anything."

"We just had a chat and he apologised. I am pretty sure that we are friends now but I don't know how long for," I said and looked at him.

"If I was you, I wouldn't have forgiven Nathaniel," he said.

"I know you don't like him, but that doesn't mean I don't have to either. I try to see the best in people and you know that, Alexander," I said and went back to completing my work.

"What happens if he does the same thing again?" Alex asked.

"Alex, stop trying to make me doubt myself," I snapped.

Throughout the lesson, Mrs. Franklin was looking between Nathaniel, Hudson, Alex and me and I didn't know why. Hudson got up and walked over to me before getting down to my level.

"Nathaniel wants to meet up with you after school," Hudson said.

"What does he want?" I asked and looked at her.

"He didn't say," she said and looked at Alex before going back to her table.

I could feel Alex's eyes burning a hole into the side of my head, but I didn't look at him. He cleared his throat, trying to catch my attention, but I wasn't going to cave. I didn't feel like a lecture off Alex and he couldn't tell me how to live my life. He wasn't my guardian. Mrs. Franklin clapped her hands, catching everyone's attention.

"I know it's not even only a week into the first term, but I have decided to change a few of the seating places around. Hudson, you will be sitting next to Alex while Brianna, I am going to place you with Nathaniel. That will give you a chance to work out a few issues that I don't want to plague the class for the rest of the year," she said.

"Mrs. Franklin, I am happy sitting next to Hudson and I don't want to change," Nathaniel said, trying to get out of the change.

"I don't care Nathaniel. This is going to happen if you like it or not," Mrs. Franklin said.

Hudson grabbed her things and walked over to where I was and sat them on the table, before looking at me with amusement.

"Are you moving or staying here?" she asked.

"Give me time," I said and got up.

"What has made Mrs. Franklin decide to change spots?" Alex asked as I got up.

"I don't know. I can only think that she is trying to play match maker with Nathaniel and Brianna but I can't be sure," Hudson replied.

I grabbed my things and walked over to where Nathaniel was. He glanced at me, but didn't say anything. He wasn't happy with this move. I could only hope that he didn't decide to take it out on me. I was getting sick of being the brunt of people's anger. His jaw locked and I heard him clench his teeth.

"Nathaniel," I said.

"Brianna," he replied and glared over at Mrs. Franklin.

"Look, I know that you aren't happy about this, but do you think that you might be able to hold your frustrations in?" I asked.

"She is up to something. I'm sure of it," Nathaniel said and grabbed his water bottle.

"Whatever it is Nathaniel, I'm sure she will forget about it in time," I replied.

"You don't know Mrs. Franklin like I do. When she puts her mind to something, she gets it. She is friends with my mother, Bethany so I know her very well and have lost count how many times she has got her way," he told me

"Do you always jump to conclusions?" I asked suddenly and looked

at him.

“Do you always ask so many questions?” he asked back.

It was obvious that we weren't going to get along anytime soon, so it seemed like we were going to be bickering for a while. I tried to ignore him, but I couldn't do it. I could sense him sitting next to me, looking over at me all the time. This was going to be fun. I looked over at him to see that he had what looked like a smile starting to form.

“Hudson said something to me that I want to confirm so I don't look a complete idiot later,” I said.

“About me wanting to meet up with you after school, right?” he asked, making eye contact with me.

“Yeah; why do you want to though? I don't understand,” I whispered, having trouble finding my voice for some reason.

“Well, we are friends so I thought that we could try and see what we have in common,” Nathaniel said and smirked at me.

I didn't have a chance to respond as the bell rang. I got up and grabbed everything before walking out of the classroom. Nathaniel somehow caught up to me quickly. I looked at him with questions brewing in my mind, but didn't get a chance to ask as a girl ran up to Nathaniel. She had light blonde hair, brown eyes and had a petite frame but she had beauty that Nathaniel and his whole family had. She was as thin as I was, but she didn't look sickly like I did when I accidentally lost a few kilos if mum couldn't afford to get enough food in the house.

“Nate, can I have your keys?” she asked and looked at me.

“Amylia, you have your own car so use that.”

“I didn't bring it. James wanted to come in his so I let him, and are you doing to introduce us Nathaniel?” Amylia asked, looking over at me before back to Nathaniel.

“Amylia, I would like you to meet Brianna. Amylia is James fiancée and has been for five years,” Nathaniel said.

“Oh, so you are the Brianna that Jay was telling me about last night. He is right, you are very beautiful,” she said.

“Thank you,” I replied.

“And I have also heard that Jason has been hanging around you. Let me tell you this. Don't hang around with him. He is bad news.

“He told me not hang around you for the same reason and that you lot only care about yourselves so I don’t know who to believe anymore.”

It sounded like Nathaniel growled, but I couldn’t be sure. Amylia cleared her throat and looked towards Nathaniel.

“Car keys,” she demanded and held out her hand.

“You crash it and you are buying me a new one,” Nathaniel threatened and gave her what she wanted.

“Nathaniel, you have two cars,” she said and walked away.

Jason started to walk towards me, and I decided to walk the other way, leaving Nathaniel standing there, looking clueless. I thought that I would have lost Jason, but I didn’t. Somehow, he managed to track me down with Daniel. What did they want now?

“I don’t have the time to talk,” I said and tried to walk away.

“Of course you do. You have a free,” Jason said.

Damn it, I thought. Daniel looked at Jason before grabbing my arm and led me over to the benches.

“What do you want?” I asked.

“Come down to basketball practice later on,” Jason said and grabbed my hand.

“Why should I do that for?” I asked, narrowing my eyes at him and looking down at where he was holding my hand.

“It will be fun for you to do something different,” Daniel said and sat next to me. “It’s at three-thirty after school on Tuesday’s and Thursday’s.”

“If I have time, I will,” I said and got up, yanking my hand out of Jason’s hand.

“What do you have planned?” Jason asked.

“I have plans that I don’t really want to break.”

“You mean that you are going to spend time with Nathaniel?” Daniel said.

I turned to look at him and raised an eyebrow at him. “Do you have a problem with that?” I asked.

“He isn’t the type of person you should be hanging around with,” Jason said and grabbed both hands this time.

“And you are? You are trying to turn me off someone that I want to

know better. And anyway, I don't know why I have to defend my case to you," I said and yanked both hands away from Jason.

"Just come to the practice, please?"

"If it will shut you up, then I will."

"Thank you," Jason said and went into kiss me.

Quickly, I moved out of the way and looked at him. Just because I said I would go didn't give him the right to move in on me. Hudson came over, and looked at both Daniel and Jason with a disgusted look on her face.

"I was looking for you," she told me.

"Since when does she have to be glued to you, Hudson?" Jason asked, angrily towards her.

"Brianna can make her own choices and she doesn't need you breathing down her neck," Daniel added.

"Um, Brianna is standing right here and is slowly losing her temper towards both of you, Jason and Daniel," I said and crossed my arms.

"We are only protecting you from Hudson and her friends," Jason said.

"I don't need protecting from anyone so stop before I do something I will later regret," I said and walked away, leaving all three of them standing there.

Nathaniel came up to me and demanded to know why I was with Jason and Daniel when everyone told me to stay away from them. People were getting on the wrong side of me today and I was about to lose my temper with someone, hopefully not Nathaniel.

"Why were you with them?" Nathaniel asked again when I didn't reply

"Why don't you just give me some bloody breathing space? You can't control me Nathaniel so don't you dare start trying to," I yelled before taking a deep breath. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have yelled, but I am just sick of people telling me what I can and can't do."

"It's okay. I shouldn't have asked you that," he said. "I know that everyone is asking you a lot of questions and that you soon would have lost your temper, but I wasn't expecting you to do so very quickly."

"Well, I do have red hair and you know what they say," I said, mak-

ing him laugh.

“So what did Jason and Daniel want? You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to,” Nathaniel told me.

“They asked me to go to basketball practice after school.”

“And what did you say?”

He wasn’t going to like my answer. “I had no choice but to say yes.”

“Brianna, you could have used the word no.”

“They weren’t going to give up. Jason follows me everywhere now. What was it going to be like if I said no? He is the type that would kidnap me if I said that and held me for a ransom that my mother couldn’t meet so he could keep me all to himself.”

Nathaniel took a deep breath and looked down at me. He nodded and walked away without saying anything. He was going to do something and I could only hope it didn’t end in tears or bloodshed of some sort.

Amylia approached me with James. It looked like she wanted something, but I couldn’t be 100% sure. She lightly hit James on the arm, making him look at her.

“What was wrong with Nathaniel?” Amylia asked me.

“I don’t know what his problem was. He just nodded his head and walked away without saying anything.”

“Amy baby, look,” James said and pointed over towards the basketball courts.

I turned around and gasped when I saw Nathaniel talking to the coach of the team and our sports teacher.

“Don’t tell me he is signing up for the basketball team,” Amylia said.

“But why would he do that for? He has never showed any interest in sport before and now, he has,” James said.

“Oh no,” I muttered.

“What?” Amylia asked, but I didn’t answer her.

I walked towards where Nathaniel was and tapped him on the shoulder, feeling the cold skin through his clothes. He turned around and looked at me but didn’t say a single word.

“What are you doing?”

“Joining the basketball team; if Jason can do it, so can I,” he said and

walked towards the change rooms.

“But Amylia and James said that you were never really interested in sports and now you are joining a basketball team? This doesn’t seem like you Nathaniel,” I said, hoping that he would see my point.

“I have had a change of heart.”

Jason caught my attention playing a game with Daniel and back to Nathaniel. I locked my jaw when I figured out that Nathaniel had only joined because of Jason and my agreement of watching him practice.

“You only joined because of Jason, didn’t you?” I asked, shaking my head at his stupidity.

“What makes you think that?” he asked.

“We’ll have fun Nathaniel. I will be watching this afternoon now,” I said and tried not to laugh.

For a change, his smile reached his eyes, but when Amylia and James came over, that changed. The mask came over his features as he looked at them.

“Joining the basketball team, I see?” James said and grabbed Nathaniel’s uniform.

“Do you have a problem with that?” Nathaniel asked.

“Nate, we never thought that you would do something like that and I have known you for a very long time. This isn’t your scene and it never will be,” Amylia said.

Jason used that opportunity to come up and see what was going on. He wrapped an arm around my shoulder, making Nathaniel look even more murderous. Amylia placed her hand on his arm to calm him down, but I don’t think that was going to work. I grabbed Jason’s hand and moved his arm from my shoulders.

“What is going on?” he asked.

“Nathaniel is joining the basketball team,” I said.

The colour from Jason’s face drained when I said that and Nathaniel used that chance to try on his uniform. Jason grabbed my arm and dragged me away out of the hearing range of Amylia and James.

“Why is he joining for?”

“Look, all he told me was that he had a change of heart and decided to join the team. What do you want me to do? Take his car for ransom

and demand him to tell me why he joined?" I asked.

"I guess the only bonus is that I will to see you more."

"Just because Nathaniel has joined doesn't mean I will be here. I don't have a reason to be and that's that," I said.

"You will see my skills this afternoon in practice. We are working up for the big match towards the end of the year and I believe that you will be impressed by what I have to show," Jason said but couldn't add anymore since James came over.

"Brianna, Nathaniel still wants to meet up with you after practice. I don't know what he has planned but I am not going to start asking questions as we usually end up in a screaming match," he told me and walked away.

"Are you going to meet up with him?" Jason asked, disgust lacing his voice.

"Yes I am going to meet with him. I planned on only staying at practice for only ten minutes before leaving, but now, I might actually stay a bit longer."

"It's like you have a crush on Nathaniel and you don't even know the real him. He is sucking you into the web of lies to brainwash you into being something you aren't!" he yelled.

"And you wouldn't? You seem like you are stalking me to begin with and now I am making friends with other people, you are going to try and ruin that for me. It's like you don't want me to be happy unless it is with you only and it never will be," I argued back.

"At least I don't look like I have had plastic surgery to look like the way I do. It wouldn't surprise me if you dyed your hair. I mean, your roots are black, not red."

"If you think that you can insult the Pryor's, you have another thing coming. We don't like it when people say things like that about us behind our back," an unfamiliar male voice said behind me.

I turned around and realised that he was related to the Pryor's somehow. The wind was blowing his blonde hair everywhere and his eyes almost seemed black. He had the same paleness, beauty and was more muscular than James and Amylia. Jason was ready to have a comeback but the other's, beside Nathaniel, joined him.

“What has he been saying, Chase?” Amylia said asked.

“That we have had plastic surgery to look the way we do. I think he is just jealous that we have beauty, brains and wealth all rolled into one,” Chase replied back and narrowed his eyes and Jason before glancing over at me. “And who is this?”

“She happens to be my girlfriend,” Jason said and kissed me forcefully.

I waved my hands around before pushing him off me and kicking him in the shin. There was no way I was going to date him. He wasn't even attractive in my eyes.

“If Brianna was your girlfriend, why did she just do that for?” James asked and stood over the top of Jason.

“She just doesn't like the public displays of affection,” Jason said in pain.

Nathaniel arrived onto the scene and thank god that he missed what Jason did and said. I don't think none of us would have been able to stop Nathaniel from hurting him if he saw Jason kiss me. I couldn't tell what Nathaniel's feelings were and it confused me. Jason ran his hand down my back before I moved and stopped him from going any further.

If he didn't stop, I was going to cause him much more pain than a bruised shin. I would have killed him.

“Do us all a favour and leave before we hurt you. Oh, and if you dare think about going near Brianna when one of us is around, think again. I will be sure to tell Dakota to keep an eye out and report back to us when she gets back,” Nathaniel said and grabbed my arm.

A spark ran through my arm and throughout the rest of my body. I looked at Nathaniel and saw that he had the same expression I had on my face; shock. Another thing I noticed was that his skin was a lot colder than James. James's skin was cold, but Nathaniel's was freezing and that if we ever got to the hugging stage of our friendship, I would shiver from his coldness.

“Your skin is cold,” I said and looked up at him.

“I know it is,” he said, defensively. “It's the temperature that is doing it.”

But it wasn't a cold day. It was the third of February and over thirty degrees in heat, and he felt like it was the middle of winter. I wasn't going to push the matter any further because of Nathaniel's short fuse, but I did want to know why he was so cold for. It didn't seem normal. I thought people were meant to be warm, not cold.

"Do you now understand why we don't want you hanging around Jason for?"

"He got me. And you know that I didn't say hello to him on my first day here. He cornered me and started commenting on my eyes and hair. I mean, no one has ever said anything about them to me before."

"You do have nice hair and beautiful eyes. Your hair reminds me of blood as it is the same colour," he said.

"Gee thanks for making me want to put a colour in it now," I replied and rolled my eyes.

"It does look like a blood rose and it smells like roses also. And your eyes look like lush green grass. You are a very beautiful girl and I am surprised that no one has stolen your heart yet."

"Why Nathaniel, are you flirting with me?" I asked and smiled.

"Maybe I am. Now come on, we are going to be late for lunch and I want to try and get to know your cousin better."

"What's the urge?"

"Because maybe he might give me an insight on how your mind works if I can manage to become friends with him."

I started to laugh, but that turned into a shriek. I grabbed onto Nathaniel to stop me from falling as I looked at the person that pushed me. Augusta stood there with her arms crossed and fire burning into the pits of her eyes. She looked extremely mad and I knew it was at me.

"Nate, why are you still hanging around her for? I thought that you would have left her when Jason kissed her before," she said.

"He did what?" Nathaniel asked and turned to look at me with a look of hurt on his face.

"Nathaniel," I breathed, hoping to explain everything, but he took a couple of steps back from me.

"Didn't you know? And it seemed like Brianna enjoyed it also," Augusta added, with a satisfied look on her face from causing maximum

damage.

“Excuse me,” Nathaniel said.

“Where are you going?” I asked, but he ignored me and walked away.

I called out his name a few times, but nothing. Augusta stepped out in front of me and crossed her arms and pouted. “I think you lost him, but keep in mind, you never had Nathaniel to begin with. You aren’t good enough for him and now, you have ruined that chance.” And she ran after him, trying to get her hooks into him.

“You just aren’t happy unless you are ruining someone else’s life, are you?” I asked, watching her walk away.

She stopped and looked at me, but continued on her way on finding Nathaniel. I needed to have a nice chat to Jason and set the record straight with him and I found him in my seeing range. As I walked up to him, I heard bragging to some of his basketball player friends about what happened.

“After today, Brianna will only want me and no one else after what I show her on the basketball court and that kiss also,” he said, totally unaware I was standing behind him.

I tapped him on the shoulder, before slapping clear across the face when he turned and looked at me. He held his cheek and looked at me in shock. “How dare you spread rumours about what happened when it isn’t true! I pushed you off me when you kissed me and now you are doing this? Is this some sort of revenge tactic or something?”

“Baby, there was something there between us and you could feel it,” he said.

“The only thing I felt was disgust and physically sick and now Augusta is using this to her advantage on making my life a living hell so thank you for making me want to hide under a rock for the rest of my time here.”

“You’ll get over it and when you do, I will be here waiting for you,” Jason said, not getting my picture.

“Then have fun waiting forever because the day I fall into your arms is the day hell freezes over,” I retorted and walked away.

I looked everywhere for Nathaniel, but couldn’t find him anywhere.

It was like he vanished into the thin air. He didn't want to be found or he didn't want to be found by me. I noticed Brandon was leaning against the building and he would be my best chance of finding and explaining what happened to Nathaniel.

"Have you seen Nathaniel anywhere because I can't find him?" I asked as I walked up to him.

"Yeah I saw him five minutes ago, but he didn't say where he was going," he told me. "Did something happen between the two of you?"

"Jason kissed me and lucky Augusta had to see it. She told Nathaniel what happened and he fled, not giving me a chance to explain what happened or nothing," I admitted.

"If I see him again, I will let you know," he said.

I left and continued looking for him. What made me freeze on the spot was that I couldn't see Augusta anywhere. I got a bad feeling in my stomach. I decided to walk to the lunch room and find a table before everyone flocked into the room. When I opened the door, I saw Nathaniel there, sitting at a table and looking straight at the wall, his eyes dead. He looked up when I walked over to where he was and stood in front of him.

"Do you know I have been looking everywhere for you?" I asked.

"I don't want to talk to you, so why don't you go back to Jason and leave me alone," Nathaniel said in a cold voice.

"He kissed me forcefully and if you ask James and Amylia, they will say the same thing. I am not interested in Jason and never will be! He gives the creeps!" I cried.

"Then why does it seem that way?" he growled towards me.

"Because he is making it out to be; he knows that we are starting to become friends and he doesn't like it, so the only way he can stop it is by doing this sort of stuff to make you hate me and that I will fall into his arms. He is sabotaging everything," I said, deflated.

Nathaniel looked down at the table and didn't say anything. I had lost this fight. Dejected, I slowly turned around and started walking away. My heart became heavy and I felt like screaming or breaking something.

"Where are you going?" Nathaniel asked.

"I can tell that you don't want to speak to me, so I am going to leave you alone. Augusta got what she wanted, so this will make her happy," I said when I turned around.

"Brianna, I believe you. I should have given you a chance to explain what happened and not ran like I did."

"You should have," I agreed.

Nathaniel got up from where he was sitting and slowly walked over to me and grabbed my hand. "I'm sorry, Brianna," he whispered and pulled out a chair for me to sit in.

"Did Augusta find you?" I asked and sat down.

"Yes she did, and she also tried to convince me to stay away from you. As you can see, it didn't work," he replied and sat in front of me.

Augusta was going to work extremely hard to make my life a living hell. What would she be capable of if my friendship with Nathaniel grows? The devil herself decided to become known and walked up to where Nathaniel and I were sitting.

"Nate, I see that you are looking better," she said and got right in his face.

"No one calls me Nate unless I tell them to," Nathaniel said in an angry tone.

"Is there a reason why you are here?" I asked, looking up at her.

"I could ask you the same thing. I thought Nate would have made it clear that he didn't want anything to do with you, since that's what he told me," Augusta said.

I turned to Nathaniel with a shocked look on my face. There was no way I wanted to be lied to over something like that.

"That is a lie Augusta and you know that."

She looked at Nathaniel and pouted, hoping to get him to change his tune on her, but it wasn't going to work. Nathaniel got up from where he was sitting and looked towards me before turning his hard as stone stare back towards Augusta.

"You know something Augusta," Nathaniel started. "Brianna would never hurt anyone and if she did, it would only be by mistake. And then I look at you. You would hurt someone on purpose and not feel any regret. You don't have a heart and if you do, it's made out of stone. You

are vain, selfish and are not happy unless things go your way. You crave for wealth and beauty and everyone can tell that you are wearing white powder on your skin.”

“I have never heard you speak like that before,” Augusta said, her voice coming out in a whisper.

“I am just stating what you are. You are trying to be someone you aren’t and it isn’t going to work. You’re a fake.”

Augusta’s eyes narrowed at Nathaniel before she broke eye contact. If Nathaniel got out of this unharmed, I would be shocked.

“What about Dakota? She is the same and in fact, I think she is trying to copy me. I was the ice queen and she stole that title from me!” Augusta yelled.

It sounded like Augusta was bitter about Dakota. Was she as cold as Augusta says she is? Or is Augusta trying to make herself look the victim of something she is, and that she isn’t as bad as she’s giving on?

“Dakota has been like that since the whole time I have known her. She doesn’t have the best past and she has a right to be the way she is, especially towards you as you tried to steal Chase from her,” Nathaniel spat and shoved past the both of us, walking out of the room.

I shot a hateful glance at Augusta before running after him. I pushed open the doors and looked around for Nathaniel. I couldn’t see him anywhere and I only left five seconds after him. It was like he had vanished into thin air.

“Are you looking for someone Brianna?” Amylia asked, appearing next to me and making me scream.

“Where did you come from Amylia?” I asked and placed a hand over my racing heart.

“That doesn’t really matter. Now, are you looking for Nathaniel?”

“How did you know?” I asked.

Amylia’s laugh was like wind chimes in the breeze, but she stopped suddenly when Augusta walked out of the doors.

“What is all the laughing about?” Augusta asked.

“Brianna, Nathaniel told me that he would meet you when the bell goes because he doesn’t think he is calm enough to be around you just yet, thanks to the witch standing next to me,” Amylia said, ignoring the

fact that Augusta was there.

“Nathaniel was fine until *she* moved here and now everything has changed for the worst,” Augusta said, stomping her foot on the ground.

“The only thing that has changed is the fact Nathaniel is starting to become happier thanks to Brianna, even though they aren’t close. Making Nathaniel happy is something you wouldn’t be able to do!”

“And how do you know that? Nathaniel and I would be the perfect couple. I can just see it now; Diamonds and pearls when he does something wrong, being waited on hand and foot, designer clothes that cost more than Brianna’s and other poor people and all the other perks of being in a relationship with an extremely rich boy,” Augusta said with an look in her eye.

I heard someone clear their throat behind us. I turned around and saw a girl with green eyes that had glasses over them; blonde hair with brown roots and was taller than me.

“Hello,” she said in a shy voice.

“Well, if it isn’t the geek,” Augusta said.

“Leave Christy alone,” Amylia said and smiled towards her. “Can I help you with something?” she asked.

“Matt told me that Nathaniel has joined basketball and was told by our sports teacher that practice won’t start until three this afternoon,” she said, in a timid voice.

“I will pass it along to Nathaniel when I see him. Have you met Brianna yet?” Amylia asked.

Christy shook her head and looked at me, trying to see if I was like Augusta. When she saw that I wasn’t, she relaxed a little bit.

“Hey,” I said.

“Hi,” she replied back.

“You said what you want, so you can go now,” Augusta said.

I had enough of her attitude. Turning around, I looked Augusta up and down before opening my mouth. “The one that has to go is you! Nathaniel was right about everything he said about you in the lunch room. You are selfish and vain and only care about wealth. What you just said confirmed it! I can’t understand what the hell Daniel sees in you! And it’s pretty obvious that you are trying to look like the Pryor’s

with the white powder you have on you. You are disgusting and if you keep on acting like this, you will have nothing and no one and it will be your own goddamn fault," I seethed and walked away, leaving her speechless.

Amylia ran over to me and made me come to a stop when she stood in front of me.

"I have never seen anymore stand up to Augusta," Amylia said. "You have guts and you are feisty by the looks of things."

"I am just hoping that she won't make my life a living hell now since I have done that," I said and looked down at the ground.

"Don't worry about that. Once Nathaniel gets wind of what happened, he will be proud of what you said."

"What's to be proud about? I told the ice queen to her face what she was and I am on her list of most hated, along with everyone else that isn't rich. If she could, she would murder me."

Before she could reply, Christy came over with an upset look on her face. Amylia walked over to her and placed a hand on her shoulder.

"What happened?" she asked.

"Augusta threatened me and said that she would steal Matt from me."

"Don't worry about her. Karma will come around and bite her one day. Isn't that right, Brianna?" Amylia asked and looked at me.

I opened my mouth to reply but the words vanished when Jason appeared in hearing range. He looked at me and smirked before slowly walking over to where I was. I had to get out of here before I said or did something I would regret.

"Of course, and if you could excuse me, I have to go into hiding," I replied.

"Why do you have to do that for?" Amylia asked.

"Jason just spotted me and is making his way to where we are. I don't want to see him because of what he did."

"He does do things that people don't like. The whole time I have known him, he has done something that earned him a slap in the face," Christy said, drying her eyes.

"Ladies," Jason said.

“What do you want?” I asked.

“I just wanted to see what was going for and too see if you wanted to have dinner with me over the weekend?”

Was he serious? I looked at him with disbelief and shook my head. There was no way I was going to have dinner with him over the weekend. Clenching my fists so I wouldn't do anything, I took a few breaths in from my nose.

“I don't think so. I promised my mum I would help her around the house this weekend while she is working,” I said, lying.

“Even at night?” he pressed.

“My grandparents are coming over to see me,” I lied, again.

“Maybe another time then,” he said and walked away.

I grabbed at my hair and pulled on it, almost ripping it out by the roots. He was never going to get the hint and it seemed about the right to get use to that fact. I looked down to my watch and saw that I still had four hours left of school. My stomach churned at that thought. I wanted to go home and sleep. I didn't want to be here a second longer.

“Are you okay?” Amylia asked.

“I don't feel well,” I muttered and walked over towards the office.

“Maybe you need something to eat? That always helps me when I feel a bit unwell,” Amylia suggested.

“What I need is sleep and some Panadol to knock me out,” I muttered.

I opened the door and walked inside the room, getting a leave pass and walking out of the school grounds. I found the chemist that mum was working at and walked inside, catching her attention straight away.

“Brianna, aren't you meant to be at school?” she asked.

“I would be, but I am not feeling well and I think I need to go home before I pass out,” I replied, glaring at the bright lights.

Mum placed her hand on my forehead and looked concerned. I was starting to feel lightheaded and clammy.

“Wait right here,” she said and walked behind the counter.

I looked to see what she was doing and saw she was talking to someone. They walked over to me and that's when it felt like all the breath had been knocked out of me. He was incredibly beautiful. He had

light blue eyes, dark blonde hair and was tall. I thought Nathaniel was tall, but I was wrong. As he approached, I figured that he must have been related to the Pryor's.

"Jack, this is my daughter Brianna," mum said.

"Nice to meet you," I said.

"So you're the Brianna that my two sons' were telling me about," he said and smiled. "She doesn't look well. The darkness around her eyes is a dead giveaway and the fact she has no colour in her face makes her look like she is the walking dead. Take her home to rest and if she isn't better by tomorrow, I would take her to the doctor's so she doesn't get any worse."

Mum nodded and went to get her bag, leaving me alone with Jack. "Nathaniel told my wife and me about you last night, but he wouldn't go into much detail. He did tell us that you were quiet thin and he is right. Are you eating enough?"

"Of course I am eating enough. I just have trouble putting on weight. Nathaniel and I didn't start out on the best of terms, but now we are starting to become friends," I said, smiling up at him.

"It's good to see that Nathaniel didn't fall into the clutches of Augusta. I was a bit worried for a while there. Her mother works here, and she is the same as her daughter," Jack told me.

Mum came over and looked between Jack and me, but didn't say anything. As we were walking out, I looked towards the counter and saw a woman glaring at me and my mother. The hair and face reminded me of Augusta and so did the icy glare. That must have been her mother.

I just wanted this day to end. Mum didn't decide to make small talk with me on the way home and if she did, I didn't have the strength to reply back. I must have fallen asleep as I felt a light touch on my arm. When I opened my eyes, I saw mum looking over and I realised that we were at home.

"I suggest that you go to bed and spend the rest of the day there, sleeping," mum said, looking over at me.

"That's if I can make it there awake," I replied and opened the car door.

I was feeling like death warmed up. I couldn't remember getting sick of quickly in my whole life so this was a first and I was hoping that it would never happen again in a hurry.

"Why are you so tired for? The only time I have seen you like this was on your thirteenth birthday and you spent the whole night awake, hoping that you father would come and see you but he didn't and I still remember the disappointment that was in your eyes for the whole day. Your young heart was broken," mum asked, making me stop walking and freezing on the spot.

I placed my hand on the front door and closed my eyes. Images from that day played in my head over again. The day before my birthday, I happened to get a birthday card from my father and because I was so young, I believed that he would come and see me, as he was making contact with me. I spent the whole night looking out the window, watching the sun rise and crossing my fingers that he would come. He never did and I spent the whole day fighting back tears for the sake of everyone else and pretended to be happy when I clearly wasn't.

My eyes opened and a tear rolled down my cheek. All the pain and disappointment from that man entered my body, but I pushed it back. That was something I didn't want to deal with.

I didn't really want to tell her what the real problem was, but this my mother and she knows when something is wrong.

"Mum, there is nothing to worry about. I just had trouble sleeping. If there was something else bothering me, I would tell you," I said and walked inside.

That was the third lie of the day and I didn't want to tell anymore for a very long time. I was only hoping that they didn't come back and bite me. As soon as my head hit the pillow, I was out.

3. Hurt

Three days later, I was allowed out and feeling like myself again.

I decided to catch the bus into school for a change, but my plans were changed when Nathaniel pulled out of a driveway in a rapid yellow Ford Falcon XR6. He glanced over to where I was and pulled over to the side of the road and turned around. He stopped in front of where I was standing, slipping his expensive sunglasses off.

“Brianna, what are you doing out here?” Nathaniel asked when the passenger’s window rolled down.

“Waiting for the bus so I can go to school; mum isn’t working today and wants to do things at home so I offered to take the bus to save her time taking me to Colac and coming back here after that. She can get more done that way and then I’m not a bother to anyone,” I told him.

My heart became heavy after I finished speaking as that was the way I always felt. I felt like a bother to everyone and anyone. I sighed

depressingly and looked up; hiding the pain I've been suffering from.

"No, I will take you to school," Nathaniel said.

"I'm quite happy taking the bus, Nathaniel," I said, being stubborn like I usually was.

He got out of the car and walked over to where I was and grabbed my school bag and placing it on the backseat with his. I crossed my arms and stood my ground. I wasn't going to let him win this battle.

"You and I both know I am not taking no for an answer so just get in the car so we can on our way," he said.

Narrowing my eyes at him, I realised that he played these games better than I did.

"Fine," I relented and got into his car.

I looked out the window and didn't say anything when Nathaniel drove off. I rested my head against the leather seat and sighed, watching the scenery fly past on the way to Colac. I was expecting the air in the car to be tense, but it wasn't. It was surprisingly comfortable.

"Why weren't you at school for three days for?" he asked suddenly.

"I was sick," I replied and looked over towards him.

"Why didn't you tell me? You didn't come to practice or music and I waited for you after school, but nothing. I was worried in the end."

"I thought Amylia would have told you that I left sick?" I asked, feeling a strange sensation in the pit of my stomach.

"She did at the end when we were at home and Jack confirmed it when he walked through the front door after work."

"I'm sorry that you didn't know. I can make it up to you, if you want?" I suggested.

"How?" he asked.

"Come to my place after school. It seems like you live up the road from me anyway so it won't be far for you to travel."

"Try around the corner. I always drive past your house and never knew who lived in it. Now I do," he said and glanced over at me.

"So, do you want to come around after school or not?" I asked, my heart skipping a few beats and making me feel hopeful on the inside from his answer.

"Are you sure that your mum won't care?" he asked.

“Mum will be glad to see that I have made another friend, so she would want to meet you.”

I didn't realise that the whole time we were talking that we had arrived in Colac. I noticed that Augusta was walking towards the school and hit Nathaniel on the arm. He looked over to where I was looking and rolled his eyes at her. She was trying to walk in high heels and the shortest skirt I had ever seen.

“What the hell is she wearing?” I asked, shocked.

“That is her seduce Nathaniel clothes and to try and grab all the boys attention at school also. When we do get to school, I want you to meet Dakota.”

I looked at Nathaniel, unsure of what to say. I knew that I would meet everyone in his family soon enough, but I didn't know if today was the right time for it. We were just at the friend's level in our relationship and I didn't want to push that.

“Are you sure about that?” I asked, my voice lightly shaking.

“Brianna, I don't know if you are feeling this also, but I feel a connection to you, like a spark. You feel very special towards me and I felt like I was going insane when you weren't at school for those few days and I figured out why,” he said.

I didn't know what to say to that. “And why is that?” I finally asked.

“Wait until the fourteenth of this month.”

“You mean Valentine's Day?” I asked.

He didn't answer. What was so important that he had to tell me on Valentine's Day? Unless he had feeling's for me and wanted to wait for that day. When he pulled into a car park, I opened the door and got out into the humid and muggy air.

“Let's hope the air conditioner is working this time around,” Nathaniel said and grabbed our school bags.

“I hate the heat.”

“And I hate the sun.”

“Nate,” I heard a voice say behind him.

“Dakota,” he said and placed her in my seeing range.

I took a step back and looked at her. She was even more beautiful as the rest of the Pryor's. Her eyes were a very dark brown and her hair

was a light brown colour. She was dressed in expensive clothes, but all the Pryor's were.

"You must be Brianna," she said and held out her hand.

"Yes I am," I said and shook it.

"Nathaniel, you were right. She is gorgeous," Dakota said and let go. "I have heard that you are on Augusta's list of lives' to ruin."

"I don't know why she doesn't like me."

"She doesn't like you because you have befriended Nathaniel and she couldn't. The only thing she cares about is wealth and beauty, something she will never have compared to us, including you Brianna," Dakota said and smiled.

"Baby," the one voice I didn't want to hear say behind me.

I turned and closed my eyes so I wouldn't have to look at Jason. He pulled me in for a hug, but I tensed up and didn't respond. I wanted him to get his claws off me.

"I missed you," he whispered into my ear.

"Well, I didn't miss you," I muttered and pulled myself out of his embrace.

"What do you want?" Nathaniel asked Jason and placed an arm around my waist.

Jason looked him up and down before looking over my shoulder at Dakota, who walked over and waved at him. I looked at Nathaniel and wrapped both arms around Nathaniel's waist. He looked down at me and winked, telling me that he didn't mind the contact that we were currently creating.

"What is going on here?" Jason asked.

"Didn't you hear? Nathaniel and I have started dating," I said and looked over towards Dakota, hoping to back me up on this lie.

"And I am giving them my blessing," she added, glancing at me.

Jason's teeth clenched before he launched himself towards Nathaniel. I stepped out of the way and placed a hand on Nathaniel's arm, which I was currently hiding behind as he managed to throw myself behind him. Dakota stood in the middle of both of them, stopping a sure fight from happening. Jason glared at Nathaniel but didn't do anything as he looked over at me.

“I would expect better from both of you. Is that anyway to behave in front of Brianna and myself? No I don’t think so,” she said and looked at both of them. “Men are meant to have respect for woman.”

Jason walked away, leaving the three of us standing there and Dakota glaring up towards Nathaniel.

“You are so lucky I didn’t wear my high heels today because I would not hesitate kicking you and hurting you,” she said, her voice quiet yet, venomous.

“What did I do? I wasn’t going to fight him and even if he tried, he wouldn’t have won. You and I both know that I fight better than anyone in this school,” he argued back.

I looked up at him, shocked about this new information. Was Nathaniel the type to pick fights or was he trained when younger so he could know how to defend himself when someone started trouble?

“Yes, I do know that and I have seen it,” Dakota said.

“I am going to go find Hudson,” I said and grabbed my school bag off Nathaniel.

“If Jason is planning anything, Hudson should be able to tell you as she knows these things,” Nathaniel said before I walked away.

I looked all over the school for her, but couldn’t find her anywhere. Was there some sort of hiding place in this school that I wasn’t aware of or something? I suddenly heard yelling and walked over to where it was coming from. Hudson and Jason were having a screaming match.

“What did you mean you didn’t know about Nathaniel and Brianna?” Jason shouted, unaware that I was currently staring holes into the side of his head, and was tempted to hit him.

“I told you that I had no idea that they were going out! They are both secretive when they want to be and even if it’s true, I don’t blame them for doing something like this! They aren’t the type that likes their business being broadcasted all over town and that is exactly what will happen!” Hudson yelled back.

I felt hope swell in my chest over my friend defending Nathaniel and I, even though it was all a lie, but it still made me feel good.

“What does that mean? There is no way in hell that Nathaniel can make her happy like I would be able to!”

I decided to go over to where they were and stop this before it got out of hand. I picked up my pace when it turned to push and shove. There was no way I wanted Hudson to get hurt from Jason. He would be on Brandon's wanted list, not that I would stop him from causing some serious damage.

"Hey," I said, but they didn't hear me.

They started screaming over the top of each other and that's when it happened. I went over towards them, hoping to stop this from becoming worse when Jason grabbed my arm and threw me down on the ground. I landed on my wrist the wrong way and felt a jolt of pain crawl up my arm. I had to bite my lip to stop me from screaming out in pain.

"Brianna!" Hudson said and got down to my level. "Are you okay?"

"My wrist is killing me," I whispered.

"I am going to find Nathaniel," Hudson said and took a few steps back.

"Do you think you could help me up first?" I asked, making her stop walking.

She grabbed my good arm and pulled me up before searching for Nathaniel. Jason stood in front of me and grabs my injured hand, for which I stepped away from him so he couldn't touch me again. He had blown any chances of staying friends with me after doing this.

"You shouldn't have gotten in the way Brianna. It is that simple," Jason said.

"And you shouldn't use harm to get what you want. You are just lucky I didn't land on that stick and stab myself from it," I spat and cradled my wrist to my chest, hoping to ease some of the pain that was currently burning on the inside.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Sorry isn't going to cut it this time around," I said and turned my head the other way so I wouldn't have to look at him.

Nathaniel came running over, leaving Hudson for dead and slowly pulled my injured wrist from my chest and started to look at it. I hissed when he lightly touched the area, making him freeze. A look of pure and utter pain shot across Nathaniel's face when he placed my wrist back into the position I had it in.

“I’m not a doctor, but it looks like it’s sprained,” he whispered.

“Great that is all I need right now,” I whispered back.

Nathaniel looked over my head towards Jason, narrowing his eyes. I didn’t know if Hudson told Nathaniel that Jason was the cause of my pain or if she didn’t. All I knew was the fact Jason was now on his wanted list. Nathaniel pulled out a phone and messaged someone.

“Let’s see how it goes during the day,” Nathaniel said and led me away from Jason.

When we turned the corner, Augusta was standing there, shooting hateful glares into the back of Amylia as she spoke with James. Nathaniel crossed his arms and looked straight at Augusta. She noticed that someone was looking at her and looked over at Nathaniel. Before she could say anything, Amylia ran over and hugged both Nathaniel and me.

“I just heard what happened,” she said and grabbed my injured wrist lightly. “It would be better for you to get it checked out and make sure that there is no major damage that we don’t know about, but it’s up to you. We can go see Jack and see what he has to say.”

“Amylia, I just came back from being sick so I don’t think I can afford to vanish again.”

“Nathaniel, go work your charm in the office while I wait at the car. James!” Amylia shouted, making him run over.

“Yes, my love?” he asked, looking at her like a lovesick puppy.

“Car keys to my car please,” she said and held out her hand.

He dropped them and looked at me and towards my injured wrist. Amylia said something under her breath, making James nod. I couldn’t even hear what she said and he could? That was strange. It wasn’t normal and I was soon to be asking questions if it didn’t stop. My eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

“James will tell Nathaniel that we have left and that we will be back once we know what the matter with your wrist is. How did it happen anyway? Nathaniel just said that you hurt it, but didn’t go into any detail,” she said.

“Do you want the long or the short version?”

“The short one,” was Amylia’s reply.

“Jason and Hudson were having a screaming match and I went over there to stop it from becoming worse. That’s when Jason decided to grab my arm and throw me to the ground, making me land on my wrist.”

“That explains why Nathaniel seemed mad about something. He feels protective of you but he won’t tell us why,” Amylia admitted and opened up the driver’s door and changing something over.

“He told me that he wants to tell me something on Valentine’s Day, so I don’t know what it would be.”

“Brianna, I have to ask you this question. What do you feel for Nathaniel? And tell me the truth about it.”

I didn’t know how to answer that question. Nathaniel held my interest on my first day here. He keeps me lying wide awake most nights, thinking about him, trying to figure him out but couldn’t. I looked at Amylia and saw she had a slight smile on her face.

“You have feelings for Nathaniel, but you just haven’t realised it yet and I believe what Nathaniel wants to tell you is the same.”

“Nathaniel makes me angry, but at the same time, he makes my heart race. Before, I tried to give Jason the hint I wasn’t interested in him and pretended to be his girlfriend and now that I think about it, I wish it was true,” I whispered, realising that Amylia was right. “Oh my god, I have feelings for Nathaniel.”

She looked at me and smiled before starting the car. How could Amylia figure out things before I could? I pushed it back in my mind and decided to think about it after Nathaniel left my place after school.

“Everyone is going to think that I am getting abused at home or something,” I said suddenly.

“If they want to get smart, they have to deal with us. And if Augusta tries to make this any worse than it is, there is going to be trouble brewing. I’m sure Hudson has told you, but she tried to break James and me up because of her greed and desires to be wealthy and decided that James would be a perfect target for her affections. It didn’t work and now she is on my wanted list as well as Dakota’s for doing the same.”

“I have figured out that she isn’t happy unless she is making someone else’s life a living hell.”

“That would be true. I am just warning you now though,” Amylia said and looked over at me when we were at the traffic lights. “She will be worse coming up to Valentine’s Day due to the fact you have two teenage boys’ after your affections and one of them she wants all to herself and won’t stop unless there is bloodshed.”

“You mean Nathaniel and Jason?”

“Exactly, Brianna,” Amylia said. “She has never got that much attention off anyone in her lifetime and it would be killing her on the inside.”

My throbbing wrist took my mind off everything and I just concentrated on the pain I was currently in. Amylia pulled into a car park and turned everything off. I opened the car door and got out. That same woman from the other day caught my attention with the cold eyes and hard stares towards me. I followed Amylia inside as I could tell that she was in charge of this one.

“Erica, where’s Jack and I have no time for games either so tell me now,” Amylia said to the woman that didn’t like me.

“He just went on his morning tea break and you can’t disturb him either,” Erica said her tone like leather.

Amylia crossed her arms and looked her up and down before grabbing my hand and walking up to the counter. A lady turned around and looked at both us with a smile on her face.

“Hello girls. What can I do for you?”

“Lesley, is Jack on his break?”

“Amylia, you know that he always goes on his break about now,” she replied.

“Would I be able to see him? My friend, Brianna, injured her wrist at school before class started and it should get looked at as she is in a lot of pain,” Amylia said.

“You know where he is,” Lesley said and went back to work.

Amylia still had a tight grip on my hand, but it wasn’t tight enough to cut off blood flow to the area. She stopped at the door that said ‘staff only’ and knocked.

“I’m on my break so go away,” Jack said from inside.

“Do you want me to tell Bethany that you throw out everything that she packs in for you most days and that you have takeaway for lunch

every day?" Amylia asked and the door opened.

"Shouldn't both of you be at school?" he asked and looked between us.

"We would be, but Jason decided to lose his temper and throw Brianna to the ground and she landed on her wrist."

I held it up and saw that it was double the size of my other one. We were ushered into the room and sat in the chairs and I rested my wrist on the table.

"How would you describe the pain?"

"Excruciating," I said.

"So what happened?" he asked and looked at Amylia.

"I wasn't there and I only found out about it through Nathaniel."

"Jason grabbed my arm and threw me down on the ground, making me land on my wrist the wrong way. Nathaniel said it could be sprained, but I don't know," I said, looking down at it.

"Why did he throw you on the ground for?"

"He and Hudson were having a screaming match because he didn't like the fact Brianna was spending time with Nathaniel and not him. We told you about Jason the other day, remember?" Amylia said, looking at her nails.

Jack nodded and went back to looking at my wrist. When he gently lifted it off the table, I bit my lip to stop me from crying out. The door opened, making me look over to it and seeing Nathaniel walk into the room.

"Did you get us excused for our first class?" Amylia asked, looking at Nathaniel.

"Yeah I did," he replied, but his eyes were glued on me.

"I'm fine," I muttered, answering the question he had in his eyes.

"Nate, it's not like Brianna is dying. You don't have to look so concerned," Jack said, glancing towards his son.

Nathaniel nodded slowly and started to walk out of the room and I couldn't stop myself from crying out in pain from all the poking and prodding at my wrist. Nathaniel froze and came over to me. Amylia rolled her eyes and pulled out her phone. Nathaniel grabbed my good hand and held onto it, giving me a sense of comfort. The coldness still

had me confused but I told myself not to worry about it. I felt that he would open up to me when he felt that he could trust me.

“How bad is it hurting?” Nathaniel asked me.

“Bad enough to make me want to inflict the same amount of pain on Jason when I get back to school,” I said through gritted teeth when Jack placed it on the table.

“That can be easily sorted out,” Nathaniel muttered, a smirk appearing on his face.

“You will be doing no such thing Nathaniel. James is making him suffer enough today,” Amylia replied without looking up from her phone.

“What this needs is an X-ray just to see if there are any broken bones. I can book you in for ten-thirty,” Jack said.

“That’s fine. I will take her,” Nathaniel said, not giving me a chance to speak.

“What am I meant to do?” asked Amylia.

“Go back to school and keep tabs on Augusta for me. She is driving me crazy again and now it’s worse coming into Valentine’s Day.”

“This is where you can fight your own battles Nathaniel,” Amylia said and walked out of the room.

“Okay, what is her problem?” Nathaniel asked Jack.

“She has been like that all day. Hopefully Bethany can get it out of her later on tonight,” Jack said.

Erica walked into the room and looked between all three of us before fixing her eyes on Jack. I could tell where Augusta got her hunger for rich men from.

“Can I help you?” Jack asked and went back to his yoghurt that looked homemade.

“You told us that no one was allowed to disturb you on your break, so why are they in here?”

“You’re not his wife so he doesn’t have to answer to you,” Nathaniel said and helped me up.

“Nathaniel, I suggest you go take Brianna to the X-ray as I can tell she is in a lot of pain. I will call now and book her in and then get them to send the X-ray here. You are very lucky I am a doctor also,” Jack said.

He nodded and shot a glare to Erica and led me out of the room.

When we got outside, Amylia and her car were gone and were replaced by Nathaniel's.

"Amylia decided to go back to school and leave us alone," he whispered into my ear, making me jump.

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"Uh, I just do," he replied and walked two steps ahead of me.

"Nathaniel, you are acting strange and it is starting to freak me out just a little bit, so can I have some answers?" I asked.

"Brianna, don't worry about it," Nathaniel said, defensively.

"You are hiding something and be prepared for me to find out what it is. There is no way in hell that I am going to deal with your changing moods and defensiveness," I said and started to walk away from him.

"What about your wrist?" he asked behind me.

I stopped and looked at Nathaniel. "You can take me to that, and then you can take me back to school."

Making sure that my arms were by my side, I marched over to his car and waited for him to unlock it. The car ride there, I kept my eyes straight. Nathaniel realised that I wasn't in a talking mood both from my pain and from the fact he is different to me.

"Brianna, can you please talk to me?"

"I don't have anything to say Nathaniel," I replied, looking straight ahead.

"I am hiding something and believe me, I want to tell you what is wrong, but I can't. It's extremely dangerous."

"You are making it sound like you are dangerous."

"I am dangerous. My whole family is dangerous. You are at risk by being my friend from so much danger."

He pulled out the front of the building, but didn't get out of the car. He was looking out the window and seemed to be in his own world. I undone my seat belt and leaned over, touching his arm, making him look at me

"Nathaniel, I don't believe that you would ever hurt me. I trust you," I said.

"You don't know what you are saying Brianna," he replied, his voice covered in pain and torture.

"I do know what I am saying. I'm hiding something also, and you know that, but I'm scared."

"Come on. We are going to be late for your appointment. We can talk after this," Nathaniel said suddenly and got out.

I didn't have a chance to reply as Nathaniel opened up my door and dragged me out by my hand.

"Hey, I already have a hurt wrist. I don't need a dislocated shoulder to add to my horrid day," I said.

Nathaniel looked at me, and let go of my arm. I pushed opened the door and walked over to the desk. A lady walked over to where I was and smiled.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"Jack Pryor was meant to make an appointment for Brianna Morrison," Nathaniel said next to me.

I cringed at the name he used. I wasn't a Morrison, I was a Clarkson. In my eyes, that name was only on my birth certificate because it had to be, not because I wanted it there.

"Of course," she said.

And thirty minutes later, I walked out of the X-ray room. Nathaniel was sitting in a hard chair, reading a magazine. I walked over to him and pulled the magazine out of his hands. He looked up at me with surprise written on his face.

"Can we go now?" I asked.

"What did they say?"

"I have a sprained wrist," I said and walked outside.

Nathaniel caught up to me and opened my door, like a gentleman. I smiled at him and got into the car.

"Do you want to go for ice cream?" Nathaniel asked suddenly.

"Sure," I replied and reached to the back seat to grab my school bag so I could grab my coin purse out of it.

"If you think that you are going to pay, you have another thing coming," he said suddenly and reversed out of the park.

"It's the least I can do. You took me to the X-ray place and drove me to school," I said, my hand still on my school bag while I looked at Nathaniel.

“And I am driving you back home when we finish school. Don’t forget that I am coming to your place after school.”

Nathaniel decided to get the ice cream take away and we ate them while talking in his car.

“You said something about being scared before. What did you mean by that?” Nathaniel asked.

Me and my big mouth, I thought.

“It’s nothing,” I muttered, hoping that I didn’t have to go into much detail.

“Brianna, you and I both know that we are hiding secrets from each other, and the only way our friendship is going to grow is to tell each other what we are hiding,” Nathaniel said.

“Nathaniel, you told me that you are dangerous and we both know that you won’t tell me what you are hiding, and the only way I will know is if I figure it out for myself,” I said and looked over towards him. “Can we go back to school now?”

“Sure,” he muttered.

The air was thick with tension between us and there wasn’t a word spoken from me or Nathaniel on the drive back. When I got out of the car, I grabbed my school bag and walked away from Nathaniel.

“Where were you? I was worried sick,” Alex said behind me.

I slowly turned around to face my cousin and lifted up my wrist and showed him the bandage I now sported. I explained what happened, and once I finished, he had fire burning in the pits of his eyes and appeared to be shaking slightly.

“Jason is a dead man for hurting my cousin due to a temper tantrum,” Alex muttered, his voice cold.

“He is already on Nathaniel’s wanted list,” I said, crossing my arms and slightly wincing at the pain it created.

“Speaking of him; what is going on between the both of you?” Alex asked, sounding curious and concerned at the same time.

“We are just friends, Alex. Nothing else going on between us,” I said and tried to walk around him.

“I don’t believe you, Brianna,” he said, making me stop walking.

I was hurting both on the inside and on the outside and I needed

pain killers to help me, and so would Alexander if he didn't stop asking me questions.

"You don't have to. Now, can I please go and put my things away and dose up on Panadol so I can get through this day without being in any more pain than I am currently in?"

I stepped around him and walked towards the classroom buildings. I opened my locker and placed my school bag inside of it and getting frustrated when it wanted to fall out. When I closed the door, Augusta was standing there with her arms crossed and her trademark cold look on her white powdered face. I jumped back and placed a hand over my heart, feeling it race in shock and fear.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"Nathaniel is a good friend, isn't he? In fact, you have him wrapped around your little finger and eating out the palm of your hand. I don't see why he is interested in you though Brianna. You are nothing but a distraction for him and once he realises this and gets sick of you, he will toss you aside like a rag doll. You aren't rich and basically don't have anything to hold his interest, so why don't you do both of us a favour and leave him alone?" Augusta suggested.

"Why do you want me to do that for, Augusta? So you can move in on him and make his life even more hellish than it already is? We both know that he isn't interested in you and never will be, so why don't you give up trying?" I asked, unaware of the consequences that she would try to inflict on me.

She grabbed my top and slammed me against the locker, the pain and coldness of the metal going through my clothes onto my skin. I was now going to have a bruised back from the force she used. She raised her hand and aimed it for my face. My eyes were open as I waited for her to slap me, but it never came.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Amylia said from behind her.

Augusta let me go and turned around to face Amylia. I breathed a sigh of relief. "Why shouldn't I?" she challenged.

Amylia looked her up and down and before placing a piece of paper in her short's pocket and crossing her arms.

I was now curious of what that paper held.

“Because Nathaniel will ruin you if you hurt someone that he wants to grow close to and Dakota will help him. We Pryor’s are a powerful family and Jack won’t hesitate to fire your mother from his chemist if you do something or if Erica tries to break up their marriage for her pleasure of hopefully getting Jack one more time.”

“You aren’t even a Pryor,” Augusta said smugly.

“This paper says otherwise Augusta,” Amylia announced and pulled it back out and handed it to Augusta.

“But-but-but...” she sputtered, gripping the paper tightly.

“The wedding is in January and Brianna, you are invited also. James is still finalising the rest of the invites, but I’m sure Nathaniel will be your date.”

“What about me? I have known Nathaniel longer than Brianna so I believe that I should be getting first pick,” Augusta said, glaring at me.

“You have Daniel. Deal with it,” Amylia said and walked away, her high heels clicking on the floor.

“That’s eleven months away. Nathaniel will be mine before then,” Augusta hissed and walked away.

The rest of the day went fast, but I kept on thinking about Augusta said. Nathaniel said what he thought of her, but could he decide otherwise about her? Augusta had wealth behind her and I didn’t. Most of the money mum had managed to save went on our house and furniture that we didn’t have living in the bungalow in my grandparents’ backyard.

Nathaniel must have gotten sick of the quiet, as he shook my shoulder on the drive home. I shook my head and looked over towards him.

“Brianna, what is the matter? You haven’t been yourself all day,” Nathaniel said.

“I’m just thinking about something,” I replied and went back to looking out the window, hoping to slip back into my own world.

“What are you thinking about?” Nathaniel asked. I knew then that going back into my own thoughts was going to be impossible.

“It’s just Augusta is giving me a hard time still.”

“Amylia told me that she was about to hit you when she handed out the wedding invitation and that she believes that she should be my date

to the wedding, and not you.”

“Who would you take?” I asked, changing the subject.

“I would take you to the wedding, and I think that I will. Augusta has her own boyfriend who can take her. The only thing she wants is the wealth that my family carry and the fact that she would be able to spend money on more expensive things that she cannot afford.”

“Why didn’t I know about the wedding?”

“Amylia didn’t want anyone knowing about the wedding and it was going to be a private affair just for friends and family, but when the witch of Colac started trying harder to steal James, she had no choice but to reveal to everyone that she was getting married. They have been engaged for five years and only set a wedding date two weeks ago,” Nathaniel told me.

Nathaniel pulled into my driveway, making mum come outside. I grabbed my school bag and got out of the car. She stopped walking when she realised who was with me. maybe I should have rang her while I was waiting for my wrist to be looked at to make sure that Nathaniel coming here was going to be okay.

“Brianna, I thought that you were catching the bus?” mum asked, sounding unsure.

“Change of plans,” I said and looked at Nathaniel.

Mum did the same and smiled at Nathaniel, who walked up to her and held out his hand. She shook it and walked back inside.

“Does she know who I am?” Nathaniel asked.

“She does work with your father, so yes she does know who you are,” I said and walked up the two steps to the front door with Nathaniel behind me. I opened the front door and walked inside the comfort of my home and told Nathaniel to wait for me in the living area.

I walked into the kitchen and saw mum at the kitchen table, looking at papers that were spread all over the small table.

“What are you doing?” I asked and grabbed two glasses from the cupboard.

“Looking at the statements of the money that your father still owes me,” she said and grabbed the calculator.

“I thought he was paying you though?”

“Apparently, since you turned sixteen, he stopped paying money,” she said, looking at the total on the calculator.

“Well, at least can you make it neater? I haven’t exactly told Nathaniel about my father and I don’t want him to find out about it that way,” I said.

Grabbing the bottle of coke, I poured two glasses and left the room. Nathaniel was looking at the photos mum had on the mantel piece over the fireplace. I cleared my throat and placed the glasses on the coffee table.

“You look like your mother,” Nathaniel said when he turned around and looked at me.

“Everyone says that,” I said and sat on the futon.

Nathaniel sat next to me and looked around the room, obviously judging what we had and what we didn’t have.

“If you are judging what we have and don’t have, stop.”

“I’m not. I’m just thinking that you have some nice things. Bethany would be proud of some of things you have.”

“Mum raised me most of the time and we couldn’t afford much. We lived in my grandparents’ bungalow in the backyard most of my life. The only bonus of that is my grandfather and I have a strong bond that no one will break. You haven’t seen my room yet,” I said and grabbed my drink.

“Well, let’s go have a look,” Nathaniel said, getting up.

“Are you serious, Nathaniel?” I asked, looking up at him.

Nathaniel nodded and smiled down at me. We had to go through the kitchen to get to my room. I could only hope that mum cleared the table and hid what I didn’t want Nathaniel to know. Pulling myself up, I led the way to my bedroom, my drink gripped tightly in hand. When we walked into the kitchen, I stopped and looked at mum.

“Where are you kids going?” mum asked, not looking up from the documents.

“Up to my room; Nathaniel wants to see it,” I said, looking at her.

“Keep your bedroom door open Brianna. We don’t want a child around in nine months’ time, especially at your age. Believe me, I know,” mum said and looked at us.

“Don’t worry ma’am, there will be nothing like that going on,” Nathaniel said.

“Call me Marie,” mum said and went back to work.

When we got out of hearing range, Nathaniel pulled me to a stop and looked at me. I had a feeling what question he was going to ask. “What does your mum mean by she knows what it’s like to have a child at a young age?”

“Mum had me when she was sixteen years old and doesn’t want me making the same mistake of having a child now in life when I am still young and still have a lot that I want to do in my life.”

“Wow,” Nathaniel breathed.

I glanced up at him and opened up my bedroom door. I stepped aside and let Nathaniel go in first. As he looked around, I noticed a photo of me and my father on my desk. I grabbed it and hid it behind a box of tissues.

“It’s nice,” Nathaniel said and sat on my bed.

“Well, you have seen everything in the house,” I said and walked over to him.

“I’m glad we have decided to become friends,” Nathaniel said. “I can see it growing into a close and tight relationship.”

He grabbed my hand and rubbed circles with his thumb on it, like he could tell I was tense about something, which I was.

“You can tell me what is bothering you,” Nathaniel said.

I pulled my hand out of his grasp and sat next to him. I knew that I had to tell Nathaniel about my father and the reason why he left, but I just wasn’t ready to.

“I can’t though. I’m not ready to become vulnerable and open up about my life story, which I’m trying to stop Augusta from revealing it to everyone.”

“It mustn’t be that bad?”

“What about you’re secret? That can’t be that bad, can it? Or are you afraid that I will run away from you when I find out about it either from you or from figuring out what it is.”

“Brianna, I know you will run for the hills once you find out what it is, and that’s why I am hoping you won’t find out what I am hiding. I don’t

want you lose you because of it," Nathaniel told me.

Before I could reply, mum walked into my room and looked at both of us before leaning against the doorframe.

"There is someone name Jason here for you Brianna and that he wants to speak to you alone without Nathaniel," mum said, confused.

I looked at Nathaniel before bolting out of my room to the front door. Jason was leaning against the frame, and smirked when he saw me.

"How did you find out where I live?" I asked.

"It is a small town and I'm glad that Nathaniel didn't follow you. He has been glued to your side since you have become friends. He looks at you like that you are the prize that he has won, when he clearly hasn't. You are my prize, not Nathaniel's," Jason said.

"She isn't your prize Jason, and she isn't mine. It's up to Brianna on what she picks or even who she picks if she wants to. Why are you here for anyway? I thought Brianna made herself clear when you pushed her down on the hard concrete at school and making her sprain her wrist. I think you have done enough damage to her," Nathaniel said from behind me.

"And what makes you speak for her? Brianna can talk and doesn't need you breathing down her neck, making her choices for her when she doesn't want or need you running her life for her," Jason said, crossing his arms.

"Excuse me, what gives you the right to think that you can control me Jason? Do don't have the right to do anything that involves me, so don't you even think that you can start to control me!" I yelled.

"Brianna, Nathaniel is different to us, and you are going to accept that. Why don't you just let Augusta have him and you can date me. I would treat you better than he ever could," Jason whispered and placed his hand on my arm.

Nathaniel got between us and looked down at Jason with anger in his eyes. I feared that they were going to start fighting in the entrance way of my home. I got between both of them and looked at Nathaniel, telling him to back off and let me fix it.

"You need to leave now Jason before I inflict the pain I am going

through because of you on your body,” I said and pushed him out of the doorway.

“You don’t mean that,” he said.

“She said leave,” Nathaniel growled and slammed the door in his face.

He rested his head against the wooden door and took a few deep breaths. I slowly walked up to him and placed my hand on his back, making him turn around so he could look me straight in the eye. They held regret and sorrow.

“I’m sorry for being so protective,” he said.

“Nathaniel, I’m not angry at you. In fact, I am glad that you are like that towards me because it saves me getting angry and upset towards someone who is getting on my nerves. You saw what Augusta did to me on my first day and I know for a fact that freaked you out,” I reminded him, then realising that he wasn’t aware I knew.

“How did you find out about that?” he asked, sounding shocked at that information I just told him.

“Hudson told me after school on my first day,” I admitted.

“She told you that? I told her and Brandon not to say anything to you about me seeing what happened and what do they do? They go behind my back and do what I didn’t want them to do. Just wait until I see them at school on Monday and give them a piece of my mind for breaking their promise,” Nathaniel said quietly.

“Don’t blame them for doing that. In a way, they forced us to be friends by doing that and now look at us. If they didn’t, we couldn’t be talking in my house, would we? We would still be at the fighting stage of knowing each other and that wouldn’t be doing anyone any good,” I said.

A slight smile cracked onto Nathaniel’s face and he walked back into the kitchen. I followed him and saw that mum was getting tea ready, using what little food we had in the house. It sucked when we couldn’t afford much.

“What’s cooking?” I asked.

“A nice salad with some toasted croutons,” mum replied.

“Speaking of which, I should get home before Bethany starts looking

for me,” Nathaniel said and placed his hands in his pockets.

“It was nice meeting you Nathaniel,” mum said.

“You too,” he replied and looked at me.

“I’ll walk you out.”

We didn’t say anything as we walked to his car. I didn’t know why he just didn’t take it home and walk back up here, but I didn’t say anything about it. I was just happy that we weren’t fighting over something.

“Next time, and only if you want, you could come over to my house and see where I live?”

“Sure,” I replied.

He nodded and got into his car. I walked back inside and locked the door before making my way to the kitchen. Mum looked up and pointed towards my wrist. I had forgotten to tell her about what happened and that it was Jason that caused it.

“Jason grabbed my arm and threw me onto the ground at school extremely hard. It’s just sprained and should heal in a few days.”

“Why did he do something like that for?”

“He doesn’t like the fact that Nathaniel and I have grown a bit closer and he decided to have a screaming match with Hudson to get answers. I could see that he was going to hurt her, so I decided to break it up and that’s when he became violent towards me and caused this. He has been causing trouble since day one and it seems that he has no plans on giving up until I end up doing something that I will regret later on in life.”

“Why doesn’t he just leave you alone then?”

“Because he doesn’t understand the meaning of that word; all he does is go around school and say that I am his girlfriend, and then there is the trouble with Augusta.”

“Who is Augusta?” she asked, sounding confused at that name.

“Augusta Nicholson.”

“I work with her mother, Erica. All she does is glare at all of us workers but when Jack is around, she is always flirting at him and saying that she would be a better wife to him than his current wife, who I haven’t met yet and mind you, Augusta’s mother is married,” mum said, making my mouth drop.

“If her husband found out about all of this, what would happen?”

“There would be a divorce on the cards. Steven doesn’t like his wife flirting with every rich and attractive guy that catches her eye and once he finds out about what Erica did today, there will be trouble brewing in the marriage.”

“When I went to see Jack with Amylia, Nathaniel’s future sister-in-law, Erica said that we weren’t allowed to see him, but when she came into the room when we were almost finish, her tone changed completely. She was flirting with him and tried to get us into trouble for interrupting Jack’s break, but was still looking at us, hoping to kill with her looks.”

“Anyway honey, dinner is ready to help you and see if it can get some meat on your bones,” mum said and patted me on the shoulder.

“I take after you mum, so it will be a struggle for me. I got your genes and this wouldn’t do anything anyway as it doesn’t have enough bad things in it to do damage” I said and took what I wanted.

“Yes, you are more of a Clarkson than a Morrison and anyone can see that.”

I smiled and sat down at the table. Throughout dinner, there was hardly a word spoken between us, but it didn’t bother me at all. I liked the quiet. The documents mum was looking at before were stacked on the table caught my attention and made me slip into my own thoughts of my father.

Even though I was sixteen years old, I still couldn’t understand why the fact he would leave because I looked like mum...well, more of a splitting image of my mother, but I just couldn’t understand it. Did he think I wasn’t his or something? Mum noticed I was in my own world and lightly kicked my shin. I gasped in shock and grabbed where she kicked me, and looking my mother straight in the eye.

“What was that for?” I asked and looked down at my hardly untouched food.

“You slipped into your own thoughts. Do you want to talk about what is troubling you?”

“The documents that you have on the table made me think of dad.”

“Honey, I have been thinking and I believe that your father didn’t

even want you to begin with. Before we moved here, I found a bunch of baby pictures of you and your father and it made me think back to when you were born. He only held you when it came to photos. Otherwise, he pretended that you weren't in the room and left most of the work for me to do while he sat on the couch and watched TV all day."

"I don't even know why I am wasting my thoughts on him. He missed out on seeing me grow up, so why should I waste any more time on him?"

"Exactly," mum said and grabbed her empty plate and placed it in the kitchen sink.

I wasn't hungry anymore, but I still ate what I could, even if I felt sick after. When mum left the room, I grabbed one of the documents and looked at it. What I saw shocked me. My father owed mum close to six thousand dollars. Why wasn't he paying anything and getting away with it? I placed it back on the pile and walked over to the kitchen sink, looking out the window and placing my plate in the sink.

My anger was starting to build towards the man I called father, when looking back at it, he missed everything in my life that was important and didn't regret it. The only contact I had was a birthday card from him in my life time. He hadn't bothered otherwise and now that he wasn't paying any money, I didn't even know if he was alive.

When I made my way to bed that night, I was fuming with anger on the inside and was tempted to find my father and demand to know what his problem was and to give mum the money that he owed her.

For once, my sleep wasn't plagued by dreams.

4. Feelings

The week flew and before I knew it, Saturday had come around, making it closer to the end of the month and to the season I enjoyed the most; Autumn.

When I was a little girl, I would spend hours looking out the window, watching the leaves from the trees onto the ground, a rusty brown colour or a light red, and then going outside to play in them for hours on end most days. That was when I didn't have any worries from boys and Augusta and the only thing I had to worry about was what colour pencil to use next when I was drawing something.

I decided to go for a walk around Forrest since mum was at work and I had nothing better to do in my day or currently with my time. I slipped on my shoes and made sure the door was locked before I walked down

the steps and onto the footpath.

When I got around the corner, I noticed that Amylia was outside with another lady at the front of her house, which must have been the same one that Nathaniel had told me about the other day during music. I slowly walked down the street and when I got closer; Amylia looked up and saw me approaching, but didn't say anything until I was hearing range.

"Brianna, hey," she said and smiled at me. "I wasn't expecting you to be walking past today."

"Hey," I said and looked at who I assumed was Bethany.

"Oh this is the Brianna that has caught my Nathaniel's attention?" she asked and looked at Amylia.

Amylia nodded and went back to planting roses in the garden, not making eye contact with either of us. The lady looked at me and smiled warmly.

"I'm Bethany Pryor, Jack's wife and the one that keeps all the kids in this household under control. Nathaniel has spoken highly of you to both of us. I'm afraid Nathaniel isn't home though and I'm not sure when he will be back," she said, frowning.

"Oh that's okay. I was just exploring the town since I haven't really had a chance," I replied, looking around and seeing a lot of forest.

"There is not really much here. Colac is more of the place everyone hangs out and gets up to trouble," Amylia said without looking up at me.

"Well, I'm not like everyone else," I said.

"That we already know. You have the guts to stand up to Augusta when everyone else is scared of her so that is good."

I smiled at her and started to walk away when the witch herself left a house and started walking up the street. I stopped walking and turned around so I could look at Amylia. She noticed what I was looking at and ushered me into the yard as her gaze turned hard towards who was approaching.

"She lives in the same street as us and she believes that because of this, she has a better chance to date Nathaniel, but what she doesn't know is that my son has his eye on someone else that has inner beauty

and doesn't have a heart of stone," Bethany told me.

Jealously cursed through my veins when Bethany finished talking; of course there was no way that Nathaniel would want to date me. I wasn't perfect enough and there are clearly other girls at school that have what he wants, including wealth. Something I would never have. I was plain, boring and had a lot of issues that I was fighting tooth and nail to keep buried so they wouldn't scare him off or even worse; scare him into Augusta's arms.

"I thought that I saw Brianna around here," James said, coming outside.

"James, if I were you, I would get back inside. The witch is approaching and you know what she is like around this time of year with guys that have money," Amylia said and wrapped an arm around his waist.

"She can flirt with me all she likes and can try and tear us apart, but we both know that my heart belongs with you and nothing will ever change that," he said and leaned down to kiss her.

I looked down at the ground so I wouldn't have to witness anything. I sometimes hated people in love and the fact they didn't know they were rubbing it in your face by mistake or they just didn't care about anyone else's feelings.

"What is going on?" Augusta asked when she approached the house and saw me standing there.

"Well we are planting flowers in the garden so we have a nice looking front yard for the new seasons approaching. The sun is shining for a change so why not get some vitamins at the same time," James replied.

"I mean why Brianna is here? She never had the right to be in this town, and she sure as hell doesn't have the right to be with you," she said, glaring at me.

"If there is anyone that shouldn't be here, it should be you and your wicked ways," Amylia seethed.

"I'll just go," I said quietly and started to step away from all of them and most importantly Augusta.

I was slowly starting to get sick of her meddling ways and trying to ruin my life and most others for her pleasure.

"And don't return. You don't have the right to hang around the

Pryor's when you aren't like us and you never will be," Augusta said, expecting them to back her up.

Her words were like being stabbed in the heart but that was something that I needed to get used to. James ran over to me and grabbed my arm, stopping me from leaving and forcing me to listen to what else had to be said in this argument.

"Excuse me, you aren't like us either, so don't you dare go around and say that you are when you aren't. All the money that your father has earned is spent by you and your mother on expensive things that doesn't even look good on you. That skirt for one is way too short to walk around a town in; and you can't even walk in those heels. At least Brianna covers up and is friendly and doesn't bother about working her way up the social scene like you and Erica with money and your craving to date a rich boy so he can fuel your need for the celebrity lifestyle that you will never have. By the time you are in your twenties, you will have nothing and no one the way you treat everyone and everything," Amylia said, glaring at Augusta. "You deserve to be alone for the rest of your life."

"And you will? Most marriages these days don't even last two years. You will have no one when a divorce is on the cards either and that's when I will get my chance at James if I can't get Nathaniel first. I am bound to grab a Pryor boy even if it kills me. No one can resist me and that will never change," Augusta said, glaring back at Amylia.

I started to wonder how many people she has turned against each other with one simple word or action. She was the spawn of Satan. There was no doubt about it.

"I adore Amylia and I would never leave her. Especially for someone like you who holds no interest for me as she is cold, vain and selfish as you," James said, anger and hatred lacing his voice.

"You have said what you wanted to and you can leave now Augusta. Brianna is more than welcome here anytime she wants to," Bethany said, speaking up for the first time.

"Why are you defending her for? She is just a poor girl from Melton that everyone wants to know because she is different and once that wears off, she will be alone like it should be and like she will be."

“It doesn’t matter if she is different or not. At least we want to be around her willingly because we like her. We don’t want to be around you anytime of the day because we hate you,” Amylia spat and grabbed my arm, pulling me out of James grasp.

She was walking at a fast pace, making me having to run to keep up with her while she still had my arm in her grasp. I didn’t have it in me to say anything as Amylia was angry and I didn’t know if she would take it out on me.

“Are you okay?” I asked when we were out of hearing range.

“She just makes me so angry, thinking that she is like my family when she clearly isn’t. We have more money than her and some of the things we have are cheap and not everything we wear is designer. If we were like her, we wouldn’t have befriended you like we did, and try to make you feel welcome any way we can.”

“All she wants to do is make my life a living hell until I end my friendship with Nathaniel or until I get sick of her and flee this town. I have fought back once and now she has become much worse. You saw that she has decided to turn to violence at school so I dread what else she might be capable of doing to me.”

What Augusta said and the way she has been treating me was making my confidence drop each time and on top of that, I was worried that she would convince Nathaniel to end all contact with me. Amylia stopped walking and turned to look at me. I sighed and looked down at the ground, trying to fight back the emotions that had started to overcome me.

“Don’t worry about her and once Nathaniel finds out about all of this, there will be trouble brewing. He doesn’t let anyone that he is close to get hurt, and this will be no different to any other time. You are special to him Brianna and nothing will ever change that.”

“It just all depends how special I am.”

I decided to make my way home. I didn’t want to be seen by Augusta, as if she saw me alone, she could do anything to harm me. As I walked up the steps to get inside, I heard a car skid to a stop at the front of my place. I turned around and saw that Nathaniel was getting out of the car.

“What are you doing?” Nathaniel asked.

“I just came back from a walk, and I also met your mother, Bethany on my walk as well,” I said, from the veranda.

“Why didn’t you stay there? I am heading back there and it would have been a nice surprise to see you at my home for once and not run into you on the street or something like that.”

“Because I had a not so nice confrontation with Augusta and I didn’t want her hanging around, with her making sure that when you come back, she can pounce on you and say I caused the trouble. She doesn’t want me around you and she won’t stop until that happens.”

“So what are you saying? That you don’t want to be friends anymore because of her?” Nathaniel asked, completely misunderstanding what I just told him.

“No, I’m not saying that at all,” I said and walked towards him.

“That’s what it sounds like to me Brianna, so why don’t we just do that? End our friendship and do you think that will stop Augusta causing trouble because it won’t do anything to stop nothing. You don’t know her like we do.”

“I am not saying that Nathaniel! I am just saying that she won’t stop until we aren’t friends, then you go and blow this out of proportion, but you know that I only wanted to be your friend, and it seems like you call the shots, so if you want our friendship to be over, go right ahead!” I yelled, fighting tears and ran inside.

I locked the door so he couldn’t enter and ran to my room, slamming the door, listening to the window shudder. I let the wave of emotion wash over me and slid slowly down the door, not stopping until I hit the floor. Nathaniel knocked on the door a few times and called out my name, but I didn’t answer him back. I really didn’t want to see him until I cooled down after what happened. I was still there when mum came home from work and shopping. I heard her calling my name, but I didn’t know if I wanted to say anything in case I broke down again. Getting up from the floor, I unlocked my door and slowly walked down the hall way.

“There you are,” mum said and turned around so she could look at me. “What happened?”

“I think that Nathaniel and I aren’t friends anymore,” I said and wiped away a few tears that were still falling down my face.

“Did you and he have a fight over something?” mum asked and looked at me concerned at the state I was in.

“I went for a walk and Nathaniel drove past when I got home. I said that I thought that Augusta wouldn’t stop making my life a living hell unless we stop being friends, and the next thing I knew, Nathaniel and I were having a fight over it. I said that it seemed like he called the shots in our friendship and that if he didn’t want to be friends, go right ahead,” I told her, trying to force back more tears that wanted to fall.

“Brianna, when Nathaniel was here last week, he seemed to be engrossed by you, so it wouldn’t surprise me if he shows up here later on or when you are at school on Monday, apologising to you or if he has a gift for you at the same time. Nathaniel seemed like the type that wouldn’t be able to handle not having your friendship. Jack told me before that Nathaniel had changed a lot since you have arrived into his life and that he doesn’t want him to go back to the way he was before,” mum said, a strange look in her eyes.

“Well, if he has decided to end our friendship, he will be going back to the way he was before I came into Nathaniel’s life. I don’t want to be friends with someone who can’t understand that I wasn’t saying that we can’t be friends and blowing things way out of proportion when he doesn’t have to.”

Mum didn’t look convinced though. I wasn’t expecting Nathaniel to arrive or even talk to me anymore, but when someone knocked on the door around seven at night, I secretly hoped it was him on my doorstep, but I couldn’t bring myself to answer the door; so I forced mum to do it while I stayed in my room, hiding from the person I so wanted it to be.

But knowing my luck, it would have been Jason, coming to annoy and harass me that bit more, making me snap and causing harm before realising what I was doing. It doesn’t take much for him to get on the wrong side of me, that’s for sure.

“Brianna, there is someone here for you,” she said, her voice laced with excitement.

Grumbling down the hall, I turned towards the entrance way and

stopped frozen when I saw Nathaniel standing there with a bouquet of roses looking down at the floor. For once, my wish was answered and not placed in the reject basket. On the inside I was dancing and jumping for joy, but on the outside, I was stony faced.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, still deciding if I was going to play nice and let him off easy or if make him work hard to earn my forgiveness.

“I came to say I’m sorry about what happened before between us. I brought you roses because I thought that they might cheer you up over everything that has been happening since you arrived in town,” he said and handed them to me.

I looked at them before looking at Nathaniel and sighing. “You think that this will make me forgive you after what you said before? I don’t like being bribed so I will forgive someone if they can’t get their way.”

“Brianna,” mum said, exasperated.

Why couldn’t she just leave and let us talk alone without saying something that she didn’t know about? I thought to myself and bit my tongue so I wouldn’t say anything. I shot her a look, telling her to leave. She finally took noticed and stepped out of the room, leaving us alone. There was a tense silence between us that I didn’t want to break.

“Look, I’m sorry, but I don’t think that this will cut it at all. You hurt me Nathaniel and once Augusta gets wind of what happened, she will try her hardest to force the divide that is now between us to be even deeper,” I finally said, breaking the silence.

“That’s why I’m here. I want to be your friend Brianna, and maybe more one day only if you wanted it to become more than what it is now. I want you to forgive me so badly and even if I have to get on my knees and beg you to forgive me and be my friend again, I will do that. I just want your forgiveness so bad because I don’t know how I would go with you are upset with me,” Nathaniel pleaded.

“You picked these coloured roses because of the way my hair smells, didn’t you?” I asked, changing the subject.

I had a feeling that Nathaniel also picked them because of the comment he made on my blood coloured hair that I was still thinking about colouring so I wouldn’t have to think of blood every time I looked at it.

“Well, as you can see I made sure they were blood red,” he said gesturing towards them with a smile.

“Thank you,” I said and smiled briefly.

I turned around and walked into the kitchen, noticing that mum had a vase out with water in it. Rolling my eyes, I placed the roses on the bench and reached for the scissors so I could trim the ends of them.

“There is another reason why I am here also,” he said behind me.

“And what’s that?” I asked.

“Monday is Valentine’s Day and this year, the school has decided to hold a Valentine’s Day dance, so I was wondering if you wanted be my date to this event?” he asked, sounding nervous.

“I don’t have a dress for it,” I said and cut the stems off the flowers. “And I wouldn’t even have the time to buy one.”

“Amylia said she would lend you one if you agreed to go with me. She will be around sometime tomorrow with everything and then again on Monday to help you get ready for the dance if you agree to attend with me.”

There was no way I was getting out of this one in a hurry. Closing my eyes, I tried to think of another excuse but none came to mind. If I was any other teenage girl with a guy with looks and money asking me to a dance, I would have agreed in a heartbeat, but I wasn’t. I was shy and hesitant when it came to some things and this would have been one of them.

“What dance and why wasn’t I informed about it from the school?” mum asked, walking into the room.

“There is a Valentine’s Day dance at school on Monday night and I asked your daughter to join me by my side,” Nathaniel said. “Also, it is the first time they have decided to do something this year and hopefully the last. I really don’t want to attend something like this every single year on a romantic day if I ever had plans with your daughter.”

“That is a lovely idea on the schools behalf. What do you say Brianna? Will you go with Nathaniel and make him happy for one night?” mum said and looked at me.

She was trying to blackmail me into going. I could sense that from over a mile away. Sighing, I closed my eyes before opening them and

looking at Nathaniel and my mother. There was no way I was going to get out of this one without a lot of kicking and screaming. I had no choice but to do what I didn't want to do. And that was relenting.

"Fine, I will go to this dance if you don't say any more about it until Monday when I have come prepared for Augusta and the hell she will unleash on me when she finally finds out that you are going to be my date and not her. If I were you mum, I would start planning my funeral now once she has finished with me. I will be buried alive by the end of the night," I said and grabbed the vase in both of my hands before making my way to my room before she could reply back to what I just said.

I placed it on my dresser and took a step back, hitting something hard behind me. Turning around, I saw Nathaniel standing there.

"Do you even really want to go to the dance Brianna?" he asked.

"I have no choice, do I?" I asked. "I have already agreed to go and I'm not the type that likes backing out of things so I will go and suffer it for one night. Who knows, I might have some fun for a change."

"That's good to know because you are going to be the most beautiful girl at the dance once Amylia is finished with you."

"Well, that's good to know," I muttered, a strange feeling starting to form in my stomach from his words.

"I should get going so Beth doesn't worry about me. I will see you on Monday, bright and early in the car park."

"Why the car park, Nathaniel?" I asked, feeling unsure that I even wanted to know the answer to my question.

"No reason," Nathaniel said, too quickly for my liking.

He had something planned, and I was only hoping that he didn't make me feel obligated to buy him something. Even if he did, I had no idea what to get a teenage boy that had everything under the sun. When he left, mum decided to corner me for answers in the living room and get the answers I could tell she was dying to know.

"So what is going on for Monday? Do I need to finish work early so you can get ready or--"

"Mum!" I shouted, cutting her off. "There is no need to get so excited over this like you are. I don't even want to go. I mean, it's Valentine's Day, and it's not a day I like. You should know that by now. "

“There is nothing wrong about getting a bit of attention from a boy that you like Brianna and who happens likes you back,” she said, her eyes sparkling.

“Oh, you mean one that I do want to start a relationship with and another I want to push off a cliff into the rocks with sharks circling, making him shark food so I’ll never have to see him again? It doesn’t work like that anymore mum; at least not in my world. I have one guy that is obsessed with me and might even result in kidnapping me if worse comes to worse that won’t get the hint that I am not interested and another that is far too perfect for me and yet, is still hanging around when he knows what this house looks like inside and knows for a fact that we aren’t rich.”

The look mum gave was like I was speaking another language towards her that wasn’t English. I had thought to myself that Nathaniel was judgemental at first and treated everyone like they were nothing, but he was slowly starting to prove me wrong, but mum was under the impression that he was an angel to begin with and couldn’t do anything wrong in the world. She didn’t really know how he treated me to begin with and I didn’t want her finding that out. Nathaniel might be banned from hanging around me if that came out into the open. There were two sides of Nathaniel that I didn’t want her seeing.

“I’m going to my room,” I said and walked away from her, a dull throbbing starting to form inside my head from all this thinking and all the crying I did before.

When I got in there, the first thing I realised was something looked different from when I was in here before. Doing a full circle, I saw that the photo I hid last week from Nathaniel had reappeared from the place I put it and it was now in front of the tissues. Nathaniel must have seen it and put it on display, not realising one of the reasons why it was hidden out of seeing range. That was something I didn’t need. Just looking at the photo stirred a tantalizing destruction that I urged and craved to let free inside of me and out into the open. I had already ripped up one photo and I didn’t want to do it to another one, even though it had the man I couldn’t stand in it. I would need a place to store a lot of photo frames if I ripped up every single photo I had of him up.

Clenching my hands, I turned around so I couldn't see the photo and took a few deep breaths, trying to calm both myself and my emotions down to the way they were before I came back in here. I didn't know how one single man that I hardly knew could stir so much anger, pain, disgust and destruction in one person. I didn't know what I was capable of doing if I ever came face to face with my father ever again.

And I wasn't one for violence or any type of harm.

5. Vampires

When I woke up on Sunday morning, what happened yesterday re-played over in my mind. But something didn't feel right to me. It felt like someone was watching me from the outside world and I tried to ignore the feeling. It wasn't going away.

I finally decided to get out of bed and I walked over to my window, but couldn't see anything or anyone looking in. Now I was slowly going insane. I was sure of it. I looked over towards the roses Nathaniel gave me and sighed. Would that be it for his gifts or would it be every time he did something wrong, I would be lavished by roses or some other flower?

Something just didn't feel right. My thoughts went back to Nathaniel, making my walking slow right down as he entered my thoughts. I knew that there was something wrong with him and his family and I just couldn't put my fingers on it, but he wouldn't spy on me, would he? Nathaniel would respect my privacy and wouldn't do anything like that, I decided, but still felt unsure about what he was capable of doing. The second person would be Jason, but he wouldn't be dumb enough to hide until the last minute, giving me a chance to catch him.

"Brianna, are you alright? You look like you have seen a ghost," mum said when I entered the kitchen.

"I don't feel right," I muttered, looking around the room just in case someone was hiding outside, looking into my life.

"I'm sure that it is only just the virus you got still knocking you around. It use to do that when you were a little girl and I'm sure that wouldn't have changed in ten years," mum said and went back to making her coffee.

"No, I mean that I feel like someone is watching me, but when I look back, there is no one looking in."

She dropped the spoon on the floor and turned around so she could look at me. It appeared all the colour from her face had drained also. Mum quickly turned back around and stared blankly out the kitchen

window, not saying a complete word to me. Did she not believe me or something? Why would I lie about something serious like that?

“Well, I didn’t want to say anything just in case you didn’t believe me, but when Nathaniel was here yesterday and last week, he was looking at you strangely, but I just couldn’t place the look. That boy is confusing sometimes and you can’t follow his eyes,” mum told me after a while, making warning bells go off in my head.

“You don’t think he would spy on me, do you?” I asked, unsure of what her answer would be. “I mean, he should know how to respect privacy and we are friends. He wouldn’t want to risk that if he got caught, right?” I asked, sitting down at the kitchen table.

“Honey, Nathaniel and his father is different to us and I have tried to ignore it but sometimes it is hard so anything is quite possible at the moment with Nathaniel. It seems like Nathaniel will do anything to make sure that you are safe and protected at all times,” mum said, still looking out the kitchen window.

“His whole family is different to us mum. People don’t have that sort of beauty naturally. It’s like something you would never see on a human, like immortal beauty, but that would be hard to achieve since they are alive. They are cold to touch and I have asked questions about it,” I said, following mum with my eyes as she walked over to the kitchen table and sat in front of me.

“What did he say?”

“He said that he couldn’t tell me because it was dangerous and that he is extremely dangerous and that his whole family is the same and he didn’t want to put me at risk. I mean, Amylia spoke under her breath and Nathaniel’s brother James, understood every word that she said and I couldn’t. And I thought bodies were meant to be soft, not hard as ice or stone,” I said and started to play with the loose piece of cotton on my top to keep my mind off everything. “It is just strange.”

Mum looked deep in thought. It was obvious that I wasn’t the only one that saw there was something different with the Pryor’s. I started to think about whom else in Forrest and Colac could see that something was different about them but was too scared to say anything.

“The only thing I can think of is that they have contracted something,

like Tuberculosis; but that disease is only in third world countries,” she said.

“What is Tuberculosis?” I asked, feeling curious about something that I had never heard of before in my entire life.

“It’s known as the curse of the vampire. Apparently, people who suffered from 1840 until 1940 showed signs of being a vampire; like the pale skin, sensitive to bright light and the beauty caused by the disease, but as I said, that would be impossible for them to contract it as they are still young and I don’t think they would travel to where it is still around without a good reason,” she conducted.

Could Nathaniel and his family be...vampires? If they were, that would mean that Brandon would be one also, and Hudson would know all about this and if she didn’t, how could he keep it a secret from the girl he is meant to be madly in love with? It was a good thing I got a laptop for my sixteenth birthday. I needed to do some research on all of this before I went crazy out of my mind with curiosity. When I finished my toast, I made my way back to my bedroom and stopped when I opened the door.

The window was wide open and there was a single white rose sitting on my pillow with a note tied to it. I slowly walked over to it and looked down at it.

For someone as beautiful as you, but only you have my heart and soul and you will have it until the day I die, it read. I had never seen that writing before, and I couldn’t pin it on Nathaniel as I had never seen his writing. He always hid it from me by hunching over every time he wrote something. Did he do it because he had plans on breaking into my room and I couldn’t blame him for it if I didn’t know his writing? I placed it on my bedside table so I could study it later on and hope it was Nathaniel that sent it to me and no one else.

Picking up the rose, I looked at it and saw all the thorns were missing. At least I didn’t have to worry about cutting myself on the dangerous part of the flower. Thinking back, I saw Bethany had these in her garden, but a lot of people grow white roses. I placed it with the blood red ones and made my way to the window. That was impossible to open from the outside, but somehow, it opened. Okay, now I was started to

silently freak out. First it felt like someone was watching me and now a single white rose has appeared out of nowhere. I think it was safe to say that I was being stalked.

I grabbed my laptop and plugged in the wireless internet, my nerves all jittery with what I might discover. I needed to know if Nathaniel was a vampire or not and then I could decide what I was going to do about it. When I finally got the internet working, I typed in the first word that came to mind; *vampire information*.

Most of the pages didn't catch my interest, but when I clicked on one, I almost fell off my bed when I noticed it had everything about what I noticed about Nathaniel and his family; the cold skin, beauty that appeared to be immortal, hard skin, icy and civil to humans and the corpse like pallor they all had. It looked like they had been out of the sun for six months, and they did have a lot of expensive things that a lot of rich people wouldn't even be able to afford. Slowly, but surely, everything started to add up and the realisation dawned on me; Nathaniel was a *vampire*.

Nathaniel couldn't be a vampire. They are monsters and Nathaniel isn't and his family isn't. I quickly got dressed and decided to go for a walk, hoping to clear my head. I walked down the hall, telling mum that I was going for a walk.

"Have fun and don't be too late," was her reply.

My mind was screaming at me to see Nathaniel and to force him to confirm that he was a vampire to me, but my heart was telling me to leave it and to protect myself from getting hurt by not saying anything to anyone. And there was an extremely high chance that he could deny everything and make me look like a complete and utter idiot for voicing my suspicions. I decided to listen to my heart, but still had no choice but to go past Nathaniel's house.

"This was going to be interesting," I muttered to myself as I made my way past it.

Nathaniel was out in the front in the garden doing something, almost making me grind to a halt so I could look at him, but I forced myself not to stop. Placing my hair in front of my face and hanging my head down, I walked past, hoping not to be noticed by him. It didn't work. He called

out my name, making me walk faster than my body would have liked as it started to protest. If I stopped and spoke to him, I wouldn't have been able to stop myself and I would have asked him for the truth. And there was a very high chance that wouldn't have ended well.

"Brianna, stop," Nathaniel said, getting in front of me.

"I'm sorry Nathaniel, but I can't stay. I have to go," I said, my voice breathless and tried to get past him.

He wasn't having a bar of that. He grabbed my arm and forced me to stay where I was. At the moment, it was my head versus my heart and neither of them was helping me in my current turbulent and tantalizing relationship with Nathaniel. I was breathing heavy and just wanted to be left alone so I could think.

"Can you please let me go?" I asked, feeling defeated and flattened.

"Brianna, why do I get the feeling that you are trying to avoid me?" he asked.

"I don't know. All I know is that I am in a hurry and don't have the time to talk, so how about a raincheck?" I suggested, sacrificing time I craved to spend with Nathaniel.

I knew if I caved, our friendship would be over in a second once I opened my mouth and asked him if he was a vampire or not. I wasn't ready to face that. Nathaniel sighed and closed his eyes before nodding and looking down at me.

"Fine Brianna, but I want to spend all my time with you tomorrow," he said and stepped aside to let me through.

"It's a date," I shouted as I walked away.

I was tempted to pretend to be sick tomorrow so I didn't have to go to school and face uncourtly attention that I didn't want, but then Nathaniel would decide to keep my company in the comfort of my own home. And if Nathaniel was a vampire, him and I alone for a long time with blood running through my veins, his sweet nectar of life, I could be a dead, blood drained corpse if he slipped up and didn't realise what he was doing.

My mind started to go back into over drive one again. Would I be able accept the fact Nathaniel could be a vampire? I couldn't find it in me to find a fault so far, besides the fact that every time I was around

Nathaniel, I was putting my life at risk, but I couldn't seem to care. It seemed like I was willing to die to spend time with Nathaniel. That was a sacrifice I wanted to make. It was a sacrifice I was willing to make.

Something else I realised that shocked me was the fact I knew and I could feel that I was slowly falling in love with Nathaniel. Did he feel the same way or was I putting everything on the line for a possible rejection or death?

"Brianna!" Dakota said and stopped in front of me. "A little birdie told me that Nathaniel had asked you to be his date to the dance tomorrow night."

"Yes he did ask me," I said, trying to pin point what she wanted.

"Well, I will give you a tip on how you can knock Nathaniel off his feet. Wear something that is the same as your hair colour. We don't really know why, but he has something for the colour of your hair."

"You mean the fact that it looks like blood and he likes it because of that fact?" I snapped, my subconscious doing a little victory dance.

"Are you alright?" Dakota asked, automatically knowing something was wrong.

I sighed before answering. "I just figured out something that I am still trying to get my head around very quickly."

At the moment, my head was the devil and my heart was the angel. They were both telling to do something different and making me feel completely and utterly confused. Dakota looked suspicious but didn't say anymore.

"Okay, well if you ever feel like talking, you know where I live so don't hesitate," she said and brushed past me in her designer clothes.

When I got home, Nathaniel's car was in the drive way, parked behind mum's commodore. That was a shock to see and made my heart skip a few beats in the process. What did he want? I made sure I was quiet so I could hear what they were talking about. I took a few steps and made sure not to trip or step on anything that will catch the attention of both of them. That would make them stop talking and I would miss out on information that I wouldn't be able to get any other time.

"Brianna just didn't seem herself before. She never has blown me off before, but she did and it was strange. Are you sure that she is alright?"

I heard Nathaniel say from the kitchen.

“Nathaniel, Brianna hasn’t been herself all day. She hates Valentine’s Day because of attention. We both know she doesn’t like it when all the attention is on her, but this is a lot worse than I have ever seen before,” mum replied.

“Marie, can you promise me that you won’t tell Brianna this?”

“What do you want to tell me?” mum asked as I walked quietly so they wouldn’t stop talking.

“I have feelings for your daughter and I plan on telling her tomorrow either at the dance or at school,” he said, making me knock over a photo from the shock.

“Crap!” I exclaimed and stood it back up right.

The noise was enough to catch their attention and to make them stop talking. Leave it to me to stuff everything up by knocking something over by mistake. I mentally yelled and swore at myself in my mind while my inner ego stood upright, hands on hips and tapping her foot on the ground while shaking her head at the same time.

“Brianna, are you back? We are in the kitchen if you are looking for us,” mum called out towards me.

Does she think I’m dumb or something? I thought to myself as I walked into the kitchen, acting like I didn’t know anything when I clearly heard everything that I wanted to know. I smiled at both of them before walking back up to my room. As I put my laptop away, Nathaniel appeared in my door way, looking at me directly.

“Hello,” I said and looked up at him.

“Have I done something to you Brianna?” he asked and walked towards

“What makes you think that, Nathaniel?” I asked and crossed my arms, getting ready to become defensive.

“Because you are acting cold towards me; it’s like you know something that I don’t,” Nathaniel said and crossed his arms.

Oh Nathaniel, you are on the money with that remark.

“Actually I do know something that you don’t, but I don’t know how you will respond so I’m not going to say anything.”

“Brianna, don’t you think I need to know what is going on? I mean,

so it won't affect our friendship?" he asked, moving in closer so our noses were basically touching. I could smell the sweet scent of his hair and his minty breath almost made me lose my train of thoughts, but I held myself together.

"Well how about that I tell you what it is tomorrow at the school dance? I still need to practice my speech on how to break it to you and hopefully I will be able to figure out your reaction while I'm practicing my speech in front of a mirror tonight," I suggested, waiting for his answer.

Nathaniel took a while to reply, but he did after a while. "Fine; I will see you tomorrow bright and early at school and there better be an explanation on your lips Brianna." And he left the room, leaving me standing there without the chance to say goodbye.

Once I told him my suspicions about what he is, I didn't know if that would change his feelings for me. He just should be happy that I didn't plan on running away from him either way, even though I should have to save my life in the end no doubt. Halfway through my thinking, mum walked into the room and started firing away with her questions.

"So what happened?" mum asked.

"What did Nathaniel want? And you could have let me know he would have been there when I left this morning," I said, ignoring her question completely.

"Nathaniel just wanted to know what was wrong with you and admitted a few things to me. Also, I didn't know that he was going to show up and if I did, I would have forced you to stay put. He arrived five minutes after you left and started asking questions straight away," mum said, looking down at my floor.

"And I know what that is. Nathaniel has feelings for me, but is too gutless to admit it to me now," I said and looked my mother's lowered head, waiting for her to look up.

"Brianna, how did you find out?" she asked, breathless.

"I happened to come home and heard you and Nathaniel talking. I know he would have stopped once I entered the room so I decided to be quiet and because of that, I heard that he has feelings for me and will tell me tomorrow night at the dance."

“How do you feel about him, Brianna?” she asked, finally making eye contact with me.

“I think I’m falling for him, but I have found out something’s that could change everything about us.”

“It can’t be that bad, can it?”

“In the end, I believe that it will be a matter of life and death, but I need him to confirm it before I can make a choice on if I end up dying in the future or not.”

“What do you know that might ruin everything? I mean, it is pretty hasty to say that this could kill you so how bad can this be?”

Do I tell her or keep it to myself. Mum deserved to know everything, but then I couldn’t risk her life also in the process. The worse Nathaniel could do is cut me out of his life if I wasn’t meant to tell mum. My inner voice started speaking: *Brianna, Brianna, Brianna, Nathaniel could drink your blood until you are dead if this wasn’t meant to come out into the open so anyone else can’t find out about it. We are talking about the fact that he could be a vampire, after all and we all know that they are a dangerous creature of the night.*

My inner voice did have a good point, but in the end, I decided to risk it and tell mum the truth instead of lying.

“I believe Nathaniel is a vampire,” I whispered.

“How can he be a vampire?” she asked, confusion lacing her voice.

“What you told me about Tuberculosis made me think about a lot of things and then I did some research and everything I found confirmed everything that I was thinking about them. I just need get the courage to tell Nathaniel about what I found so he can tell me if it’s true or not. I do find it a shock if he and his family, plus Brandon have the same things in common with a vampire and I don’t even know if I should be telling you all of this just in case if it is true and I’m putting your life in danger by admitting all of this.”

“All I can say is Nathaniel should be glad that you haven’t decided to run from him after finding all this out because if I were you, I would have by now and I would be not looking back over my shoulder. This is a lot of information to process and you are only sixteen years old, but you have always had the mind set of an adult since you were a little girl.”

“What if he doesn’t want anything to do with me after tomorrow? I said to him when he was here before that I would tell him what I know tomorrow night at the dance. I just don’t that backfiring and me being all alone while he falls into the arms of Augusta, which she will use that to her advantage on making the rest of my time here a living hell because she got Nathaniel and I didn’t because I blew the only shot that I would have had with him.”

“Sweetie, I don’t see him doing something like that. Nathaniel seems to be smitten with you and you haven’t even started a relationship, and if he does, I won’t hesitate to go and get answers from him straight away and I won’t be nice about it. Plus I don’t think his father would like it if his son decides to hurt a girl when Jack has told me that he has taught Nathaniel to treat a woman like a princess and with a lot of respect. Nathaniel might be immortal, but I don’t think Jack wouldn’t hesitate on hurting him if he did something to hurt a woman,” mum told me before looking walking out my room and leaving me alone in my thoughts once again.

I was looking out the window most of the night until I could hardly stay awake. Before I left my room to get ready for bed, the roses caught my attention. I had a feeling that Nathaniel left the single white rose also, but I couldn’t prove it and I craved to do so, but that was just another thing I would have to ask Nathaniel tomorrow if he were still talking to me. It’s not every time someone announces that they are aware that you are undead and drank blood for a living.

As I was just getting under my comforter, there was a tap on my window. I looked over towards that way and saw the second person in the world I didn’t want to see; Jason. Hitting the pillow, I whimpered, trying to ignore his consent tapping, but it was going to be hard with someone that did never get the hint when I told him I wasn’t interested in a relationship with me and all the stalking problems he was giving me. In the end, he got on my nerves so I had no choice but to open up the window and listen to what he had to say. I yanked on the opening and had to use all my force to pull it open, letting all the hot and humid night air into my room.

“What do you want?” I asked when I opened up my window.

"I was just coming to remind you tomorrow's Valentine's Day just in case you forgot all about it," he said with a smug smile.

"Don't you think I know that? It's a day I hate with a passion, but you are on that list in first place," I seethed back.

"Why can't you accept that we are meant to be together Brianna? You will love your gift from me tomorrow at school and what time will you be ready for the dance so I know when I can pick you up? Oh and wear something lacy and black that will make your figure even more revealing," Jason said, trying to look down my singlet top.

"First, I don't want anything from you and second, I have a date already for the dance," I replied.

"Of course you do; it's me and only me."

"Ha-ha, no; try Nathaniel Pryor. You know, you're enemy for my heart? Well he asked me and I said yes," I said and felt smug when Jason looked shocked. "He was the only one I wanted to go with in the first place and I got my wish, so you better not even dare try to ruin everything for me and for Nathaniel. Do you understand what I am saying, Jason? Leave all the drama and hatred to Augusta when she finds out about all of this tomorrow."

"What does he have that I don't? Is it the money he has because let me tell you that I have a wealthy background also and I can give you anything you ever wanted also and at least I have body heat. He wouldn't even be able to keep you warm in the winter while I would be able to," Jason said, trying obviously to impress me.

"He doesn't stalk me like you do and by the way, I don't care about money so that doesn't attract me to him or the lack of body heat. It will come in handy on all the hot, humid days for the rest of summer and other warmer days that the year might have. And Nathaniel has already given me something also," I said and walked over the vase where the flowers were.

I walked back to the window and showed him the flowers that I would gladly take over and over again only if there were from Nathaniel and no one else. There was no I was giving Jason my heart. That belonged to Nathaniel and that was the first time I admitted that to myself.

“Is it the money because I have money as well Brianna and I will be able to give you anything you want and take you anywhere you want to go in the whole world?”

“It has nothing to do with the fact that Nathaniel has money behind him. I couldn’t even care that he is rich. You can go now Jason, and bother about even thinking about picking me up for the dance. I don’t want you here anymore, so leave me alone,” I said and closed the window in his face as well as the drapes so he couldn’t see into my room anymore.

Grabbing at my hair, I pulled on it until I could feel pain, but it wasn’t hard enough to pull it out by the roots. That would be the first thing Nathaniel would notice tomorrow and I didn’t feel like explaining that to him. I was slowly getting sick of everything and wanted out of living in this town. In fact, I was tempted to ask mum tomorrow if I could move back to Melton and live with my grandparent’s and find a causal job so I could support myself, but the most important thing to me was getting away from Jason because of the anger he stirs in me, Augusta for the fear of my relationship, and Nathaniel, only for the fact he could kill me by mistake, and I didn’t want him to live with that regret for the rest of his life.

I wasn’t looking forward to tomorrow now, but then in the first place, I wasn’t looking forward to it at all to begin with. My gut feeling was telling me that both Nathaniel and Jason would be fighting for my attention all day and the same thing would be happening at the Valentine’s Day dance unless something happened to change all that.

This wasn’t going to end pretty once Nathaniel and Jason came face to face either in the car park or at the dance. No doubt, everything would end in a fight over me and someone getting kicked out of school or possibly ending in death. And I did not want that happening, not in a public place anyway.

And then there was the devil herself, Augusta. I had feeling a feeling that she was capable of doing something horrible and bad, but I didn’t know what she could do. I was only hoping that she wasn’t as dangerous as Nathaniel and his family. I now had to deal with the fact that I had two people after my blood. One because he couldn’t help it and it

was his natural food source and the other because I was invading on what she wanted, and that person was Nathaniel.

And that was why I hated being the centre of attention.

6. Valentine's Day Dance

Mum had taken it in her pride to wake me up an hour earlier than I would have liked.

My enthusiasm had vanished during the night and all I was feeling was horrified at the fact I was going to be surrounded by presents that I didn't even want and because my mind was slipping to the dance to-night where I would have to ask Nathaniel the dreaded question that I didn't want to ask but I needed to know; are you a vampire?

"Why are you so excited for?" I asked sitting up in bed and looking at my mother, whose murder I was planning in my mind and intending on making it look like an accident.

"Brianna, you have two boys interested in you so you should be happy. It is your first proper Valentine's Day and there will be many more to come," mum said, opening my closet.

"The only thing I want today is quiet, but I don't see that happening anytime soon," I said, forcing myself out of bed.

"You never know."

"Mum, Nathaniel is going to be overbearing as he has already told me I have to meet him in the car park and I think we are spending most of the day together and Jason will make me want to hurt somebody by

getting on my nerves like he usually does anyway. Do you see me getting any quiet? Because I don't see that happening."

"Just hurry along," mum demanded, walking out of my bedroom.

Glaring at the door, I turned on my heel and grabbed a light blue top and a pair of leggings before getting dressed and walking down to the kitchen. My mind shifted back to what awaited me at school and my hunger vanished.

"Can we just go now? I want to get this out of the way as soon as possible. Oh and please take the long way," I said, grabbing my school bag.

"You can't avoid this forever, Brianna," mum said and picked up her car keys.

"I have no choice when I get there now do I? I am just hoping that Nathaniel's gift totally outshines Jason's and not reverse," I said and walked outside

"I believe that Nate's gift will have something to do with this dance tonight, but I'm not sure about Jason's," she admitted and started the car.

Placing my school bag in the back seat, I got in the car, automatically slipping into my own world once mum started driving. When we entered Colac, I realised that she didn't take the long way. This torture was never going to end, especially today.

"Have a good day, honey," mum said.

"You aren't the one that is getting thrown into the sharks," I seethed, grabbed my school bag and got out of the car.

Just as I stepped onto the grass, I was turned around by Jason, who had something in his hands.

"Happy Valentine's Day," Jason said and handed me his present.

"A scarf," I said and pulled it out of its box.

"It gets cold here in winter, so I thought that you might want something to use for a change," Jason said and stepped a bit closer to me.

"Thanks," I replied. "I will keep that in mind."

"Brianna, there you are!" I heard Hudson yell and ran over to where I was standing.

"What's going on?" I asked, happy that she shown up when she did.

“Nathaniel has been looking for you.”

“Well you can tell Nathaniel that he can wait. I got to Brianna first so I can take all the time that I need,” Jason said, his tone cold and hard.

“Brianna, Nathaniel wants to give you your gift. Apparently, it has something to do the dance tonight but Nathaniel wouldn’t say anymore,” she said, narrowing her eyes at Jason.

“Tell him I will be there in five minutes,” I replied and placed the scarf in my school bag.

“What about me?”

“I promised Nathaniel that I would meet him and I will. I don’t like to break promises,” I told Jason and followed Hudson, relieved to get out of there.

Nathaniel was leaning against his car when I walked around the corner and when he saw me; he stood up straight with a small box in his hands. The look on Nathaniel’s face told me he was up to something, but I didn’t know what.

“You’re late Brianna,” was Nathaniel’s first comment to me.

“You can thank Jason for that. He got to me before you could and gave me his present before hounding me like usual,” I replied and crossed my arms.

“And what did he give you?”

I pulled out the scarf and handed it to Nathaniel. He said something under his breath, but I couldn’t understand it. I was slowly starting to get sick of that. Sighing, I looked up at Nathaniel and started speaking.

“What do you have for me?”

“Open it and find out,” Nathaniel said and handed me his gift.

“Nathaniel, I don’t want anything.”

“Brianna, just take it please?”

Looking into Nathaniel’s eyes, I felt my insides turn to mush. I carefully ripped the paper of the box and opened it up; gasping when I saw what was inside. Nestled inside the silk lined box was a ring with a red coloured stone in the middle.

“I picked red because I love that colour on you,” Nathaniel whispered in my ear.

“This ring is lovely, but I can’t accept it. This would have cost you a

fortune. I mean, the box is Tiffany alone. It's too much for me to take," I said, my voice hoarse.

"I want you to have it and I won't take it back," Nathaniel said and pulled it out of its box.

He slipped it over my middle finger and stood back so he could have a look at it. I couldn't help myself and threw my arms around his neck, hugging him.

"I was expecting a thank you, not a hug; but I'm not complaining," Nathaniel said and hugged me back.

"What does she have that I don't?" I heard Augusta ask behind us.

"A heart, warmth and gentle spirit," Nathaniel said and pulled away from me.

"I have all that and at least I got you a present, not like Brianna," she said and pulled out a gift bag.

Nathaniel looked inside of the bag and tried to smile at what was in it, but it was more of a grimace. He pulled a bright red bow tie out of the bag, almost making me laugh.

"What is that for?" I asked.

"The dance tonight; I broke it off with Daniel and decided that Nathaniel would be my date for the night. I will be wearing vivid red and I expect to be picked up at seven and not any later," she said and turned on her heel.

"Augusta, Brianna is my date for the night and the only colour I want to see is blood red and that will be on her and no one else," Nathaniel said, making her stop walking.

"Excuse me?" Augusta asked, disbelieving at what Nathaniel was telling her.

"You heard him, so leave," Amylia said, walking up to us.

"Amylia, I thought we were friends?" Augusta said, pouting.

"Since when did you believe that? We were never friends and never will be either."

"We'll see about that, Amylia. See you at the dance tonight Nathaniel. When you get sick of hanging around Brianna, you know where I will be tonight," she said and brushed past all three of us.

"She is like this now and it's not even nine in the morning yet. What

is she going to be like at the dance tonight?" Amylia asked, her eyes glaring into the back of Augusta.

"We will find out then," Nathaniel said.

Amylia glanced down to my hand before doing a double take and picked it up; looking at the ring Nathaniel gave me. She looked down at it admiringly before sighing and letting go.

"It will match your dress that you are wearing tonight. I will be there around five to help you get ready," she said and started to walk away.

"Um Amylia, can I talk to you for a second?" I asked.

"Sure," she said and looked at me.

"I would rather Nathaniel not hear what I have to say," I whispered.

"You can say whatever in front of me," Nathaniel said, hearing what I whispered.

"I'd rather not."

"Tell me," Nathaniel said, getting in my personal space.

I knew that I had to tell them. This couldn't wait until the dance tonight. They would get suspicious and start asking me questions. I could feel it.

"I think that you and your family are vampires," I finally said, watching them look between each other but didn't say anything.

"And what makes you think that?" Amylia asked, defensively.

"I looked it up as you all have been acting strange and I just wanted some answers. I mean, who can understand a person when they talk under their breath? You all can, and you are cold to touch, corpse like pallor and what seems to be immortal beauty and the changing moods," I said.

"That is stupid. We are human, like you," Nathaniel said, his tone and stare as hard as the first day I met him.

That was enough to give me my answers.

"Fine, if you want to be like that again, take your freaking ring because I don't want it," I seethed and pulled it off my finger, throwing it on the ground.

"Brianna," Nathaniel breathed, shocked by my actions.

"And another thing, don't bother about picking me up tonight for the dance, I'm not going. I should have just kept my mouth shut but

that's what I get for just wanting some answers," I said and walked away.

I heard Nathaniel call out my name, but I didn't turn around or paid any attention to him. I was angry and I didn't feel like saying something that I would regret later on. When I turned the corner, I rested my head against the bricks and sighed. I had a feeling Nathaniel was going to act like this, but at least I got it off my chest and the ball was now in his court. He could now decide what would happen between us.

"Didn't you hear me call you?" Nathaniel asked when he turned the corner.

"I think you made your words clear, Nathaniel," I said and tried to run but he grabbed my arm, stopping me from leaving.

"Don't run," Nathaniel whispered and pulled me to his chest.

"I have no choice as you are holding onto my arm, stopping me from running."

"Look, I know that you are mad at me, but I'm furious with you at the moment," Nathaniel breathed into my ear.

"You could at least confirm if you are or not," I said, already knowing that they were from the defensiveness.

"I don't have to confirm nothing Brianna, and what gave you the right to look up vampires?"

"I told you why Nathaniel."

"You don't see me looking into your past, so why should you look into mine?" he pressed again.

"Let me go," I spoke, calmly.

"I'm not letting you go Brianna until I know what made you look up what I didn't want you to know."

"Well forgive me for caring about you and wanting to know why my friend kept on saying that he was dangerous, but wouldn't tell me anything when I asked. Nathaniel, I classed you as a close friend as you took time to spend time with me and didn't ask questions like everyone else and because you stood up for me against Augusta," I said and watched as his hand fell from my arm.

"Brianna, I didn't know that you felt that way."

"Well, you do now," I said and turned around so I could look at Na-

thaniel.

“Please come with me to the dance, Brianna. I only want to go with you and no one else and if you don’t go, I happen to know where you live and I won’t hesitate to bring bad movies and popcorn around and watch them with you all night until you beg me to turn them off and never want to see them again,” he said, making me crack a smile.

“Fine, but I’m giving you until tonight to tell me if you are a vampire or not. I need to know this Nathaniel,” I said and walked to class before the bell rang.

When I walked into the classroom, I saw Hudson sitting in Nathaniel’s seat. I placed my school bag on the table and looked at her.

“Hello Brianna,” she said.

“Can I help you?”

“What is going on between you and Nathaniel?”

“Nothing is going on; we are just each other’s dates to the dance tonight,” I said and sat down.

“Brianna, I’m not stupid. I have seen the way you both look at each other. You are in love with Nathaniel and he is in love with you. I mean, why else would he go to Brandon and ask for advice on “picking a blood red ruby ring for Brianna because of her hair colour and her heart” were Nathaniel’s words to him,” Hudson said.

“Then why didn’t he just admit that he had feelings for me? I mean, he told my mum when they thought I wasn’t in hearing range, but I heard everything.”

“Hudson, why are you in my seat for?” Nathaniel asked, placing a long box in front of me. “It’s your present.”

“Wasn’t the ring enough?” I asked.

“I got you something else when I was shopping,” he said and placed the ring I dropped before back on my finger.

“Can I open it when I get home?” I asked, noticing the way his hand lingered on my fingers.

“Of course,” Nathaniel said and shooed Hudson out of his seat.

“Remember what I said,” Hudson said and walked over to her table.

“What was that about?” Nathaniel asked, glancing towards Hudson.

“Don’t worry about it,” I said, looking over my shoulder towards her.

“Brianna,” Nathaniel warned.

“Can’t I just keep some things to myself?” I asked and looked at him, my eyes pleading.

His eyes glazed over when they looked into mine, and he nodded his head in agreement. Mrs. Franklin walked into the room and looked directly at Nathaniel and me. I had a sour look on my face and it looked like Nathaniel was gripping the table with his hands. I was getting a feeling that I was going to be asked questions after this class.

“Why do you have to know if I am a vampire?” Nathaniel asked after a while.

“So I know if I am risking my life being around you. You said that you are dangerous, Nathaniel, and I just need to know how dangerous that you might be,” I said, looking straight at the blackboard.

“Brianna, can I talk to you after class?” Mrs. Franklin said suddenly, shooting Nathaniel a look that made her look scary.

I nodded, not wanting to get on the bad side of her. Nathaniel spent most of the class glaring at Mrs. Franklin, but she ignored him. When the bell finally rang, everyone left the room besides Nathaniel, Mrs. Franklin and I.

“Nathaniel, you aren’t needed for this talk,” Mrs. Franklin said

“I beg the differ Aubrey. I have a right to know what you plan on telling Brianna.”

“Leave,” she hissed and grabbed Nathaniel by his top and literally threw him out of the classroom. My mouth dropped open when I saw that.

She turned back around and slowly walked over to where I was sitting, making me sit back in my chair when she placed her hands on the table.

“Is something wrong?” I asked.

“I couldn’t help but overhear you and Nathaniel talking.”

“But we were talking quietly so no one would hear us.”

“You know Nathaniel’s secret, don’t you?” she asked.

“You knew about it?” I asked, shocked.

“Brianna honey, I am a vampire also. And so is my husband, Nathaniel and his family and Brandon. I’m surprised Hudson could keep

her mouth closed about it once your relationship with Nathaniel changed.”

“Why won’t he admit that to me then?” I asked and looked down at the table.

“Nathaniel is scared Brianna. You are the first girl that has grabbed his attention and he doesn’t understand why that happened. Most of the young ladies throw themselves at him and you didn’t. Nathaniel was expecting that to happen and he was shocked that didn’t happen and he decided to know you better, but what he didn’t know he was slowly falling in love with you when he saw your beauty on your first day here and now that everything is starting to come out into the open has him fearing that you will run from him,” Mrs. Franklin said.

“I’m not that special,” I muttered, feeling embarrassed and looked down.

She placed her hand under my chin and made me look up at her, where I saw that she had a serious look on her face.

“You are a very beautiful girl Brianna, so I’m shocked no one else has fallen for you also and Nathaniel; I know you are listening in to what we are saying,” she said and walked to the classroom door and opened it, making Nathaniel fall into the classroom.

“Why did you tell her that for? I didn’t want Brianna to know about me being a vampire or my feelings for her and yet you tell her Aubrey,” Nathaniel said his tone hard.

“I only told her because you are too gutless to do so Nathaniel,” Mrs. Franklin said, crossing her arms.

“You have fallen in love with me?” I asked Nathaniel.

“I wouldn’t exactly call it love, but it would be pretty close to it,” he admitted.

“Well Nathaniel, you have until 10 o’clock tonight to admit everything to Brianna, including feelings and vampiric secrets or I will tell her everything that you don’t want her knowing,” Mrs. Franklin threatened.

“You wouldn’t dare,” Nathaniel said his voice low and venomous.

“Try me,” she said, the threat in her voice and walked out of the room with Nathaniel right on her heels.

I stood in the room and tried to process everything. I had the con-

firmation that Nathaniel was a vampire; and second, he was close to falling in love with me and there was a huge chance that he was lying about that.

Grabbing my bag and the other gift that I placed in my bag, I walked out of the classroom and went on a hunt for Hudson. She was the one that could give me the answers that I wanted and needed to know. I found her over with Brandon and made my over to them.

“Hudson, can I talk to you for a second?” I asked.

“I’m pretty sure that it can wait,” Brandon said, his tone cold.

“I know what you are,” I said, making both of them freeze.

“H-h-how did you find out?” Brandon asked, sounding and looking shocked.

“I did some research and got my answers when Nathaniel became defensive when I asked and also, Mrs. Franklin confirmed it for me as well. I don’t think Nathaniel really liked being called gutless though.”

“He is gutless and at least Aubrey said it to his face. I have been trying to work myself up to say that for years,” Brandon said.

“Does this affect our friendship?” Hudson asked suddenly, fear lacing into her voice.

“All depends on your vampire boyfriend that is,” I said and looked at Brandon.

He had his arms crossed and was looking me straight in the eye. Hudson wanted to still be my friend, but it seemed like Brandon was in charge of everything in the relationship. I narrowed my eyes, waiting for him to respond.

“How do we know that we can trust you? I mean, I don’t want Hudson being at risk from anything.”

“Listen, all I want is answers because I’m sick and tired of Nathaniel’s changing moods. I wouldn’t even know about this if it wasn’t for Mrs. Franklin. I have feelings for Nathaniel and I know that he has them for me also, so if he cared about me so much, why didn’t he want me to know about what he is?” I asked and looked between both of them.

“If I knew the answer to that, I would tell you, but Nathaniel doesn’t tell anyone anything. He doesn’t even tell us about his human life as he shuts down when we ask,” Brandon said.

“See what Nathaniel has to say at the dance tonight. If something happens, we can bring you back home,” Hudson added and placed her hand on my arm.

“Fine, but he better want to tell me why he didn’t want me knowing about him being a vampire,” I said and turned on my heel, walking away from them.

When I walked around the corner, someone grabbed my arm and pulled me into the shade. James and Chase were standing in front of me.

“Can I help you?” I asked.

“How did you find out about us being vampires?” Chase asked in a whispered.

“Why don’t you ask Nathaniel? He will be able to tell you what you want to know because if I get asked one more question about this, I will scream,” I said and started to walk away.

“What about your father? Do you want to answer questions on that?” James asked.

I stopped walking and turned around to look at them, just staring blankly. My body went numb and tears sprung to my eyes. Chase waved a hand in my face, but I didn’t respond. I had shut down and felt a sharp pain in my chest that came on every time someone mentioned my father.

“How did you find out about him?” I finally asked.

“Augusta was kind enough to tell us some stuff that she managed to find out. His name is Saul Morrison, is thirty-six years old and is from Adelaide. Is there anything else that we should know?” Chase asked, sounding smug.

“You don’t need to know anything about the pain and heartache that man put my mother and me through for almost sixteen years,” I said through clenched teeth.

“It can’t be that bad,” James said, trying not to laugh.

“He didn’t want me so he left and I haven’t seen him since. Are you happy now that you have almost pushed me to my worst? Or do you want to break me that bit more?” I snapped, looking between both of them. “And just keep in mind; I’m not the only one hurting over this.”

That wiped the smugness off both faces. James opened his mouth a few times, but no sound came out of it. I shook my head and took a few steps back from them. The pain that was currently inside of me was starting to reach boiling point. Chase reached for me, but stopped when he saw the look on my face.

“We shouldn’t have said anything,” he said, looking down.

“Well now you know that he left, so why don’t you go and report back to Augusta what you know and let her spread it around the school and leave me the hell alone,” I said and walked away, but not before hitting the wall with my injured wrist.

The rest of the day went fast and when the last bell rang, I wanted to get out straight away, but Nathaniel stopped me.

“Brianna, what is going on? You haven’t been yourself all day. Does it have something to do with it being Valentine’s Day?”

“It has nothing to do with that,” I said.

“Then what is it? You know you can tell me Brianna,” Nathaniel said and pulled me in for a hug.

“Why didn’t you tell me about your secret? You knew that I wouldn’t judge you and yet, you still hid it from me,” I said and rested my head against where his heart was.

“Believe me, I wanted to tell you, but it isn’t easy telling the girl that you like that you are a vampire and knowing that she might run away from you,” he whispered.

“Can you take me home?” I asked.

He nodded and grabbed my hand, leading me towards his car. On the ride home, I kept on thinking about that I need to tell Nathaniel about my father and what happened, but I just wasn’t ready to. How can you tell someone that you are falling in love with that your father didn’t want you from birth and thought that you ruined everything and thought leaving would be the best choice?

“What are you thinking about?” Nathaniel asked.

“Just stuff,” I replied.

“Anything that is interesting?” he asked, trying to engage me in conversation but I really wasn’t interested at the moment.

“Not really.”

Nathaniel stopped the car and I looked out the window, seeing that we were back at my place. Just as I was about to open my door, Nathaniel grabbed the handle and bet me to it. He held out his hand for me to take, like the gentleman that he was.

“Thank you,” I said, getting out of the car.

“So I will pick you up at seven tonight?” Nathaniel asked when he walked me to my front door.

“Sounds good,” I said and smiled.

Nathaniel slowly leaned towards my face, his eyes glued to my mouth. Just as we were about to kiss, a car pulled up out the front of my house. He took a few steps back and I looked down at the road, seeing Amylia walking up my drive way with a smile on her face.

“Well, I see that you are closer than ever,” she said and placed two bags on the front porch.

“And your point is Amylia?” Nathaniel asked his tone harsh.

“Grouchy,” she said and looked him up and down. “As you can see, I have two bags here and hardly any time to make Brianna the bell of the ball tonight. Be back here at seven sharp.”

“Shouldn’t I be allowed to see what Brianna is going to turn out like?”

“Goodbye Nathaniel,” she said and shoed him away. “Unlock the door please. I am going to make you look like a vampire’s dream.”

“Just don’t make me look like a Goth,” I whispered and unlocked the front door.

Two hours later, Amylia had done my hair, make-up and polished every bit of skin that she could get her cold, vampiric hands on.

“There we are,” she said and stepped back, admiring her work. “Now, just for your dress and you are ready for a fun night of dancing and being glued to Nathaniel’s side most of the night.”

“Why am I getting the feeling that all eyes are going to be on me and Nathaniel tonight?” I wondered aloud.

“Eyes were going to be on the both of you anyway. Nathaniel doesn’t pay any attention to the girls at school and then you come along and changed everything. Most of them are jealous because of the fact Nathaniel likes you and he doesn’t like them. They all are going to be

green with envy when they see you on Nathaniel's arm," she said and grabbed a dress bag that was zipped up.

"Is that my dress?" I asked.

"You are going to love it. Once I found out that Nathaniel asked you to the dance, I spent most of the night making this dress just for you. A one of a kind style that I know that you will only be able to pull off," Amylia told me and opened the bag.

I looked at her with shock. I wasn't aware that she made clothes, so I was flattered that I would be wearing a dress just made for me. When she pulled it out, my mouth dropped open. It was...breathtakingly beautiful. It had a black silk bustier with crystals sewn onto the belt and the rest of the dress was beautiful. The rest was blood red with a diamond brooch holding most of the fabric onto the side. I was actually glad to be wearing that dress.

"I-I love it. Thank you," I breathed.

"I'm glad. Now just for your shoes," she said and opened up my closet.

"I don't have any heels," I said.

"Then I was glad I brought these babies along just in case," she murmured and pulled out a black pair of stiletto's.

"I'll break my neck in them!" I cried, looking at the narrow heel on them.

"You will be fine as Nathaniel will have a tight hold on you most of the night. Now, get in your dress. I want to see what it looks like on you," she said and handed it to me.

I slipped the dress on and got Amylia to zip it up at the back before walking to my full length mirror. I gasped in shock and had to blink a few times. I was pretty for a change. My hair had been pulled back into the messy bun and had a light dusting of make-up on my face, giving off a healthy glow and for once, it looked like I had cleavage.

"Nathaniel is going to love you when he sees what you are wearing," Amylia said from behind me.

"Now I am glad that I have agreed to go to this dance," I said and looked out the window, hoping to see his car, but no one was there.

Amylia smiled and glanced down at the watch she was wearing be-

fore clearing her throat. "Nathaniel should be here any minute now, even though it isn't seven, but he has never been good with time when he gets excited," she concluded.

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"I see that Nathaniel hasn't explained about our powers, but I'm sure that he will in time," Amylia said.

"Why can't you tell me?" I asked, feeling frustrated.

"Because it isn't up to me; if Nathaniel wants you to know everything about vampires and his past when he was human, he will tell you and even if he doesn't want to, he should," she said with a blank look on her face.

"Is his past that bad or something?"

"Nate is here," she said, not answering my question.

"Hello," I heard him call from the lounge room.

"We are in Brianna's room," Amylia said and waited for him at my door. "And close your eyes! I don't want you to see her."

"I will be seeing her anyway."

"Fine; keep them open."

I was looking out the window when Nathaniel walked into the room. Taking a deep breath, I turned around and faced Nathaniel. His eyes became wide when he saw me. I looked him up and down and saw that he had a black suit on with a red top underneath it with a black tie. In his hands were a bunch of roses.

"You look breathtakingly beautiful," Nathaniel whispered.

"Thank you."

"Alright, you better get going. I will see you there a bit later on with James," she said.

"What about Dakota and Chase?" Nathaniel asked.

"Other plans."

She walked out of the room, leaving us standing there alone. I walked over to my side table and grabbed a headband, before placing it on my head.

"We should get going," Nathaniel said and placed the flowers on my bed.

I nodded and Nathaniel grabbed my hand. He led me outside into

the cold, making me shiver as the icy wind wrapped around my body. I locked the door and made my way over to his car. Nathaniel opened my side of the door and helped me get into the car.

“I thought that it was meant to be warm today. It is summer after all,” I said when Nathaniel started driving.

“Not today my angel,” he replied.

“I have a question for you,” I said, looking over at him.

“And what’s that?” he asked.

“Did you break into my room and place a single white rose on my pillow?” I asked, watching his facial expression.

Nathaniel looked like he wanted to basically lie, but he quickly looked over at me before talking a deep breath.

“Yes I did. I placed it there because it reminded me of your skin and the beauty it held,” he replied after a few minutes.

Halfway towards Colac, Nathaniel grabbed my hand and didn’t let go. He pulled up to the high school and the first thing I noticed was that everyone was much prettier than I was. But of course, they all had money, I thought to myself. I was raised on minimum wage most of my life with the odd stapling of money my father decided to chuck in until mum put her foot down and got the big guns involved.

I got out of the car before Nathaniel could and noticed Augusta standing under a tree, waiting to pounce. She did when Nathaniel came out into the elements.

“Nate baby, you look divine,” she said, pushing me out of the way.

Catching my balance in these shoes, I walked around her and stood next to Nathaniel, looking at what she was wearing. If her dress was any shorter, it would have been a skirt. It was bright pink with heels that matched. I thought that she was meant to be wearing vivid red?

“For the last time, my name is Nathaniel. Only the people that I say can call me Nate,” he said.

“How about we go dance?” she suggested.

“I’m staying here with my date.”

Augusta turned her eyes onto me and looked me up and down with disgust written on her face. At least I didn’t dress like I was a stripper.

“Please, that dress doesn’t suit you at all. You aren’t even pretty, so

why try and make yourself when you know for a fact that nothing you do will be worth it," Augusta said, satisfied that she was hurting me.

"At least her make-up doesn't look like war paint and everything is covered up," Amylia said behind us.

I looked over at Amylia and saw that she had a yellow ball gown type of dress on and flawless make up to match. James was wearing an all-white get up.

"James, how can you handle Amylia when she is all wrong for you?"

"Nate, Brianna," James said looking between us.

"I'm still waiting for a dance, Nathaniel," Augusta said.

"Then you are going to be waiting for a long time," Nathaniel said and walked away, dragging me along with him.

When we walked inside where the dance was being held, all eyes were on us. Biting my lip, I looked down towards the floor. I didn't like the attention part.

"Would you like a drink?" Nathaniel asked, grabbing my attention.

"Just some lemonade," I replied and spotted Hudson talking to Alex and what appeared to be Laura on his arm.

Once Nathaniel left to get the drinks, James made his way over to where I was standing. I just looked at him and didn't say a word.

"I'm sorry about before. I guess that we were just mad that you knew about our secret, but when we thought it over, we soon realised that Nathaniel would have told you anyway once he worked up enough nerve. I'm sorry about mentioning your father. We didn't know that he was a sore subject to you."

"He wouldn't be if he didn't hurt us the way he did, but I don't really want to go into detail about all of that yet. The only people that know the real story is mum, my aunt and Alex because they are family and saw what mum and myself went through."

"That I can understand. Will you be telling Nathaniel?"

"In time," I said.

"What are you telling me in time?"

I turned around and saw Nathaniel standing there with the drinks in his hands and a confused look on his face.

"About my crazy family," I said, hoping that would be enough for him

not to ask questions.

“Why do I have the feeling that you aren’t telling me the truth?” Nathaniel asked, looking me in the eye.

“Can you please just leave it at that?” I asked and looked at James.

“Do you know what is going on?” Nathaniel asked his brother.

“I don’t have a clue,” he replied, his eyes holding concern about something.

“Did you do something to Nathaniel?” Augusta asked, coming up to where we were standing and placed a hand on Nathaniel’s chest.

She made me clench both fists so I wouldn’t end up hitting her flat on the floor. I grabbed Nathaniel’s hand and forced him to start walking. A slow but rocky song started playing and I got the urge to dance.

“Dance with me,” I said.

“Not until I know what is going on. You are hiding something and I believe James has an idea on what it is.”

“Well it wasn’t like you weren’t hiding anything, was it?” I fired back, making him flinch.

“You know that I wanted to tell you everything.”

“And I want to do the same, but I’m afraid.”

“You have more to be afraid of when you are around me,” he said in a soothing voice.

“I can’t tell you. I have to talk to mum about it first before I can go into detail,” I said quietly.

“How can it affect her?” he asked, confused.

“Because she is involved also; this isn’t just about me Nathaniel and it will never be about me. It is more about my mother and I don’t want to place her in any more pain than she has already been caused,” I announced.

“Does this have anything to do with your father? I mean, he isn’t around and you don’t want to talk about him to anyone.”

“I don’t want to talk about this anymore Nathaniel. I came here for fun, not to have a fight with you over anything.”

Nathaniel shocked me by grabbing my hand and leading me outside. Augusta caught my eye and narrowed them at me when she saw Nathaniel had my hand in his tight grip. He opened the door and led me

around the other side of the building. Where was he taking me? He stopped walking when he was in the moons glow.

“Why are we here?” I asked.

“Because it is the only way we won’t be bothered by anyone,” he replied, looking up at the sky.

“Anyone but Augusta; she saw us leaving, so knowing her; she would try and find us.”

The glow from the moon made Nathaniel even more beautiful when he turned around. His honey coloured hair seemed to shine and his eyes had a sparkle to them, but there were black circles around his eyes. He opened his mouth and with the moonlight, his teeth were brighter and sharper and his complexion had become more vivid. Outside, he seemed like an angel of some sort, but he wasn’t. He was a vampire and the darkness captured what he was. The boy I loved was a...monster. He was a deadly, bloodsucking monster, but I couldn’t find it in me to care.

“What do you think?” he asked and gestured to himself.

“You look like something I have never seen before in my life. You are even more beautiful than ever.”

“Brianna, I am a killer and this is what I look like. The killer inside of me is begging for me to drain you dry, and I am fighting not to do that right now. I’m a monster and nothing will ever change that for me,” he said, his voice laced in pain.

I walked towards him, making him take a few steps back. My mind was screaming at me to stop and start running away, but I wasn’t going to do that. I placed my hand on his cold cheek and watched him lean into it.

“You don’t scare me Nathaniel. I know that you should, but you don’t,” I said.

“You should be afraid of me Brianna. I am a vampire and you are my prey. I’m nothing but a monster that has an innocent girl caught in his web of lies and betrayal that makes me the person I am today,” he said, getting closer to my face.

“Nathaniel, I trust you with all my beating heart. You won’t hurt me like you think you will end up doing. I know that you won’t do anything to ever hurt me in that way you are designed to now do with the blood

drinking.”

I placed my other hand on his other cheek and leaned in closer. He did the same and his lips lightly touched mine. After a split second, he placed his hands around my waist and pulled me closer to him, deepening the kiss at the same time. Nathaniel’s lips were like ice against mine, but I couldn’t find it in me to care that my lips were starting to burn from the coldness.

After Nathaniel pulled away, he lightly kissed my lips three times before smiling like I had never seen before. He pulled me in for a hug and I rested my head on the place where his heart should be. It felt different this time. It felt hollow.

“Why does your chest feel hollow?” I asked.

“Because I don’t have a heart beat and plus before you, I suffered from depression, which made things worse.”

“Is that why it feels colder than the rest of your body?”

“Yes,” he replied.

I heard a scream near us, making me jump out of Nathaniel’s embrace and place a hand over my racing heart. Augusta was standing there, ready to attack something.

“What does she have that I don’t?” she asked, anger lacing her voice.

“Nothing you need to know about,” Nathaniel said.

“She doesn’t even have money!” Augusta exclaimed.

“That doesn’t mean anything to me. Why are you out here for anyway?” Nathaniel asked his tone angry.

“To see where you’d vanished. You know that we should be together Nathaniel. Brianna is just a distraction for you and I can’t wait for the day that you realise it,” the witch said.

“If she was a distraction, why did I fight blood and bone to get her to like me so much for?”

“I never got to dance,” I whispered to myself.

“Where are my manners? Would you like to dance, my angel?” Nathaniel asked and held out his hand.

“What?” Augusta screeched.

“I would love to,” I said, taking his hand and ignoring Augusta.

Nathaniel led me back inside and onto the dance floor. He led

throughout the dance, which was good as I had no idea on what I was doing with slow dances. Amylia and James came past us and smiled after the dance had finished.

“I’m happy for you Nathaniel and in fact, everyone will be once they all know,” Amylia said.

“Everyone but Chase,” Nathaniel murmured, catching my attention.

“What do you mean that he won’t be happy?” I asked.

“My brother believes that Nathaniel should be dating a vampire, as human’s are weak and don’t have the beauty and the strength to keep up with a vampire lifestyle,” James told me.

“Does he now?” I asked, feeling angry.

“We all thought that until you stood up for yourself. That’s when we realised that you weren’t weak. Chase has never really had a heart, and the same goes for Dakota, but she likes you a bit more than Chase does,” Amylia finished, but I could tell that they weren’t telling me something.

That wasn’t enough to make my anger go away. They might have been around for I don’t know how long, but that didn’t give them the right to class me as weak. I might be human, and I might have a heart-beat, but that doesn’t make me the same as everyone else. I looked at the clock on the wall and saw that it was almost ten o’clock at night.

“I’m going for some fresh air,” I said and started to walk away.

“Brianna, I know that you are mad about what we said about Chase, but think of it this way, you don’t have to spend time with him. I’m the one that you will be dating,” Nathaniel said and placed a hand on my shoulder.

“So are we really going to be a couple or are you just saying that so I won’t stay mad?” I asked, feeling unsure.

“I really want to date you Brianna. I have strong feelings for you and I hope that you might feel the same way,” he whispered into my ear and wrapped his arms around me.

“I will admit everything after we have been together for a while,” I said, leaning into his embrace.

Nathaniel chuckled and kissed my cheek. I felt safe being in his embrace even though I knew in the back of my mind he could kill me with-

out a second glance.

“What the hell is going on here?” Jason asked and stood in front of me.

“I believe I am hugging my girlfriend. What’s going on with you?” Nathaniel asked, pretending to sound interested.

I could hear smugness in his voice and Nathaniel’s arms became tighter around me. It was like he was protective of me. Nothing was going to drive away from Nathaniel and I was going to see to that.

“What about me? I thought that you had feelings for me Brianna?”

“No she doesn’t have feelings for you,” Amylia said, not giving me a chance to speak.

“Nathaniel, can you take me home?” I asked. “I have had enough for one night and my feet are starting to hurt in these shoes.”

“Please, call me Nate,” he said and looked at James with a hard expression on his face and cold, dead eyes.

“Keep the dress also Brianna. You might need it for another day,” Amylia said and grabbed James arm, leading him away.

When we got outside, the wind was a lot colder than before. I started shivering straight away and I saw that Nathaniel was doing something.

“Here,” he said and placed his jacket over my shoulders.

“What about you? Won’t you be cold?” I asked.

“The cold doesn’t affect me as I can’t feel it due to my body temperature. One of the many things that reminds me that I will never be human again,” Nathaniel muttered.

I slipped my arms into the sleeves and waited for it to warm me up, as it was as icy as Nathaniel’s skin. Just as I was about to open the door, I felt a hand make contact with the side of my face. Someone had slapped me. I placed my hand on where it had started to sting and looked with my mouth wide open.

“How dare you steal Nathaniel from me? He was never yours to begin with and what do you do, you come along and steal him from right under my nose! When he realises that you are a mistake, the better. I will be planning my revenge on you and I tell you now, it won’t be pretty once I am finished with you,” Augusta said and walked back inside without giving neither Nathaniel nor myself a chance to say any-

thing in response.

“What can she do to make my life even more of a living hell?” I asked Nathaniel, who was still in shock.

“I don’t really know, but she will find something to do that you aren’t expecting.”

I just couldn’t understand what I had done to make Augusta so bitter towards me. I was aware that she didn’t like the fact Nathaniel warmed up to me over time, and now, we were a couple. She now had a better reason to be bitter and try to ruin everything in my relationship with Nathaniel.

The only thing that scared me about was the fact she knew stuff about my father and would dig deeper for the information to destroy me. She was the type that would invite my father into town or tell him that I was living here.

7. First Date

It was two days after the dance, and so far, Augusta hadn't done anything.

I couldn't understand why I was feeling scared of her. She sure didn't have the power to convince Nathaniel to leave me, but there was something there about her that still made me so scared of what she might do. And I still hadn't told Nathaniel that mum knew about his secret also. I didn't know how that would go down and I didn't want it ending in tears, or bloodshed.

"What are you thinking about so intently Brianna?" Nathaniel asked and wrapped his arm around my shoulder.

I looked at him, glad that he had pulled me out of my thoughts of the one person that I didn't want to even think about. I know that I should have been paying all my attention onto Nathaniel and not worry about that witch, but that was an extremely hard thing to do. I was not only protecting myself, but my mother too.

"I'm worried about what Augusta has planned for me to make my life a living hell," I admitted.

"Baby, you don't need to worry about her. We can take care of her if she even dares to try anything. I do have a surprise for you after school to take your mind of everything though," Nathaniel said and stole a bite out of my sandwich.

"And what's that?" I asked, looking at him.

"A date," he announced.

"Nate, we are a couple, so why do we have to go on a date?" I asked.

"Because I want to take you on one, that's why Brianna," he said, his tone of voice daring me to challenge him.

“What time?” I relented.

“Be ready at six, but I will be with you at your house anyway to make sure that you are ready to have a fun night out,” Nathaniel said before kissing my cheek and walking over to his table and towards the curious eyes of his family at his current happiness.

Alex looked up when Nathaniel walked past his table and walked over to where I was sitting. I looked up at my cousin and kicked out a chair for him to sit down. He sat down in front of me, his eyes glued to mine the whole time.

“Can I help you?” I asked, grabbing the sandwich that Nathaniel had bitten and not sure if it was safe to eat.

“What is going on with you and Nathaniel?” he asked.

“I thought mum would have told Rachel by now. Nathaniel and I am a couple.”

Alex sat back in his chair before shaking his head. “That is something I wasn’t expecting you to say Brianna. So does Nathaniel know about Saul yet or are you still keeping him in the dark about it?”

“I haven’t told him anything as of yet, but I will admit everything in due time. Don’t rush me into doing this Alexander.”

“He needs to know Brianna. You can’t keep him in the dark about this forever.”

“Don’t you think I know that Alex? I know that I need to tell him everything, but I don’t know what the hell Augusta has planned before I can even try to find the courage to tell Nathaniel. For all I know, she could invite him to town just to hurt me that bit more and then there is mum. I need to consider her in all of this as well. I can’t afford her getting hurt anymore and you should know that by now.”

Alex got out of his seat and walked over to me, before giving me a hug. He could tell that I was getting upset about all of this. Once everything had calmed over, I planned on telling Nathaniel everything, but I wanted to know about his past also. I wasn’t going to be pleased if I told Nathaniel about my past, but he didn’t tell me anything.

“I will be fine Alex,” I said and pulled away from his embrace.

“But I don’t want to leave you knowing that you are upset,” he argued.

“This is nothing compared to how I have been before and you know that,” I pointed out.

“I’m not leaving Brianna,” he said, putting an end to that argument.

He stayed with me until the bell rang. Nathaniel was waiting for me when I got outside and took my hand, leading the way to our next class. Mr. Franklin looked up when we walked into the room and a smile came onto his face when he saw our entwined hands.

“About time, Nathaniel,” he muttered.

Most of the class, I could feel Nathaniel’s eyes on me, making me nervous about what I was doing. I didn’t really want to fail this class and he wasn’t helping me one bit. I kept my eyes on what I was doing so I wouldn’t stare at him for the whole lesson.

“You do know that you get more beautiful every second?” he asked, brushing a piece of hair from my face.

“Nate, stop trying to flatter me because it isn’t going to work,” I said, looking up at him.

“Do you think that will make me stop?” he asked.

“It will if you make us fail this class due to your lack of help with this subject,” I said and laughed when he pouted.

“You are mean,” he said.

I leaned in and gave Nathaniel a kiss on the cheek. I was counting down until the bell since I could spend the afternoon with Nathaniel and see what this date was that he had planned was. I soon remembered that he wasn’t aware that I had told mum that he might be a vampire.

“Nate, I have to tell you something,” I said, still trying to gauge his reaction.

“What is that?” he asked, sounding completely happy, but I had a feeling that was going to change once I sprung my news on him.

“Mum knows that you might be a vampire, as I told her when I figured it out so you might have to tell her,” I whispered so no one could hear us.

“Oh,” he responded.

I didn’t like the sound of that, but it was actually a better response than I had anticipated from Nathaniel. He didn’t have the best track record when it came to his moods and I didn’t want him snapping.

Mr. Franklin decided to let the class go early, which pleased me. When I got outside, I stopped walking when I spotted Augusta leaning against Nathaniel's Ford Falcon, waiting for him. He followed my eyes and growled under his breath, but I still was able to hear it. Augusta looked over at us and smirked.

"She just can't get the hint."

"Will she ever give up?" I asked.

"I have an idea that might work," Nathaniel said.

I looked at him confused until he glued his mouth against mine, making me follow his lead. Augusta screamed in frustration, and walked the other way, her high heels clicking along the ground. I pulled away and took a deep breath that I needed.

"Well, that worked," I breathed.

"That it did and I felt like doing that anyway," he replied.

"Let's go back home before mum starts to worry," I said and walked over to his car.

When we got back, mum was pacing on the front porch when Nathaniel pulled into the driveway. She walked down to the car and tapped on the window.

"You could have called and said that you were going to be late," she said as I got out of the car.

"We didn't know mum," I said and bit my tongue so I wouldn't snap. She had never been worried before.

"I'm sorry Marie, we lost track of time and that was my fault," Nathaniel said, using his forgive me smile that he hasn't tried out on me just yet.

"Well, I guess everyone makes a mistake every now and then," she said and walked back inside.

"Thanks a lot Nate," I whispered.

"Something wrong, Brianna?" he asked.

"Every time we come back late or something happens; you are going to use that smile of yours aren't you?" I asked

"I didn't think that it would bother you. At least you don't have to answer to your mother when I do that. You should be happy that I am saving you a job."

I huffed and crossed my arms in frustration. I hated it when he was right, but it would be nice to see the concerned mother for once, not Nathaniel beating me to explain what had happened by using that smile of his that would let him free of murder.

“Come on,” Nathaniel said. “Let’s go inside.”

“What are you both doing for dinner tonight?” mum asked from the kitchen when we opened the front door.

I walked into the kitchen and saw that mum was looking in the fridge. Nathaniel came up from behind me, and placed a hand on my shoulder.

“Um, I plan on taking your daughter out for dinner tonight. Nothing too fancy of course as Brianna would have my head if I tried,” Nathaniel said, sounding nervous for the first time since I’ve known him.

“Sounds nice,” mum said and shut the door. “What time do you plan on going?”

“At six,” he replied.

While they were talking, I slipped back into thinking about what plan Augusta had. She had never bothered me until now, and that’s what scared me. What if she did invite my father into town to make my life a living hell? Would I be able to cope with that? Would mum be able to cope with that if it were to happen?

“Brianna?” I heard mum ask, pulling me out of my thoughts. “Are you okay?”

“Sorry, I just slipped into my own world there for a second,” I replied, feeling a bit spooked.

Neither of them looked convinced, but didn’t ask any questions, for which I was happy about. Quietly, I slipped away and walked into the lounge room. A car that I had never seen before was parked out the front of my house caught my attention. I walked over to the window to try and get a better look and stepped back when I figured out that the man in the car was looking straight into my house and straight at me. It was like he didn’t care that he had just been caught. He then placed the car in drive and left, the dust in the air the only reminder that he was there.

That was creepy; really, really, *really* creepy.

Nathaniel walked into the room and I had to play it cool. I didn't want him knowing that some man was just out the front of my house and was looking in and didn't stop when he saw me standing there.

"You look a bit pale," Nathaniel said and placed a hand on my forehead.

"I'm fine," I replied, brushing off what I just saw. I didn't need Nathaniel knowing and going into overprotective mode.

"So, we are set for tonight. Marie gave me the name and address of a pub that she thinks you would like," he said and sat down on the couch.

"Great. So mum isn't fussed that you are a vampire dating her very mortal daughter with blood running through her veins that would be tempting you every single second we are together?" I asked.

"She said Jack explained everything to her on break before so she feels that she doesn't really need to worry, but I told her to be wary anyway. You never know when something might happen by mistake. Not being concerned for being around a vampire is the one mistake that you could ever make that could cost you your life in the end."

"I'm sorry that I said something to her," I said.

"It's fine. I'm not going to lie and say that I'm not mad at you for saying something, but at least I don't have to act human around your mother and neither does my family for a change without the constant worry of slipping up and exposing our true colours. That is hard enough as it is and the fact that we can be ourselves around two humans is a welcome change."

"Just so you know, I am not really a fan of meat," I said and sat next to him.

"Why is that?"

"It makes me sick."

"That just means I would have to take care of you but I won't force you into anything that you don't want to do," he said and pulled me to his chest.

Mum walked into the room and looked at us with a longing look on her face. I knew that deep on the inside that this would have to be hurting her, seeing her only daughter with a teenage boy that treats her like

a princess. In Nathaniel's eyes, I would be a queen to him and he would be the type to worship the ground that I walk on.

"Are you alright mum?" I asked.

"I'm fine. Just seeing the two of you like that brings back memories of your father and me," mum said and sighed.

"If you don't mind me asking, what was Brianna's father like?" Nathaniel asked, completely shocking me.

I looked between mum and Nathaniel, not sure on how she was even going to answer the question. I was dreading the response but then at the same time, I was curious.

"He was completely different to you Nathaniel. He wasn't really caring or romantic and never really liked my parents. He was judgemental and didn't like it when other people were around us. When I fell pregnant with Brianna, I thought he would have changed, but he didn't, so that's why we aren't together," mum said, looking at me.

I was glad that she had given him the short version on what happened. I didn't really want to fight with Nathaniel if she told him everything.

"I can find a picture of him," mum said and left the room.

"You are like your mother," Nathaniel said. "Good at heart."

"That is good. I never really wanted to be like my father."

Five minutes later, she walked back into the room with a photo album in her hand. When I saw the cover, I almost went green. They were my baby photos that I didn't want anyone to see ever again.

"Are you kidding me? Couldn't have you found another photo album without photos of me in them?" I cried.

"These are baby photos?" Nathaniel said, sounding excited.

"Nate," I warned.

"Brianna, let the boy see them. Who knows, if you have kids, they might look like this," mum said, a strange look in her eye.

"I don't see that happening in the near future," Nathaniel said, making both of us look at him.

"What do you mean?" mum asked.

"We can have children, but it is rare for a male vampire to create an offspring with a human as we aren't meant to date."

“What would happen if a human female fell pregnant with a vampire’s child?” I asked in a small voice.

“I don’t know the answer to that as I have never seen that.”

There was something about the look on Nathaniel’s face that I didn’t like. I planned on asking Nathaniel more question when we were alone. It seemed that he wasn’t telling me the whole story because mum was around and I wanted to know everything that he was hiding from me.

When mum was halfway through the photos, I looked at the clock and saw that it was almost time to go.

“That is Brianna’s father,” mum said and handed Nathaniel the photo.

He looked between me and the photo before handing it back to mum, muttering something about how I didn’t look my father. That was an understatement. Everyone knew that I looked like my mother. I didn’t know if it was genes or what it was that caused this, but all I knew was that it caused a lot of heart ache.

“We should go,” I said and grabbed a jacket just in case it got cold later tonight.

“If we are going to be late, I will let you know beforehand,” Nathaniel told mum.

“Have fun,” she said and went back into the kitchen.

When I got to his car, I saw the same car that was out the front of my place down the end of the road, but he was still looking to where I was. He looked like someone I had seen before, but I just couldn’t place the face and it was driving me crazy.

“You know what you said about you can have children, is that true?” I asked, putting my full attention onto Nathaniel.

“Yes, that is true. A human can carry a vampire’s baby, but they don’t go full term as the foetus is a lot stronger than a normal human baby. It’s usually about seven or eight months until the water breaks and the baby is born, so it’s close enough to a full pregnancy for the mother so she can still do what she wants and can still go out into public and that way it doesn’t look suspicious to everyone else from the outside world for the rest of us vampires. They are called a Dhampir which means they are a mix of vampire and human.”

“Then why didn’t you just say that instead of lying?” I asked.

“Then Marie would be hounding us for grandchildren if she knew that you could carry them for that long, like Bethany is hounding me. She wants grandchildren, but doesn’t understand why no one is adopting and Brianna; you are fertile and give her time because she will be asking for grandchildren.”

“My mum doesn’t want me to make the same mistake of having a child so young Nathaniel, so I think there is much to worry about in the department. She wants me to live my life instead of being weighed down with the task of caring for a newborn baby.”

The first thing I noticed when we got into Colac was the cloud cover. Was it meant to rain or something? There was nothing like a summer night storm to cool things down to help you sleep. We pulled up out the front of the place where we were going to eat and Nathaniel got out of the car before making his way over to the passenger side and opening the door for me like a gentleman.

I got out of the car and smiled at Nathaniel. He smiled back and led me inside. He found a table and pulled out the chair for me to sit down in. I did that and was pushed in before Nathaniel walked away and ordered our food.

“I hope you like chicken,” he said when he sat in front of me.

“Yes I do. It is only type of meat that I can handle,” I explained.

“The messy hair look makes you even more beautiful,” Nathaniel whispered, sounding captivated while he was looking at me, adoringly.

Blushing, I looked over to the other tables and saw that man that was outside before was in here and looking at me. He was stalking me. Nathaniel noticed where I was looking and did the same.

“Are you okay?”

“That man was outside my house before,” I muttered.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Nathaniel asked, sounding angry

“Because I didn’t want to get you or mum worried for no reason,” I said.

I thought back to my photos and tried to place the features. The same nose, eyes, hair, skin...oh no way. This could not be happening to me, not here and not now. Not around Nathaniel and not when I wasn’t

prepared for the worst. The blood in my body went cold when I realised who it was. My father was back in town and I had the feeling Augusta was behind all of it. What other reason would he be back for? I wanted to murder that bitch for the pain she was going to cause mum and myself.

This was going to make mum extremely livid when I told her who was back. Nathaniel's eyes widened for some reason, but he didn't say anything. I was getting a bad feeling about all of this. I didn't need Nathaniel to figure this out before I had a chance to explain everything to him.

"Let's just forget about all of this and just enjoy our date before we have to go back to school?" Nathaniel suggested.

"Sure," I replied, open to that suggestion.

"When is your birthday?" Nathaniel asked after taking a sip of water.

"I was born on March fifteen."

"Turning seventeen or eighteen?"

"Seventeen, but I don't anything for my birthday. I don't like celebrating them."

"Then I will try my hardest not to find you something," he said, but there was a look in his eye that gave me a bad feeling.

"Do you have a favourite colour?" I asked.

"Blood red, as it reminds me of you. What about you, my angel?"

"I like forest green," I replied and that was only because of his eyes that haunted my dreams every single night since I have met him.

Nathaniel nodded and sighed. "I still need to explain about being a vampire to you. Amylia said that you were curious about our powers and everything else about being a vampire, but she didn't explain as it was up to me."

"She said something about your past and that if you wanted me to know, you would tell me but she recommended that you did tell me."

His eyes became hard and the tendons in his fists were standing up on edge as he clenched his fists. I slowly placed my hand on his arm and watched his hands become flat back on the table. I didn't know how bad his past was, but what I said didn't have great results.

"I'm sorry if I said something that you didn't like," I whispered.

“I can’t stay mad at you, but I think back to when I was human, it makes me full of rage and anger at everything that I went through and was forced to do over the nineteen years I was alive,” he whispered so no one close by would be able to hear what he was saying.

“Nate, you can tell me about it,” I said.

“I will another day but I do want to show you something over the weekend.”

The girl brought us our food and glared at me when she saw that I had my hand on Nathaniel’s arm. That was something that I had to get used to.

“Will there be anything else for you?” she asked Nathaniel and completely ignored me.

“Brianna, do you want anything?” Nathaniel asked.

“I’m fine,” I muttered, keeping my eyes on the food.

“My date and I will let you know if we need anything,” he replied coolly.

She nodded and walked away, not saying another word. I took small bites out of my meal as I wasn’t really hungry. I could feel everyone’s eyes on me as I was with the most beautiful guy in the room. No doubt, half of them would be planning my death so they could get my Nate.

“Tell me what is wrong,” Nathaniel said suddenly.

“What are you talking about?” I asked, looking up and trying to play dumb. I must not have been very convincing.

“Anyone can tell that something is bothering you. I want to know what is wrong with my girlfriend.”

“It’s just; everyone in this room would be thinking the same thing over and over again. How can someone so plain and pasty skinned can get such a beautiful guy who is way out of her league?” I asked, lifting my hands in the air.

“If anyone is the lucky one, it is me. You could have completely cut me out of your life once you found out my secret, but you didn’t and I am grateful for that.”

“You know that I wouldn’t do something like that,” I stated.

“But you never know Brianna. I don’t think that I am worthy enough for you and I will always think that. You should be with someone that

has a heartbeat and is human and that won't take your love for granted like I will."

"What if I don't want someone like that? What if I wanted to date someone different to an average human, like you? What if I wanted a challenge?"

Nathaniel didn't have a response for that. It seemed that I had proved him right about something for once. Either that or, he was still trying to figure out what I was giving him the time of day and didn't have an answer to his question.

I couldn't help myself but to have just one more look at the man that I believe was my father. My mouth dropped open when I saw Augusta sitting across from him. The man said something, making Augusta look over her shoulder towards where we were sitting and smirking before pointing to me and saying something that I couldn't make out.

That made me know she was behind that man, who was no doubt my father, coming into town. She knew that his arrival would make me fall to pieces that Nathaniel would never want to see and make me get up and leave me. She would be there to comfort him and steal him from me and his family.

"Brianna, the colour has left your face."

"I don't feel real well, but I will be fine," I said and tried to smile.

"If you want to go back home, we can," Nathaniel suggested and started to get up from where he was sitting.

"No! I mean, no, I will be fine. I'm having fun in your company."

"Augusta is walking with that man that was looking over here before. It seems like they are leaving," Nathaniel said suddenly.

"So Saul, what do you think of the town so far? I mean, Colac has a lot more than Forrest does," I heard Augusta say in her annoying voice that sometimes made me want to puncture my own ear drums.

"It is different to Melton, but I can't understand why my daughter would move to such a small town like that, but that's her mother for you. She makes the decisions and leaves everyone else to pick up the pieces of the devastation that she can create without a second thought or what it might mean for everyone else."

My stomach started churning when I heard that. He was my father

and she brought him here for her revenge. He knew who I was and that I lived in Forrest, but he didn't make his way over here and asked any questions.

"Well people make mistakes and don't realise until it is too late and can't go back to fix them," Augusta said and glanced over my way.

Shaking my head, I got up, grabbing Nathaniel's attention.

"Are you going somewhere?" he asked.

"Bathroom," I replied and walked towards it.

I locked the door so no one else could come in and bother me. That way, I would be able to think in quiet. Augusta said she planned on making me pay for taking Nathaniel from her when he even wasn't interested in her, but what she didn't know was, she wouldn't just be hurting me. She would be hurting my mother, but she was Erica's daughter after all so I don't even think that would phase her one bit on the damage she was doing. Mum never wanted to see him again, and now he was back in town. Splashing some cold water on my face, I went back to my table and saw that they were gone.

"The whole time you were gone, I was bombarded with every single person thoughts in this room and they were not pleasant ones at all," he said in a displeased tone.

"You can read minds? Can you read mine?" I asked feeling very worried that Nathaniel would start looking in my mind to see what is wrong with me.

"No, I can't read your mind, and if I could, I wouldn't as you deserve privacy. And I wouldn't want to find out things about you through your mind. I would want you to tell me everything that you want me to know and not find out about it through your mind."

"Well, that's good to know," I said and finished my meal.

Fifteen minutes later, Nathaniel was leading me to his car and planned on taking me back to his place for a while as he wanted me to know his family better.

"Nate, there is no rush on me meeting your family proper," I said.

Secretly, I just wanted to go home, but I didn't want to tell Nathaniel that. I needed to tell mum about dad being back in town and I needed to do that alone. I didn't want to risk her doing something, with me

knowing that I would be the only one to calm her down.

“How about we do that on the weekend also?” he suggested.

“That is fine by me because at the moment, I am that tired and I think I would just like to go home and relax,” I lied and faked a yawn to back up my story.

For once, it seemed Nathaniel believe it and drove me straight home. All the lights were out when we pulled up so I didn’t know if mum was in bed or was just sitting in the dark.

“Do you want to come in for a bit?” I asked as I opened the front door. I was feeling guilty for lying to him and I wanted to make it right before he found out about it.

“Are you sure?”

“I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t want you to.”

When I walked inside, I saw mum sitting in the lounge in darkness. Nathaniel looked between mum and me before excusing himself and leaving to go home. It was like he could sense something was wrong. She didn’t look up at me when we were alone, leaving it to me to find out what was wrong.

“Okay, what is wrong?” I asked, looking at her.

“I am just thinking about everything that has happened in the past so I can move on into the future,” she said.

I had to tell her what I just found out, even if it was going to hurt her and make her want blood, but I have to tell her. I walked over to the couch and sat on it, looking across at her.

“Mum, there is something that I have to tell you,” I said quietly.

“Whatever it is Brianna, I am sure that it is something that isn’t interesting right now,” she said, her tone flat.

“Mum, he’s back.”

8. Fights

When I woke up on Saturday morning, I thought back to over everything that had happened over the last few days that seemed to make everything a bit more entertaining in this town; only if that's what you wanted to call it.

To say that mum was mad when I said that dad was back in town and possibly back in our lives would have been an understatement. She was absolutely livid. I believed that she was going to use some sort of violence to make me say what I knew about him being back, but she didn't. I thought that she didn't want to know any more about this. And things with Nathaniel were strange. He was fine until yesterday when I spotted him talking with Alex and now everything had changed.

When I asked Alex, he said it was nothing, but he had a guilty look on his face, like he said something that he wasn't meant to and he didn't

want me to know about just in case I did something that didn't end nicely, like me punching him in the face and breaking his nose.

Today, I planned on asking Nathaniel what is problem was as I planned on surprising him at his place. I left a note for mum telling her where I was and made my way to his place. Everyone was home, which was shocking. It was the weekend and I thought that they would all be out.

I knocked on the door twice and waited for someone to answer it.

"Brianna, we weren't expecting you today," Bethany said in surprise when she opened the door and saw me standing there.

"I know, but I thought I would surprise Nathaniel for a change since he has been the one doing since we became friends and now a couple," I said and smiled at her.

"Well come in, dear," she said and stood aside. "I'm sure Nathaniel will love to see you today. He hasn't been himself all morning."

The house on the inside was breathtaking. Every wall was a pale white and the decor matched, and if it wasn't white, it was another pale colour. You could tell that they put a lot of time and effort into this house. I stood in the entrance way, feeling overwhelmed at what I was seeing.

"Nathaniel's room is second on the left. Just knock twice and wait for him to answer. He doesn't like it when people walk in without him answering for some reason," she said and walked back into the kitchen.

I found his room and knocked twice like I was told and waited. He almost ripped the door of the hinge and looked down at me in shock.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I wanted to see you," I replied. "Is there some law against that?"

"Well, that is perfect as I want to talk to you about something anyway," he said and led me over to his bed.

His bedroom didn't look like a normal teenager's room. His bed was placed over on the north wall with a desk and laptop in front of it. I took note of his covers and noticed that they were a light blue with nothing on them. His closet was over to the side on the east and next to that was another door. It seemed to have class and was spotless. I sat on his bed and looked over to him, seeing that he was looking down at the

wooden floor.

“What do you want to talk about?”

“I spoke to Alexander yesterday, but you know that as I heard you ask him what I wanted to talk to him about,” Nathaniel started.

“You have never really talked to Alex before, so why the change in heart now Nate? I mean, I had seen it in your and Alex’s eyes that you wanted to do some harm to each other, and now you are talking to each other. What is going on?” I asked, getting worried.

“He told me something that was interesting and that he thought you had already told me, but you didn’t and I don’t even know if you planned on telling me anyway.”

“What did my cousin tell you Nathaniel Pryor?” I demanded, my temper starting to get the best of me.

“He told me about your father, Brianna! Why didn’t you tell me the truth about him? I know that he left when you were eighteen months old as he couldn’t handle the fact you didn’t look like him, which was stupid and Alex said that he never had any interest in you. That man we saw at the pub the other night was Saul, wasn’t it?” Nathaniel asked, getting upset.

I didn’t say anything. I just stared at the ground, upset by the fact my cousin told him about my father when I didn’t want him to. Another thing that ran through my mind was the fact Alex wasn’t going to come out alive once I was finished with him. I would bury him alive and make sure no one knew where he was buried.

“Answer me Brianna!” Nathaniel yelled, getting off the bed and standing in front of me.

“I was going to tell you everything when I was ready! Alex had no right to tell you that when he clearly knew that I planned on telling you,” I yelled back, tears running down my face.

“That doesn’t make up for it Brianna. I am meant to be your boyfriend and yet, you can’t even trust me enough to tell me about your father,” he said and walked towards his bedroom door.

“You want to know why I didn’t tell you about my father Nathaniel. It was because I was afraid of getting hurt by someone I loved, but I did anyway!” I screamed, making him stop walking.

He turned around and gasped when he saw what state I was in. I collapsed to the floor and started sobbing uncontrollably. He ran over to me at vampire speed and held me to his chest, rocking me like a small child.

"I'm sorry Brianna. I shouldn't have said anything," he whispered into my ear.

"Mum had waited most of my life for that man to come back to us, and when we both never want to see him again, he shows up again all thanks to Augusta and her wicked ways."

"I know," he repeated over and over again into my hair.

"I have to go," I said suddenly and got out of his embrace.

"Where are you going?"

"I need to have a talk to Alex, and I have to do it now before I forget or worse. Augusta could get to him first and do more damage."

"Let me drive you," Nathaniel said and grabbed his car keys.

"No, I need to go by myself on this one Nathaniel. I need to think. I might come back later if I feel up to doing it," I said and placed my hand on the doorhandle.

"Stay the night Brianna. Mum won't care since it is just her and me tonight," Nathaniel said, making me stop and turn around so I could face him.

"I thought everyone was here?" I asked.

"No, they are gone with Jack to Melbourne for the night. They just took Bethany's car since it is bigger," he said, his eyes begging for me to agree.

"Fine, I will stay. I will be back later," I said and walked out of his bedroom and into the living room.

"Is everything alright? I heard you and Nathaniel yelling," Bethany said from the dining table.

"Everything is fine. I will be back later," I said and walked outside.

I knew Alex would be at the general store so I made my way over there. He wasn't getting out of this lightly, and I was going to make sure of that. When I walked into the store, I found him by the magazines and walked over to him, trying to hold back the screaming and violence that I really wanted to unleash on my cousin.

“Ow! What was that for?” he cried when I slapped him across the back of the head.

“Why the hell did you tell Nathaniel about my father? You knew that I was going to do it and yet you had to open your big mouth Alexander.”

“Because I thought that you would have told him about that man by now. I knew that your father was back in town and I didn’t tell you,” he admitted, looking away from my glare.

He was now making me even angrier than I was before by admitting this. I clenched my fists so I wouldn’t punch him in the face and tried to take some deep breaths so my temper wouldn’t get the best of me.

“Why did you do that for?” I growled.

“Because I knew that it would have upset you. Nathaniel asked a few questions about the man in the pub where he took you out for dinner and I had no choice but to confirm it was him, thinking that you had already told him, and give him a heads up on what might happen now. I’m sorry Brianna.”

“I thought mum was going to kill someone when I told her that he was back, but she didn’t. I have never seen her so mad before.”

“Well for Aunt Marie sanity, I hope he doesn’t hang around long.”

“I’m worried about her. I know dad caused her a lot of pain in her life time and I’m scared that she might do something dumb so she doesn’t have to see him.”

“I better get back to work, but I will see you at school,” Alex said and walked away from me.

As I made my way back home, I’d hope that Bethany called mum and told her that I would be spending the night there. Well, that’s if Nathaniel told her. When I walked through the front door, I was surprised to see Bethany sitting on the couch, comforting mum.

“What is going on?” I asked.

“Nathaniel told me what was going on and I thought that I should come here and see if Marie needed any help with anything,” Bethany said.

“Oh did he now?” I asked feeling upset that Nathaniel told his mother what was going on.

“Don’t be mad at him, Brianna. He was just worried about you and

your mother. He really cares about you. I thought that I would never see that day when he found happiness with someone that was made for him. Not after what happened when he was human,” she whispered.

“Did something happen? Amylia said something, but she wouldn’t go into detail as she said it wasn’t her story to tell.”

“Yes something did happen, and I can’t tell you either. That is something Nathaniel will have to tell you, and by right, he will tell you as he now knows about your father. Relationships aren’t meant to be based off lies.”

“I’m going to go pack,” I said and walked off to my bedroom.

I didn’t have a clue what Nathaniel had planned for us, but knowing him, it would be something that would take me by surprise. When I had finished, I walked back into the lounge room and was informed by Bethany that she is going to be staying here for a while and that I could make my way over and spend time with Nathaniel.

As I walked there, I kept on thinking about if we had another fight like before. I did know that Nathaniel would want more details on my father, but I wasn’t ready to go that far yet. Maybe once he told me what his human life was like, then I would tell him everything.

Just as I was about to knock on the door, it opened and I was pulled into a hug. I inhaled Nathaniel’s scent and tried to look up at him, but I couldn’t since he had his arms wrapped tightly around me. I was scared that if he didn’t let me go, he would slowly crush me to death, as I could feel my lungs being pressed against my rib cage. I could already feel my breathing becoming restricted from the lack of air flow.

“I believe that you are happy to see me,” I said, muffled into his chest.

“Of course I am,” he said and kissed my forehead before letting me go.

He grabbed my overnight bag and walked into the living room with me following, trying to get as much air as I possibly could. He placed the bag on the couch before walking back over to me with a smile glued onto his face.

“Is Bethany still at your place?” he asked when he stopped in front of me.

I nodded before answering. "Yeah I think she plans on staying there for a while. Thanks for telling her about what is going on, by the way."

"That means we are alone for a while and I'm sorry about telling her that, but I thought she should know and help keep your mother company. What do you want to do?" he asked and wrapped his arms around my waist. "Because I was thinking that we can watch a movie."

"I was thinking more along the lines of you telling me about your human life. I want to know what Nathaniel Norwood was like before he became a vampire and a Pryor by one single bite to change everything."

"Tomorrow," he said with a hard tone in his voice.

"How do I know that you will keep your word though? I mean, you say stuff, but then the harshness in you comes and ruins it. You are still hot and cold Nate."

"At least I admitted after a while that I was a vampire while you were gutless to say anything about your father," he fired back.

"Because of Mrs. Franklin; if she didn't do anything, you would be still denying the truth that you and I both know I had figured out. And don't you dare bring my father into this Nathaniel."

"I can if I want to Brianna."

Shaking my head, I grabbed my overnight bag and stomped out of the room, making my way up to his bedroom.

"Where are you going?" I heard Nathaniel ask from the entrance way.

"Away from you," I spat, not looking behind me even though I could feel his eyes burning holes into my back.

"Is that what we are going to be doing the whole time you are here is fight over dumb things that have no meaning?" He asked, but I didn't stop walking

"You tell me Nathaniel." And I slammed his bedroom door.

I couldn't understand why he was making me so mad. Maybe it was the fact he went behind my back and asked about my father when I wanted to be the one that explained everything to him, and both of them knew that, and yet, they both did the unthinkable or maybe it was the fact that I hid this from him and that I wanted to be the one to tell him and no one else. Something was making me mad, and I had no idea

what it was.

Two hours later, I was looking out the window when a knock on the door distracted me. It was either Nathaniel or Bethany standing there, but I wasn't going to answer it.

Nathaniel called my name from outside the door, but I didn't answer. Acting like a child wasn't going to get me anywhere, and I knew that, but I couldn't find it in me to care. The fifth time he called my name; I opened the door and waited for him to start speaking. He looked at me with a strange expression and waited for me to start talking, but I wasn't going to do that.

"I don't want to fight with you," he finally said when he realised that I wasn't going to say anything until he spoke.

"Well, I don't want to fight with you either, but we are," I replied and walked back over to the window.

"Not if we sit down and talk about what is bothering us," he said.

"I'm mad at you and at Alex," I stated.

"What are you mad about?" he asked, appearing next to me.

"You went behind my back and asked about my father to someone I call family. Alex knew that he was betraying my trust, and yet, he still told you. I was working up to telling you about it, but he got there before I could. You should not have asked when he asked if you knew what was going on!" I almost shouted, but I kept my emotions under control.

"Look, I am sorry Brianna. I wanted to know what was going on, and as I said, I thought that you weren't going to tell me anything," Nathaniel pleaded.

"You better hope I can forgive you," I muttered quietly.

"Brianna, don't be like this. I said I was sorry."

"Can we just not talk about it anymore?" I asked.

Nathaniel nodded and grabbed my hand. I could see regret in his eyes, and that made me melt just a little more. Bethany called out to us when she got home, making him go down to meet her. I made my way down there after a while. The first thing I had noticed was Nathaniel was nowhere to be seen, and that it was just me and his mother.

"Where did Nate go?" I asked when I walked into the kitchen.

"He went to the shop I work at, but he didn't say what he was get-

ting,” Bethany said, not taking her eyes off the carrot she was chopping.

“Do you have any idea when he will be back?”

“He shouldn’t be long. Not with you here.”

It was quiet between us as I had no idea what to say. I had never been around a vampire before, besides Nathaniel and I were feeling nervous. I walked over to the dining table and sat there without saying a word.

“I hope I’m not making you feel nervous or anything,” Bethany said, walking over to where I was sitting.

“No you aren’t,” I said and smiled at her. “I just have no idea what to say.”

“It was like that with Dakota, Amylia and I when they first came into the family. We didn’t know how to act around each other, which led to fights between the men, but two weeks later, everything was fine,” she said, with a hint of a smile on her face. “It was more Nathaniel and Chase that clashed to begin with and let me tell you, I am glad that they decided to become nice to each other. I don’t think I would have been able to handle fighting all the time,” she finished.

I opened my mouth to say something, but Nathaniel chose to walk through the front door. When he saw me, he raced over and dragged me into standing up and giving me a tight hug.

“True love,” Bethany said and left the room.

I pulled back and wondered what made Nathaniel act like this. Maybe he was trying his hardest for me to forgive him and thought lavishing me with affection was going to work.

“What is with all of the affection you are giving me?”

“Because I thought that you would have left when I went out, but you didn’t.”

“I’d said that I would stay over, didn’t I? I wasn’t leaving because over some fight that we had over what my cousin had told you.”

He grabbed my hand and took me back to his bedroom, but kept the door open. Nathaniel pushed me down on the bed and lay next to me. His bed was so comfortable; I could have gone to sleep. I was looking forward to sleeping tonight.

“I’m pretty sure that you are going to like the place I am taking you

tomorrow.”

“Where is it?” I asked.

“That will ruin my surprise,” he murmured and kissed me lightly.

Being surprised I could handle, but if he had any more ideas that involved attention, I wasn’t going to be happy. I looked over towards Nathaniel and saw that he was looking up at the roof in his own world.

A flash from the door caught my attention, making me look over there. Bethany was standing there with a smile on her face and a camera in her hand. Nathaniel lifted his head to look at her, but didn’t say a word.

“You could have got us in a better shot,” he muttered after a while.

“What I got was perfect Nathaniel. I am glad that you aren’t fighting anymore. I didn’t like to hear all the yelling and screaming.”

Bethany left the room, and I turned to Nathaniel. “How can you hear what people are saying through walls?”

“Vampiric hearing,” he stated. “We can understand what people are saying when it is a small space or are close to us, as well as thoughts. When we speak under our breath, no human can understand, but a vampire clearly can.”

Hearing all of this made me start to feel left out. Nathaniel was faster, stronger, and better at everything that I could ever be or do. He was perfect, and I wasn’t. I was just a plain human with no special qualities.

“Why do you have to be so perfect for?” I asked.

“Brianna, I am nowhere near perfect, but that’s the thing. My beauty lures you in, like it has with every other girl in this town. The beauty I carry is from the venom running in my system, waiting for me to attack. You have seen what it did to Augusta since she knows she can’t have me because I belong to you.”

“Nate, I haven’t lived here long, but I can tell that she never had a good bone in her body. She likes to ruin things for wealth and power, and she will be trying to ruin everything once she finds out that you know about my father, and you haven’t left me because of it.”

“She can do whatever she wants, but nothing will ever tear me away from you because I lo- I mean, because I care for you deeply.”

I picked up on his slip straight away. He almost admitted that he

loved me, but changed his words. I didn't say anything about it as I didn't want another fight with Nathaniel. Suddenly, he got off the bed and walked over to his desk, opening the draw up.

"Close your eyes," Nathaniel said, walking back towards the bed with something behind his back, hiding it out of my view.

"What are you giving me?" I asked with my eyes shut.

"Something that I think you would like to see."

He placed what felt like to be a piece of paper in my hands. I opened one eye and saw that it was blank. I looked up at him confused as all hell. Why would he be giving me a blank piece of paper for? He motioned for me to turn it around and I did, seeing what was on the other side.

"Oh my god," I breathed.

"Since I haven't been sleeping much since you have entered my life, I decided to put my time to good use and draw a portrait of you," he said, but I wasn't paying any attention to him. My eyes were glued on the drawing.

"How did you get it so perfect?" I asked and traced over my nose that he managed to draw so perfectly.

He pulled a picture out of his pocket and handed it to me. He had a picture of me that was taken on the first week. How did I not know about that? I looked up at him, speechless and in a decent amount of shock.

"We took it in secret," Nathaniel said, as if he were reading my thoughts. "Amylia hid in the shadows so she wouldn't get caught taking the photo and gave it to me after school, so I could study it and get every detail right so it wouldn't look stupid and so I wouldn't make myself look completely stupid."

"That is so stalker like and so creepy," I managed to say.

"I know, but I couldn't help it. I thought that I would never have a chance with you, so I needed something that would keep me sane and that happened to be it. I knew you were my soul mate in music on your first day, and I had to know you better, but we kept on fighting. Once we started to get along, I was willing to just be friends, but deep inside, that wouldn't have been enough. I wanted to be your everything Bri-

anna. I wanted to be the one that you would come to when you needed comfort, to give you happiness and to give you my cold, dead heart that I yearn for it to start beating again.”

By the time he finished his speech, I was crying in silent. Getting up off his bed, I walked over to him and wrapped my arms around his waist, crying into his chest. He wrapped his arms around me and kissed my forehead. He whispered something, but I couldn’t understand what it was as he spoke so fast.

The whole night, Nathaniel was glued by my side, and Bethany had a strange look on her face. I wondered how mum was going, alone at home and in her own thoughts. The situation with my father had shaken her up, but I just didn’t know how much. Nathaniel tightened his grip on my shoulder, making me look at him and briefly smile.

“You are worried your mother, aren’t you?” he asked.

“Of course I am. I not sure what my father was like when they were younger, but it must have been bad if she has basically shut down because he is in town due to that bitch.”

“How do you know that she isn’t just grieving for her relationship?” Nathaniel asked.

“I asked her that back in Melton, and she denied it.”

“Nathaniel, Brianna is here to have fun, not get asked a question when I can tell that she doesn’t want to answer them tonight, so just let the girl have some breathing space and she will answer everything when she is ready, not when she is forced to,” Bethany said, scolding her son.

He glared at his mother, but didn’t say anything. I looked between them and noticed that they seemed to be having a silent conversation together. Nathaniel suddenly got up and left the room without saying a single word.

“He needs to learn how to control his temper,” Bethany muttered to herself.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“It’s nothing,” she said and walked out of the room, leaving me alone with a confused look on my face. Why wasn’t anyone telling me a single thing? I believed I had the right to know what was wrong with my boyfriend.

Getting up, I made my way to Nathaniel's room with questions on my mind. I opened up his bedroom door and saw him looking straight out the window. He didn't even acknowledge that I was standing there. Something was seriously wrong with my vampire.

"What is going on Nathaniel? You have never acted like this before and that is scaring me," I said, slowly walking over to him.

"There is a first for everything," he said with a cold tone in his voice.

"Nate, you can tell me what is going on. I am your girlfriend and I care about you. I want to help you."

"Brianna, just leave it alone," he hissed.

"Why are you acting like I am the enemy?" I asked.

"Because I don't want you to know as it has nothing to do with you and it never will," Nathaniel said, turning around to glare down at me.

"Does this have anything to do with Chase? Is it because he doesn't approve of me as I'm human, and in his eyes, weak?"

"It has nothing to do with that."

"Tell me the truth Nathaniel. I don't want to be in relationship if you aren't going to tell me what is bothering you. They aren't meant to be based on lies."

"Don't you think I know that? I have been in relationship before you Brianna, so I know how everything works."

"Then why are you acting so defensive for?"

"I'm not defensive."

"You are!" I argued back.

I should have just stayed at home and kept mum company, instead of being here and fighting over everything. The way the night was going, we were soon going to start fighting over the time to wake up for my so called surprise. I didn't even know if I wanted to see it.

"We need to stop this fighting Nathaniel. I came here to escape and now I am starting to wish that I just stayed home to comfort my mother," I said after five minutes of quiet between us.

"I know that we do, and I don't want you to leave, but I just have a feeling that if we keep on acting this way, you will leave."

"How far away is my surprise from here?" I asked, hoping I would get my answers for tomorrow, and to take our minds of everything.

“Nice try Brianna, but I do like that you are trying to get our minds off all the fighting that we are currently doing.”

I laughed and walked over to my bag, unzipping it and pulling out a hair tie and toothbrush before walking towards his bedroom door.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“To clean my teeth and get ready for bed so I don’t have to rush around when I am dead tired and not thinking straight,” I replied.

“You don’t need to leave the room,” Nathaniel said, making me confused to what he was saying.

Turning around, I saw that Nathaniel was standing next to the other door with a smirk on his face. He opened it and stepped aside. I slowly walked over and stuck my head in, gasping in shock. He had his own bathroom.

“You will be using that every time you are sleeping here. It saves you using the guest bathroom and I can save you if something happens, like you slipping on water or something crazy like that,” he said, taking my toiletries bag into the bathroom.

“Nate, I can do all that myself. I am not prone to danger,” I said, following him.

“Towels are in the cupboard and use whatever you want. I’m not fussed with things being left open or being placed in a different spot to where it was originally. That’s Amylia and Dakota who care about which goes where,” he said, ignoring what I just said and walked out of the room, closing the door behind him.

I looked around the room, taking in the large, shining white and black marble bathroom. A shower was over on the right side of the room with the bath across from it, tucked in the corner. The basin was at the other end of the room, where I knew all the towels and everything I needed was.

Half an hour later, I walked out of the room feeling refreshed. Nathaniel was on his laptop and looked over to where I was standing. Nathaniel had changed into a plain white shirt and black pyjama pants. He looked me up and down, taking note of what I was wearing. I had black Capri leggings and a midnight blue singlet top on that I wore to bed in the summer most nights.

“Why does your hair look black for? I thought it was red?” He asked, sounding confused and I picked up a hint of suspicion.

“Because it is wet still, you idiot,” I said and walked over to him.

“What are you doing anyway?”

“Chatting to James online since he is bored as Amylia is helping Dakota with some fashion collage they are putting together for fun or something like that,” he replied and pulled me down to sit on his knee. “I tune them out when they start on fashion and stuff like that.”

I just stared at the screen, not saying anything. Nathaniel seemed happy to talk to his brother online. Even what James was saying was passing over the top of my head. I had too much on my mind.

“How long has the Pryor family been around for?” I asked suddenly, breaking out of my thoughts.

“Jack is one hundred and seventy-one years old, but his family had been around for over five-hundred years before he was born, and that makes him a very, very powerful vampire.”

I slowly nodded; taking in all the information that Nathaniel just told me. I got up and walked over to the window, looking straight into the Otway’s. This family had a lot of legacy that I had no clue about until now. They had power that moved into today, with Jack being the main name holder, and a powerful and no doubt a deadly vampire when he wants or has to be to protect his loved ones from danger.

“You don’t need to be frightened by this Brianna. Because of the Pryor family and when I was human, makes me very well off and you very spoilt,” Nathaniel said behind me.

Turning around, I made sure that I kept eye contact with him before I started speaking. “But I don’t want everything and anything. I never really had much to begin with and I don’t plan on changing that. I was raised to work for what you want, and not for it to be handed to you on a silver platter.”

“You don’t need that though. Everything you have ever dreamed of I can get you without any problems.”

“I don’t need everything. I am happy with what I have got and I don’t want anything else that is over my budget of one hundred dollars.”

“Believe me; I will change your mind one day. When we get married,

what is mine is yours, and that includes money.”

“You see us that far into the future?”

“My angel, you are my mate, so of course I do. Nothing will ever tear us apart.”

“I’m tired,” I said suddenly, putting an end to this conversation.

Nathaniel shut down his laptop and looked at his alarm clock. I did the same and saw in the bright red letters that it was almost ten thirty at night. “Do you want to go to sleep then?” He asked.

“I don’t really want to sleep at the moment,” I replied.

“Then how about we go see what mum is doing?” Nathaniel suggested.

I agreed to that. He took my hand and led the way. Bethany was curled up on the couch, reading a thick novel when we entered the room. She glanced up at us before placing a bookmark into the place she was reading.

“Brianna, don’t you look lovely in your sleepwear, but I never realised how thin you were.”

That was true. I only weighed 50 kilos and my whole life; I had trouble putting on weight. Everyone had always thought that I was starving myself for attention, but the truth was that I wasn’t doing that. I just couldn’t find it in me to put on some much needed weight, and I was envious of the girls that had an hourglass figure; the one thing that I have wanted my entire life but would never get no matter how much I tried.

“Do you eat enough?” Nathaniel asked, sounding concerned.

“Yes I do eat enough. I have always been thin. I never put on weight, no matter how much unhealthy food I eat,” I explained, trying not to lose my temper.

“What do you kids have planned for the rest of the weekend?” Bethany asked.

“I plan on taking Brianna out tomorrow for a bit,” Nathaniel said.

“That sounds nice, but make sure you are back not too late. They are saying there is going to be a storm tomorrow afternoon, and you know how they get around here. I don’t want Brianna out in one and Nathaniel, don’t look at me like that. You might be immortal, but Brianna is

human and is more vulnerable to everything in the world, including being struck by lightning and hit by golf ball sized hail.”

“What do they do?” I asked, sounding concerned that I might be stuck in a bad storm sometime tomorrow.

“They just get severe, but you should be able to cope with that, since you are from Melton and they get bad storms anyway.”

“I’m going to bed,” I announced.

“But you said that you didn’t want to sleep right now,” Nathaniel said, holding on my arm.

“I had a change of heart,” I said and pulled myself out of his grasp.

When I entered his room, I walked over to the blind and opened it a little bit. I wanted the moon to shine through and light it up a bit just in case I needed to get up for something in the middle of the night and so I wouldn’t hurt myself by falling or tripping like I normally would in the dark. Crawling into bed, I waited for Nathaniel to make his way up so I could fall asleep without being disturbed.

I was half asleep when Nathaniel came into the room half an hour later. I opened one eye and looked up at him. He took off his shirt and crawled in next to me, wrapping an arm around my waist and pulling me to him. “Are you awake?” he whispered.

“Well, if I was asleep, I wouldn’t be now, would I?” I murmured, fighting the urge to roll my eyes and succeeding.

“I enjoy your sarcasm Brianna,” Nathaniel whispered. “Not as bitter as I thought it was going to be, as Alexander told us different when we all found out about you arriving to town.”

“That wasn’t sarcasm Nathaniel. That was the truth I just happened to be pointing out,” I said, my face muffled into the pillow, hoping that sleep would come and overtake me. I didn’t know how much longer I would be able to fight my body before it succumbed to sleep.

“You are smart when you want to be, Brianna. I have to give you more credit than I usually do from now onwards.”

“Can I please go to sleep now or do you want to keep on testing my intelligence until I snap or something Nathaniel?” I asked in a tired voice, forcing myself to stay awake but was starting to lose the battle.

Nathaniel whispered something into my ear that I couldn't understand as I fell asleep almost straight away.

9. Surprises

I was woken up to someone placing feather light kisses on my cheek, and then on my nose.

I could feel the ice cool breath breathing on my face.

Slowly turning my head, Nathaniel was looking at me with a cheeky smile on his face. I groaned and tried to smother my face with the pillow. He chuckled and leaned closer to me, making me almost fall out of bed.

“Why did you have to wake me up for?” I asked with my voice muffled.

“It is nine in the morning Brianna, and I wanted to show you the rest of the house before I take you for your surprise as I didn’t have a chance to do that yesterday,” he said and moved the pillow from my face.

I squinted and hissed to myself when the bright light hit my face. I could feel a headache starting to form from the brightness. Why did he have to live in a naturally light house where sunlight was a given? Right now, I think I would have preferred that he lived in a spooky looking castle that would fit a vampire and have hardly any light.

“Can I just wake up a bit more first?” I asked, struggling to keep my eyes open as I was still half asleep. “Or did you want me to walk around like a sleep deprived zombie for the rest of the day?”

“Of course, Brianna; we couldn’t want that happening,” he replied and got out of bed. “I will be in the kitchen if you need me,” he added and kissed me on the forehead then left the room.

I wanted to go back to sleep, but I knew if I did, Nathaniel would soon be up here, waking me up again in an unknown sort of way that only he could think of. Crawling out of bed, I slipped on my shoes and made my way into the lounge room, and cringed when I saw the sun shining through the large lounge room window.

The front door opened and I looked over that way, seeing Bethany hanging her thin coat for the summer up on the hooks. She picked up the bags that she placed on the ground and turned around, looking to where I was.

“Good morning Brianna,” Bethany said when she saw me standing there and walked down the entrance way hall with a few shopping bags in her hands. “Nathaniel, I have got the fresh bread you requested from the store and a few extras that I thought might help you in your quest for perfection and what you don’t use please put them in the pantry for a spare day.”

He walked into the lounge room and took the stuff out of her hands and went back into the kitchen, not saying a word to me. I turned to Bethany and saw that she was trying to hold back laughter and so far was winning.

“What does he want with fresh bread? What is my vampire trying to do?” I asked.

“Attempting to make you breakfast, but I don’t know how it will go as he has never cooked for anyone before. I do all the cooking in this house hold since no one else can cook. Nathaniel wants to be the perfect boyfriend, but it is hard as his diet consists of mostly blood that we have in storage and a bit of human food that we can stomach.”

“I thought it was strange that you could eat solid food and yet, you are forever immortal.”

“It plays to our advantage if there are humans around, and that way, we don’t have to lie about being on some sort of a diet. Dakota and Amylia only eat the same amount that you do, but the boys keep the economy alive as they are just like every other teenage boy out there. I’m always buying food for them.”

“What are you talking about?” Nathaniel asked, walking into the room with a plate in his hand.

“You mean you couldn’t hear us talking from the kitchen?” Bethany asked.

“I was busy trying not to burn the house down mother dear as I know for a fact that you would have my head,” he said and handed me the plate. “Eat, as I have a lot planned for you today.”

I looked at what he made me, and it seemed to be something that looked like it was from out of space. When I had another look, I realised that it was cremated toast. Bethany laughed and walked into the kitchen, saying something about making me something more edible.

After I finished the toast with Vegemite on it, I made my way back to Nathaniel’s room and planned on getting dressed into something that would fit the elements of a humid town. Nathaniel had his bedroom window open, letting all the hot and steamy weather come through.

Nathaniel came out of the bathroom dressed in black shorts and a navy blue singlet top. I decided to keep what I was wearing on for the day, as I couldn’t find it in me to change since I had started to feel lazy.

“You have seen most of the house, but I feel that you need to see the rest of it,” Nathaniel said, walking over to me. “After all, you will be spending a lot more time here.”

“How do you know that?” I asked, even though he was right. I would be spending more time here if his family liked it or not.

I just wanted to make him question himself for once in his life as I had no idea if he has ever done that before.

“Because I can sense it; now, let me show you everything,” he announced and took my hand.

He led me down the hall, pointing out everyone’s bedrooms along the way, and stopped at a closed door. “This is one room Amylia would love to hold you hostage in,” Nathaniel said and opened the door, revealing a beauty room.

“Oh no,” I muttered.

Along the walls were hair colours, make-up of a different variety, clips and headbands, hair products and a lot more that I couldn’t place. There were chairs in the room that you would see in hair salons and a full length mirror glued onto the wall.

“Amylia had to beg Bethany to let her make this into a beauty room

and then she had to beg James to help build it for her.”

“She better not think about using this stuff on me as I like looking natural and not like a Barbie doll.”

“Amylia will try and get you to let her have some fun with all of this. Now, to the next room,” he said, leading me out.

“Nathaniel, I am sure that this can wait a bit longer,” I said, feeling shaken from the beauty room and the thought that Amylia would force me into letting her give me some sort of a makeover. That thought made my blood run cold.

“What is the fun in that?” he asked and kept on walking.

He pulled me into the study, and I almost fell over backwards when I saw the collection of books around the room, with a whole pile of them stacked on a desk next to a laptop and countless other things. It seemed to be a study and library all in one.

Nathaniel led me outside and I stopped frozen in my spot. Over to my left was an in ground swimming pool, and over to the right was a tennis court.

“This is what we do when we are suffering from boredom or not in the games room.”

“You weren’t lying about having money,” I whispered.

“Did you think I was lying about something as huge like that? We could buy this town and still have change to spend; over one hundred diamond necklaces, and four top of the range Mercedes to be exact.”

“Can you please take me for my surprise now? All of this is getting to my head and I don’t know how to process it all.”

Nathaniel nodded and took my hand before leading me over towards the trees. I looked at him confused over why he was taking me this way. He lifted up the wired fence and moved under through it, wanting me to do the same. I crawled through, and almost lost my footing, but Nathaniel caught me before I could face plant the ground.

“Why did you take me this way for?” I asked.

“Because this way is the quickest; if I took you by road, we would be getting there later. Now, wrap your arms around my neck, and hold on,” he said, coming to stand in front of me.

“Nathaniel, what do you plan on doing?” I asked, unsure of what he

planned on doing. I could only hope it wasn't something too bad and that I could handle it.

"Watch and learn," he said and made sure I had a tight grip on him before taking off like a bullet.

I soon realised that he had a vampiric power that he was displaying to me and tried my hardest not to scream. I looked around me, and tried to take in the scenery, but at the speed he was currently doing, it was hard. Everything just looked like green and brown mush cluttered together in a small space.

"Can you please slow down?" I asked, feeling not quiet myself. In fact, I felt like I was about to die but I wasn't going to tell Nathaniel that, he would come to the worse conclusion about my health if I revealed that.

"Does this speed scare you?" he asked, concern lacing his voice.

"I am just not feeling human, and it feels like all the blood has rushed out of my body and gone somewhere that I don't even want to know about."

That was true. It felt like everything inside of me had fallen out. My head was starting to spin and my stomach started to churn.

"Brianna, if that was the case; you'd be a mangled corpse by now, drained bone dry from a creature of my kind."

"That does not make me feel any better Nate."

"We are almost there. Can you wait another five minutes of not feeling human?"

"That's if I don't be sick first," I muttered.

Nathaniel slowed down to walking pace, and loosened my grip around his neck. I knew that he slowed down because of my comments, but I was also hoping that he wouldn't have some sort of pent up anger because of it. After all, I just did stop him from travelling the way he prefers due to my stupid human nature.

"Are you mad at me?" I asked in a small voice.

"Why would I be mad at you for?" he asked, sounding confused.

"Because I couldn't handle the way you get around; like a vampire," I whispered.

"That is my fault Brianna. I should have asked you first and not just

assume that you would be alright with me running that fast.”

“I have never got motion sickness before, so that is a first.”

But at the speed Nathaniel was travelling would have been enough to make anyone sick.

“We will just walk and take our time there. I don’t want you getting sick on me.”

“I will be fine,” I said and walked in front of him.

He took my hand and decided to lead the way, which was good as I had no idea where the surprise was. The sun was shining on what appeared to be water up ahead in the distance. Was that what Nathaniel planned on showing me?

“We are almost there,” he said and kissed my hair.

“Are you taking me to what appears to be water? What do you plan on doing Nathaniel? Do you plan on throwing me in there and watch me struggle with rocks and whatever else that is sharp underneath the surface?”

“Do you think I would be that cruel?”

“Well, you are a vampire after all. Shouldn’t you be cold, harsh and cruel to everything and everyone that passes you because of who you are?”

“No, that is Dakota that treats everyone like that. She is only nice to you because I asked her to be in the first place, but if I didn’t, she would show you the real Dakota.”

“Is she bitter about something?”

“She is bitter about a lot of things, but that isn’t my story to tell. If you grow close enough to her, she might tell you what haunts her but I highly doubt that will happen.”

She isn’t the only one that has things to haunt her every single day of her life, I thought to myself. “So if she didn’t have...issues, she would be nice?” I asked.

Nathaniel laughed before replying. “I wouldn’t say she would be nice, but Dakota and I have never been close, and I think that what could be her problem also. It doesn’t help that I have decided to date a human when everyone in the family tried to set me up with vampires, but I never held any interest in them.”

“So you picked the weakest kind out there?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t call you weak,” Nathaniel said and slung his arm around my shoulder. “You have guts and know how to fight back when you have to, and you don’t let people tell you what to do.”

“You better not get any ideas in your head Nathaniel. I wouldn’t hesitate to yell and scream at you if you tried running my life.” I would have included hitting as well but I didn’t feel like having a few broken bones from the hardness of his immortal body.

He chuckled and pulled a few tough branches that I would never be able to get through out of my way with his bare hands, throwing them off into the distance. Some of this stuff was starting to scare me. But, I guess that he was starting to feel comfortable in his vampire skin around me to do these sorts of things.

“Close your eyes,” he said suddenly and stood in front of me.

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want this to be ruined,” was his reply.

I shrugged but did what he asked of me. He made sure that his grip on my hand was tight before he started walking in what I hoped to be a straight direction, as I didn’t really want to trip over tree roots. He stopped walking suddenly and stood behind me, wrapping his arms around my waist.

“Open your eyes,” Nathaniel whispered into my ear.

When I did, I gasped when I saw what Nathaniel had taken me. The water was crystal clear and sparkled from the sun shining down onto it. It had the greenest grass that I had never seen and was surrounded by the Otway Ranges. It appeared to be in the middle of nowhere, and yet, it breathtaking. There were wild flowers that were growing in the grass and around the bed of water.

“How did you find this place?” I asked.

“It is a hidden treasure that I found when I went for a walk to clear my head just after I met you,” he explained.

“My arrival had benefits,” I joked.

“If you didn’t arrive into town, I would still be suffering from my severe depression that you are starting to clearing up.”

“Is that why you are having mood changes?”

“That is one reason why,” he said, his voice vague and distant.

I didn’t press the issue as I knew Nathaniel would tell me in due time, but I was hoping today was the day he told me everything, as he said today yesterday. I was hoping that he didn’t go back on his word.

“Are you telling me everything today?” I asked.

“Only if you tell me more about your father,” he challenged.

The look on his face told me he was dead serious about this. I have no choice but to tell him everything if I wanted to know about his past in return. “Fine,” I relented.

He walked over to a bush and pulled out what looked like a beach bag. I looked at him confused until he met my eyes and explained what he had planned. Since the water was a warm temperature, he decided that we could go swimming. But there was something Nathaniel didn’t know. I couldn’t swim, as I never wanted to learn.

Nathaniel changed into his board shorts behind a bush and got into the water, waiting for me to do the same. I sat at the edge in the red one piece that was in the bag and placed my legs in the water, as the lake seemed like a swimming pool.

“Are you coming in?” he asked.

“I’m happy sitting here.”

Nathaniel swam over to the edge and gently pulled me into the water, but I grabbed a hold to the edge before I could go under. Nathaniel then grabbed a hold of my waist and pulled me deeper into the water, leaving me to choice but to try and hide my fear of dying by drowning. But I knew Nathaniel would never let that happen.

“Nathaniel, what are you doing?” I asked, sounding scared.

“Well, I want to swim with my girlfriend,” he said and let me go in the middle of the water.

I almost went under the water, but saved myself from a certain death.

“Nate, I can’t swim!” I screamed, grabbing onto his arm to stop me from a certain death.

He grabbed me in a flash and kept a tight grip on me. “You can’t swim?” he asked, sounding shocked.

“I never learned because I didn’t feel the need to do so. Now I should

have gone through with it," I admitted.

Nathaniel seemed even more shocked when I told him that. He took a breath and looked straight at me. "Then I guess I will have to teach you, which I am looking forward to doing."

"That is why I was happy sitting on the edge, watching you," I admitted.

"Come on," Nathaniel said and swam back to the edge with me in his arm.

"What are we doing?" I asked.

"The storm clouds are starting to form in the distance, but nothing for us to worry about, so I thought that we could watch them gather."

"You like the weather?"

"It is very interesting and complex to learn."

"Learn?" I asked.

"Yeah, but I have no intension of learning everything about it. I mean, I don't age, so that wouldn't look good around everyone that does, and I don't. They will get suspicious about me and look up something that will reveal that I am a vampire. And we don't want that happening as it will ruin our lives."

I pulled myself out of the water and walked over to grab a towel. I glanced up towards the sun and felt my skin. It still was early in the morning and yet, my skin felt like it was on fire. I hope whoever packed the bag remembered sunscreen for me. I looked around in the bag, but couldn't find what I wanted.

"What are you looking for?" Nathaniel asked, walking over to where I was.

"Sunscreen," I muttered.

"There isn't any," Nathaniel informed me.

I froze and stopped looking and turned around so I could look at Nathaniel. "There is no sunscreen?" I asked, disbelieving what I was hearing. Haven't they heard of a thing called Cancer on the skin?

"Yeah, Amylia thought that you wouldn't need it, so I wouldn't go looking for any."

"So I can blame her when I start looking like a red rose from sun burn? Or if I get a Melanoma on me somewhere?" I asked.

“Why would that happen? Melanoma only forms on moles or freckles and I don’t see any of them on your skin.”

Sighing, I turned around and grabbed my hair, pulling it to the side and pointed to the freckle that my hair always hid or that I made sure was covered up from the dangerous beam from the sun. Nathaniel came up behind me and placed his hand over it. I shivered from the skin to skin contact and let my hair go, feeling it brush Nathaniel’s hand.

“I didn’t see this at the dance though.”

“My dress covered it out of view from everyone. It was like Amylia known about it, but she didn’t have a clue.”

Nathaniel moved away from me and walked over to the beach bag and looked through it for something. He came up empty handed though.

“How about we just watch the clouds brew and then later on, we can talk about all of our troubles?” Nathaniel suggested.

“What happens if we get caught in the storm though?” I asked.

“I can use one of my many vampire powers to get us back in a hurry, but the feel of summer rain on your overheated skin is soothing.”

I sat down on the soft grass and looked up at Nathaniel. He sat next to me and looked straight with a blank look on his face. I placed my hand on his shoulder, but didn’t get a response out of him. It was like Nathaniel was in his own world and nothing could pull him out of it.

“Hey, what is wrong?” I asked.

Nathaniel shook his head as if it was to clear his thoughts and looked over to me with a blank look in his eyes. “I’m just thinking about something.”

“Do you wish to tell me?” I asked.

“I want to tell you right now, but I don’t know how you will take everything that I am bottling up on the inside,” he said, his voice laced with an edge.

“How do you know that? I have most of my feelings bottled up so I don’t have to deal with everything that I have been put through in my life.”

“I don’t think it would be as bad as my story would be, but I am still trying to figure out how to break everything to you. My life hasn’t been

easy, and the same goes for your life also. And I believe after today, we will come out even stronger in our relationship.”

I hoped that he was right, and once everything came out into the open about his past and mine, that it wouldn't drive a wedge between us. I didn't want that happening. I didn't want my relationship with Nathaniel to fall apart before it really even started.

“What happens if it doesn't Nathaniel? What happens if we end up growing apart from everything that might happen?” I asked.

“We won't grow apart Brianna,” Nathaniel said, trying to reassure me, but it wasn't working.

“How do you know that though? It's not like you can predict the future or anything Nathaniel. You and I have no idea what will end up happening in this relationship in the future.”

“That is true, but I have been on this planet long enough to know when I am right over something and I know for a fact that I am right over this.”

I laughed to myself and looked back at the clouds that were still brewing in the distance. They were starting to turn into the vivid blue that was the sign that something would happen. The wind picked up, blowing my hair straight into my mouth. I gagged and removed it while hearing Nathaniel snicker next to me.

“Shut it,” I said and looked at him.

“I didn't do anything,” he said, looking straight ahead but was still trying not to laugh.

I just looked at him but didn't say anything in response. We did enough fighting yesterday over crazy things, and I didn't feel like starting another one.

“I shouldn't have laughed to myself, but that doesn't happen to Dakota or Amylia and it is funny when it happens to someone else.”

“That's because they use hair products and I don't, as you can tell,” I said, wrapping my hair around my finger.

“You don't even wear make-up and because of that, that makes you even more beautiful in my eyes as you embrace your natural beauty. You have seen the way Augusta and everyone else besides Hudson look on a daily basis. Everyone thinks if they make themselves look like a mil-

lion dollars and act the way that they do, they will end up getting my heart, but that has been taken by someone else.”

“Who stole it?”

“You stole my heart Brianna. I-I love you so much that it makes my frozen, dead heart feel like it is in pain and most times, I can’t even feel like I can even breathe as my feelings are that strong for you,” he whispered quietly and looked down. “I’ve put my heart on the line but I just don’t know how you feel about me.”

I gasped in shock and placed my hands on his face, lifting it up so he had no choice but to look at me. I kissed him as hard as I possibly could be human. He responded and pulled me in tighter, making my lips hurt after a while. I pulled away when I needed to breathe and looked Nathaniel straight in the eye.

“I love you, too, Nathaniel,” I breathed.

He pulled me in for another breathtaking kiss, but pulled away suddenly and looked around him. I did the same but couldn’t see or feel anything. When I looked into Nathaniel’s eyes, they seemed glazed over, like something had grabbed his attention in the distance.

“Something wrong Nathaniel?” I asked.

“We should get going,” he said and pulled me up off the ground.

“Why do we have to go for? Is something going to happen?” I wondered.

“I can sense a change in the weather approaching so I want to get out of here before it hits and just in case you get sick from a sudden downpour of rain and soaks you to the bone,” he said and grabbed my hand.

“Are you still going to tell me everything or have you changed your mind about that also?” I asked.

“I promised you that I would Brianna.”

“But people go back on their word all the time,” I pointed out. “It wouldn’t surprise me if you did the same as everyone else,” I added under my breath, hoping that he wouldn’t be able to hear what I just said.

“Brianna, I have been on this earth for a long time, and I have learned not to go back on my word anymore. It comes back to haunt you like it is about to with me and it will plague me for the rest of my

vampiric life, which is going to be a very long eternity for myself. Also, I heard what you just said also. Talking quietly doesn't work around vampires at all because of our hearing. It is going to take you a very long time to get use to that."

"Well, isn't that nice to know," I grumbled quietly, disappointed that I had been heard, but I should have known not to say anything. Next time, I will just think it to myself and hope that he won't listen into my thoughts.

Nathaniel started to walk at a fast pace, making me trip up along the ground until I could find my feet and catch up to him. On the walk back, it felt like eyes were glued to me in the distance, watching my every move that I was making. I looked behind me countless times, but I just couldn't see anyone standing there. I looked behind me two more times, but still couldn't see anyone standing there.

It felt like I was being stalked, but the person was invisible. It was like the person didn't want to be found, or they just didn't want me knowing who they are. Something was telling me that it was Augusta, but she isn't the type that would hide in the shadows. She would come out into view almost straight away.

Something was starting to tell me life was about to get much more interesting, and not because I was dating a vampire.

10. Unhappy Stories

Nathaniel led me up to his bedroom, barely saying hello to Bethany.

When we entered, he locked his bedroom door, and started pacing around his bedroom. I was starting to fear that he was going to burn on a hole into his floor from all the pacing that he was doing. I sat on the edge of his bed and waited for him to start speaking to me.

I knew that Nathaniel didn't really want to tell me about his past, and I didn't know what horrors had happened in his past life, but all I knew was I wouldn't let it scare me away from the man I loved. I would force myself not to run even if my body was screaming at me to do so. I felt that I had the right to know about Nathaniel's past life.

"Nate, if you don't want to tell me, you don't have to," I said, feeling dejected at the thought that I wouldn't know about his past.

"I promised you I would, and I have to. If not, someone else will tell you, and I want you to know everything from me. I am just scared that you will judge me."

"You know that I won't ever judge you on nothing. Even if you slipped up, and drank human blood by mistake, I still wouldn't be able to judge you. That is your natural lifestyle."

"Well, you know that I am nineteen forever and stuck in my youth for the rest of my life," he started.

"Of course I know that. Are you telling people that you are nineteen, or a different age?"

"Nineteen, but that isn't included in my horror story of Nathaniel Monroe Norwood when he wasn't a Pryor."

He had a vacant look in his eyes, and that worried me. I wanted to

get up and comfort him, but I knew if I did that, we would never get to the past. Nathaniel took a deep breath and stared out the window. “I was born on September 29th in nineteen-forty in the city of Melbourne. I was never close to my mother and father when I was a child and I could never really understand why. It was like they resented me over something, but my relationship became even frailer when I was around twelve years old.”

“Why?” I asked.

“There was this girl named Mary Thomas, and she was four years younger than I was. She had black hair, ice blue eyes and was a spoilt child and knew it. Everything she demanded, she got without a fight. She had everyone eating out the palm of her hand; everyone but me that was. Augusta reminds me of her, and that is the main reason I cannot stand her. My parent’s craved wealth and met Mary’s parents one day at the local markets, forming a friendship based on lies. I was shoved with Mary, and disliked her straight away due to her cold and cruel nature. She took a liking to me almost straight away, and thought I was perfect boyfriend material for her, and treated me as such while I tried my hardest to pull away from her. When I turned seventeen, I was hit with a bombshell from my mother. Mary was to become my bride and I had no say in the matter or of my future happiness. My family and her family had decided that we were to be wed in the most lavish ceremony in the town and of that time.

“I had been tormented and forced to fake my happiness for five years, and now I was going to be stuck with the girl I hated for my whole life. I begged and pleaded with my parents to call off the wedding, but they didn’t budge. “Nathaniel, this is the only way we are going to be a part of the elite in this town and that is what I want. I don’t want to be looked down upon any longer. Do you realise how much I hate it? You don’t know,” my mother said countless times. They only cared about wealth and status and couldn’t care that their only son was slipping into a depression over what they had planned. It was only what they wanted and not what I wanted. I wasn’t important,” he said, taking a deep breath.

I got up from where I was sitting and walked over to him, placing my

hand on his chest. He took a few deep breaths and looked down at me.

“You don’t have to continue. I can see that this is causing you pain,” I breathed.

“I have to. I have started to tell you, and I can’t stop,” he said, his eyes glazed over with what looked like tears.

“Not if it’s going to cause you pain and I don’t want you to be in so much pain from reliving the past.”

“Brianna, my love, I want you to know *everything*, and that includes my past with Mary and my family and how I was turned into what I am today.”

I relented and nodded, knowing that he was right. He took another deep breath before speaking again.

“Over time, Mary forced intimacy in our relationship, and I had no choice but to agree. Apparently, Mary didn’t want to marry with her virtue in place. When our families found out, they were excited, thinking that Mary would become pregnant with child who will be even more spoilt than Mary herself and carry on the legacy of both families into the future. My father decided to force me to give him a grandchild right after the wedding and he wanted it to be conceived on the honeymoon, and I refused to give into his demand. I told him to his face that all he cared about was greed and wouldn’t care if I was stabbed or mugged because it didn’t involve money and that he would let me die in the street if it was to save a dollar or two. He was left speechless as I walked out of the room. I felt...pride as I told my father what I thought to his face for once.

“It was nineteen fifty-nine when the date was set, November twenty of that year. Over time, Mary grew more selfish and self-centred over everything. When it came to the wedding, everything had to be done her way. The flowers had to be tulips; the reception had to be in a garden, I had to be dressed up like a doll, and she had to be the most beautiful one and the only beautiful one, which was hard when she looked like Augusta, and acted like her as well. It would have been like dressing up a witch and trying to hide all of her warts. One day, I just had enough and told her my thoughts about her to her face out in public.

“You are vain, selfish and self-centred,” I yelled. “You get everything

you want when you demand it, and your father can't say no! You repulse me, and I don't care what you think."

"If you have forgotten Nathaniel," she started. "I have the power and the wealth to ruin you and your family. What do you think of that?" she asked.

"I honestly couldn't care if you did that. My parents only want me to marry into your family for your money!" I shouted, catching the attention of some people standing nearby.

"Mary gasped and couldn't say anything. I glared down at her and walked away, not caring who had heard our fight. At least everyone knew the real reason for this wedding. I had hoped that it would be cancelled, but it wasn't. Mary took it in her stride to make me even more miserable by forcing my affection towards her, and forcing me to stay by her side in public outings. The months flew quicker than I have ever known and before I knew it, it was the day before the wedding.

"Mother had forced me to get ready for the rehearsal dinner, saying something about making sure everything is perfect for the wedding, but I tuned her out straight away. I wasn't in the mood for her or anyone that day. Even at the dinner, I was withdrawn and not with it. My grandfather, to whom I preferred over my parents, could see I wasn't myself, and said something to my father about taking me outside to smoke some cigars he had brought for the special occasion like he normally did.

"Nathaniel, my boy, tell me," my grandfather started and looked over to where I was standing. "What has got you in such a sombre mood a day before you make an honest woman out of Mary?"

"I don't want to marry her," I admitted, inhaling the cigar smoke. "Mary isn't the woman that I want to spend the rest of my life with. I don't love her and I know for a fact that I never will love her."

"Then why don't you call off the wedding and save yourself from this misery that you are about to inflict on yourself?"

"I tried, but no one would listen to reason. Mother and father only want me to marry Mary for her money and status that she carries. I have begged and pleaded, but they won't listen. I have been forced into this since I was twelve years old and have never had a say in what I

wanted to do in my life. That is all that I want for once. My parents don't care about what I want."

"You are a wise boy Nathaniel, and for once, why don't you do what you want to do and not what everyone else wants you to do?" he suggested.

"Your grandfather seemed very wise," I said, grabbing Nathaniel's attention.

"He was a very wise man, and my grandmother was a very wise woman. They never had much, which fuelled my mother's yearning for wealth and status. She didn't like being at the bottom of the latter and was willing to do anything to get the wealth that she wanted," he said, glancing towards me.

"Continue," I stated.

He took another breath. "What should I do? Leave her and risk getting the wrath of my parents or tell everyone the real reason for the wedding and cause a scandal in the town and banish my whole family back to the bottom of the social latter?"

"They both sound horrid, but yet, they sound excellent. You are a wise boy, and I know you will think of something," he said and patted me on my shoulder, walking back inside.

"There you are," I heard Mary say. "I have been looking everywhere for you."

"I turned around and looked at her, not saying anything. Her eyes seemed cold and harsh, and I was getting a feeling what married life would be like to this witch. "Did you need something?" I finally asked.

"Are you coming back in?"

"No, I'm not. I'll see you at the wedding," I said and walked away, ignoring her calls for me to return.

"I spent the whole night in bed, awake, knowing that I would be kissing my freedom goodbye come twilight. I was still wide awake when father burst into my bedroom when the sun was still rising. He dragged me out of my warmth and demanded that I tried on my suit. I glared at him and grabbed my everyday clothes, walking into the bathroom. I came out dressed and grabbed my hat.

"Where are you going?" father asked.

“For a walk; I don’t know when I will be back,” I said and walked out of my bedroom door.

“We are going to the gardens at twelve, so meet us there and don’t be late Nathaniel Monroe!” father yelled.

“I slammed the front door and decided to walk to where the wedding was being held. Everyone was setting up, and I saw Mary, giving her usual orders. You’d think that she would be happier since it was her wedding day, but she wasn’t. She was worse and I could sense it from the other side of the garden. I walked away before she could see me standing there. I didn’t know what her mood was going to be like towards me since I left her at the rehearsal dinner.

“I made my way into the forest and used that as a chance to clear my head. I leaned against a tree and thought I heard something. I looked around, but couldn’t see anything as it was strangely foggy. A second later, I felt something bite me on my neck. My body felt like it was burning from the inside out and I fell to the ground. I managed to crawl out of sight and prayed for death, but it never happened. I spent the afternoon burning, and when the sun started to set, people started to look for me.

“Someone from Mary’s family came close to finding me, but only took the hat I was wearing and left. I spent two days there, hoping for death. My heart stopped beating and the pain stopped at the same time. I felt...different. I looked around a few times, but the sensation never left. I couldn’t even feel my heart beating. When I got up, I smelt something sweet but bitter at the same time. I saw a trail of blood on the ground and felt hungry. That was when I realised I was a vampire and it was my blood I was looking at.

“I made my way back home, but kept my distance from them so I wouldn’t be seen. I saw mother and Mary sitting outside on the steps of my old home.

“Why did he have to go missing for? I mean, it was our wedding day after all. Did he have this planned or something?” I heard Mary asked, glaring down at her engagement ring.

“I don’t think my son would do something like that. Your father has gathered a search party, and we are all going to look tonight in the for-

est. Nathaniel could just be lost and waiting for us to find him. I know my son,” mother said.

“And I know him also. When Nathaniel doesn’t want to be found, you can’t find him. We need to let him come back to us, and when he does, the wedding will be back on.”

“I waited until they left that night and broke into my home, and went straight for my room. It hadn’t been touched; expect that Mary had now moved into my room. I looked around it, taking in the scent I had when I was human. My stuff caught my attention and I wanted it. I didn’t want to travel empty handed. I grabbed a duffel bag, and took what I wanted; my clothes, shoes and valuables. I also stole money from the safe so I could get as far as possible.”

“How much did you steal?” I asked.

“Over two thousand dollars,” Nathaniel replied.

“And did you leave town?”

“Yeah I did. I forced myself to leave, as I didn’t want to get caught. I changed my clothes, and ripped the top I was wearing right down the middle then left it in the forest for them to find. For six months, I was alone, until Bethany found me one day. She took me back to Jack, and he taught me how to behave when I was around a human. Over time, I started to class him as my father and Bethany as my mother. They were more of parent figures than my own parents. Two months after being with them, Jack came home with a sombre look on his face. He informed me that my mother and father had been killed, but I couldn’t find it in me to feel any pain. After everything they put me through my whole life, I just felt pain and anger towards them and I know that this will sound cruel and cold, but I am glad that they died and I hope that they are looking down on me and seeing how happy I now am and not like I was when I was human.

“For some reason, Mary didn’t give up on looking for me. She loved me in her cruel, twisted way and because of that, I hated her and I still do hate her,” Nathaniel snarled, making me jump.

“You really have a lot of hidden anger and betrayal from your family, don’t you?” I asked.

“Of course I do,” he said.

“How much does everyone else know about all of this?”

“They know everything about my past. Each and everyone one of us have a troubled or haunted past that we try and forget about, but when simple things in the news reminds you of what happened when you were human, it hurts and threatens to break everything you have built.”

“At least you had two parents. I only grew up with one that struggled to make ends meet,” I said, staring towards the ground.

“It couldn’t have been that hard. I have seen people without a parent and it doesn’t affect them,” Nathaniel snickered.

I looked up towards him, laughing without humour from Nathaniel’s snicker. One minute he was nice and charming, and now he was cold and different.

“My mum never wanted a child, and it was my father that wanted one. Everyone had to convince her to have one, and look what he did. He left without a second thought. Most other people have contact, but I didn’t. I was forced to get a part time job to help mum save for a house so we could leave that town and leave all the bad memories behind. Now the cause of all the pain is back in town and I don’t know what he even wants.”

“He can’t be that bad.”

“You tell me Nathaniel. Should a father abandon his child? Should a child spend most of her life trying to find the man who was meant to save her from the monsters under the bed or be the person a girl is meant to look up to for guidance, love and protection?” I asked.

“I guess,” Nathaniel replied.

“Since I was thirteen, I spent each night in bed, lying awake wondering if I did something wrong that made him leave when I was little, and he hasn’t forgiven me for it and feels like that I should be punished for it. All my friends had two parents, while I didn’t. They never asked questions, but I always felt different to them for that reason. Mum had to work two jobs to save for a house and to make sure I was getting things that I needed; like clothes, shoes, food and stuff for school. She didn’t want to live off my grandparents and she thought since she had me so young; she was going to be a good mother and not force her parents to look after a mistake.”

“I was being a bit harsh, wasn’t I?” he asked, regret seeping into his voice.

“You were. You haven’t lived my life Nathaniel, and I haven’t lived yours, but that still doesn’t give you the right to judge like you were. I was going to tell you more about my father, but I changed my mind,” I said, and walked out of the room, leaving him standing alone.

Bethany was sitting at the kitchen table with a blank look on her face. She looked up when I entered the room and smiled weakly. Something was bothering her.

“Are you okay?” I asked and walked over to the kitchen table.

“I heard what Nathaniel told you about his past, but I am shocked that he thought your life wouldn’t be hard living in a single parent household,” she said.

“People make it look easy, but it wasn’t in my life. Mum was lucky that she didn’t have to pay for childcare as my grandmother offered to do it for free,” I said and pulled out a chair.

“So you were mostly raised by your grandmother?” Bethany asked.

“Yeah, but when mum could find the time, she took over. She didn’t want to work two jobs. She only wanted to work one and spend most of her free time with me, but she couldn’t. We wouldn’t have been able to live on the money dad gave her as it was not even two hundred dollars.”

“When I spoke to your mum yesterday, she seemed like a tough, strong willed woman that doesn’t let anything get to her, but when she spoke about your father, there was this bitter edge to her voice.”

“Both mum and myself have got to the stage where we never want to see him again, but now he is back in town and I don’t know what he wants,” I said, slumping my shoulders and sighing.

“How did he even find you here?” she asked.

“I think Augusta found him and invited him into town. She is hell bent on making my life a living hell and this is the best way on doing it,” I admitted.

“That wouldn’t surprise me if she was behind this. Augusta is always trying to get her claws into Nathaniel, but nothing works. Nathaniel learned from Mary.”

“Nathaniel said Mary was like Augusta. Is that true?” I asked.

“Augusta is worse. Mary had limits and she was sweet when she wanted to be. Mary loved Nathaniel in her own way and she did want to marry him, but she felt like she was forced also and I know this because of my vampire hearing. Augusta is obsessed with Nathaniel and she is always saying that when they finally start dating; she will get everything that she is always wanted and being able to rub it in the faces of everyone else.”

“Is that the main reason why she wants me out of the picture?” I asked, starting to put the pieces of this twisted puzzle together.

“Yes it is. Has Nathaniel told you about my past?”

“He said they aren’t his stories to tell,” I replied.

“Well I will tell you more another day, but to give you the short version, I was in an abusive relationship when I met Jack. He knew something wasn’t right when he saw me in the streets after our meetings. One day, he followed me home and saw everything that was happening. He admitted everything, including that he was a vampire and that he loved me. I felt the same and asked him to change me into a vampire. We ran away and have been together ever since.”

“At least you got your happy ending. I don’t think my mother will ever get that and that is what makes me even sadder,” I said.

“You never know about that Brianna,” Bethany said and looked towards the hallway.

Nathaniel slowly walked around the corner, looking guilty. I sat upright, knowing that Nathaniel was in the hallway, listening in better than he could from his bedroom.

“Were you listening in?” Bethany asked her son who was still not making eye contact with either of us.

“Answer the question Nathaniel,” I said when he didn’t speak.

“I was,” he admitted.

“You will never learn Nathaniel,” Bethany said and left the room, only leaving us in a pin dropping silence.

“I’m sorry Brianna. I was thinking that everything was still like it was back in my era, but it isn’t. Everything has changed a lot in the years and I telling you about my past forced me to slip back into the cold, harsh world that I was forced to live in.”

“Things aren’t easy for me Nathaniel and you are thinking everything was and that I was making things look worse than they were because they aren’t,” I spat and got up from the table and walked over to the back sliding door. I crossed my arms and stared straight out into the elements.

“I said I was sorry Brianna. Do you want me to get on my knees and beg forgiveness because I will do that,” Nathaniel said behind me.

“You don’t need to do something stupid like that.”

“Then why does it feel like I have to?” he asked.

I didn’t answer. I just stared out the door, looking at the lightning that was now able to be seen in the distance. I lifted my eyes up and saw Nathaniel’s reflection staring back at me. I thought vampires didn’t have a reflection? I slowly turned around, looking at Nathaniel in shock.

“I do have a reflection Brianna. I guess I just forgot to tell you, but there are a lot of things that you don’t know about my lifestyle,” he said and walked out of the room, leaving me alone.

The front door opened and voices came from the hallway. Dakota and Amylia walked into the room laughing with shopping bags. Amylia looked towards me and slowly made her way over. James, Chase and Jack did the same, but the look on Chase’s face told me that he didn’t want me here.

“Nathaniel told you about his past,” Dakota announced.

“Maybe she didn’t want us to know that Dakota,” Amylia said, glancing over her way.

“He was fretting over it yesterday, so it is about time he told her,” she said and pushed her way past Amylia and grabbed my hand. “Now, if you don’t mind, I am taking Brianna and we are going to have a nice heart to heart talk. Amylia, you are welcome to join,” she finished and led me over to her bedroom.

She shut the door and turned around to face me. I looked around her room and saw that it was set the same as Nathaniel’s, the only difference was she had a beauty space and a pale yellow comforter set. Dakota sat on her bed, and motioned for me to do the same.

“This is different,” I said after a while.

“Well, it is nice to have a change, and since none of us know you

very well, I thought it would be a perfect chance to do so," she said, her eyes becoming hard.

"Nathaniel knows stuff about me," I said.

"But we don't. There is a high chance that you and Nathaniel will be together for a very long time, and we just don't want him to get hurt. Mary and his family did enough of that during his human life," Dakota said, looking straight into my soul.

"I won't hurt him Dakota," I said, but that didn't break her glare.

"It is rare for a vampire to fall for a human, and we just don't understand why. I mean, you are nothing like us and it scares us even though it should be you that is frightened. You and I know that you are weak and that is something that we don't want for Nathaniel."

"Maybe it is because Brianna has something we don't produce. She has warmth that we can't give and a lot more that I don't wish to say because you, Bethany and I can't give that," Amylia said from the door.

"Don't you think Nathaniel would have gone for someone that won't die one day? I don't see Nathaniel changing Brianna into one of us unless something happens or Brianna is on her death bed," Dakota said, talking like I wasn't even in the room.

"Maybe we should tell her our past so it won't be a scary revealing your past to us?" Amylia suggested, walking over to the bed and sitting on it.

"Then you are starting," Dakota seethed and went over to her window.

"Please tell me it isn't like Nathaniel's?" I asked.

"Nathaniel was forced into marriage. I was born into slavery in the year of nineteen-thirty. My last name is Mallory and my mother was working for a rich family. Their last name was and still is Clementine. She found out she was pregnant and thought that they were going to fire her, but they didn't. The Clementine's made sure her work load was light and that she didn't overdo it. When I was born, Mrs. Clementine looked after me until I was old enough to take over from my mother," she said, but stopped talking and narrowed her eyes when Dakota made a strange sound from over in the corner.

"Go on," I said.

“Over time, I formed a friendship with their son, Vincent. He was the only one that could calm me down when I was angry, or comfort me when I was upset and I grew to love him. When I was eighteen, the mood changed in the house, and this man that gave me the creeps kept on hanging around, looking at me like I was a piece of meat. One day, I pulled Vincent aside and asked him what was going on. When he told me to sit down, I knew the news wasn’t good, and that it had something to do with that creepy man.

“My father was going to tell you this another day, but you really need to know,” he said, his dark eyes holding sorrow I couldn’t place.

“What is going on?” I asked.

“You have been brought by Mr. Doris,” he told me, his voice sombre.

“I gasped and felt betrayed. I didn’t even know his family had me up for sale, but when he explained that he made the head servant an offer who didn’t like me and wanted to set Vincent and her daughter up, it all made sense. His family fought blood and bone for me to stay, but Mr. Doris wouldn’t listen to reason. He wanted me only for himself. I used to wake up from nightmares, drenched in my own sweat from that man.

“Two days before I due to leave, Vincent pulled me aside and asked if he could do something. I agreed and he told me to close my eyes and grabbed my hand. I didn’t know what he planned on doing. Suddenly I felt pain burning up my arm, making me gasp and open my eyes. Around his mouth were my blood and a bite mark on my wrist.

“Through my pain I managed to ask him what he was. His answer shocked me. He said his family were vampires and that he was giving me a chance of freedom by changing me. Throughout my transformation, Vincent stayed by my side. I just escaped before I was due to be taken and two days later, a search party was gathered to find me. I was hiding in a laneway when James found me. My first thought was that he was going to hurt me.

“I won’t harm you,” he whispered as he approached me.

“I still wasn’t sure. I mean, I had never seen him before and all of a sudden, he was in front of me. I could tell he was vampire, but I just

didn't know how old he was. I heard Mr. Doris calling out for me and looking in where I was hiding. As he walked down the lane, I made a run for it. I thought I was alone, but James had decided to follow me. He now knew I was wanted by someone, but he didn't know the reason for it and I planned on keeping it that way."

"You mean that you lied to James for the first two years of your relationship so he wouldn't know the reason of why you were turned into a vampire Amylia," Dakota interrupted.

"Like you didn't do the same to Chase," Amylia said, sassiness lacing her voice. "You didn't tell him about what your family did until he found a story on them in the newspaper and demanded answers!"

Dakota walked over to where we were sitting and glared down at Amylia. This was a sore subject for Dakota, and Amylia had made something tick over.

"That isn't for you to give away to a human," Dakota said, her voice eerily calm.

"How about you stop being so bitter about everything and want everything your way when it isn't going to happen. Face the facts Dakota, Brianna is a part of this family now and I don't see that changing any time soon, and Chase, I know you are standing at the door listening in so you better want to enter so you can hear what I have to say," Amylia said, her eyes glued onto the door, her stare getting harder and colder by the second.

Chase walked into the room slowly, looking at Amylia with what looked like fear to be in his eyes from this vampire. She got up off the bed and pulled me up with her. Dakota crossed her arms and looked over to Chase.

"Are you going to speak or what?" he asked, looking at the two of them.

"There is something you need to realise, like James, Beth, Jack and I have. Brianna makes Nathaniel happy, right?" she asked, looking at them.

"Yeah," Dakota said quietly.

"And do you want to see him go back into that depression that was slowly breaking Bethany's heart?" she asked again.

They both shook their heads, and Amylia used that as her chance to continue on with her point that she was trying to make.

“Because if you don’t stop acting like a pair of spoiled brats, Brianna will leave, and Nathaniel will be worse than ever. He loves her, like the way Jack loves Bethany; like the way James loves me, and like the way Chase loves you Dakota. Do you both want to see that happening and knowing that you are the cause of his pain and thoughts of death because he has lost his one true love?”

“That wouldn’t happen,” Chase said. “She is just a human.”

Amylia stared at Chase and narrowed her eyes at him. Suddenly, she closed them, and both Dakota and Chase cried out from something she was doing. Her eyes opened and they stopped.

“Is that enough proof to see what you would do to him if that ever happened due to your jealousy?” Amylia asked.

“He wouldn’t be like that,” Dakota whispered. “He wasn’t even like that before she came into his life.”

“He would be. You saw what James was like when we had that break a few years back. He was like a walking zombie and Nathaniel would be no exception. Stop acting like a pair of spoiled brats and get it through your heads for once. Even though Brianna is human, she makes Nathaniel happy and Chase, you should know better,” Amylia said and started to walk out of the room, her grip on my hand not letting go.

“What do you mean I should know better?” Chase asked, making us stop walking.

Amylia turned around and looked at her future brother-in-law before speaking. “You are the closest to Nathaniel out of all of us and it has always been like that the whole time I have lived in this house. You should know by now that your dislike for Brianna will affect your relationship with him a lot. And if you don’t stop acting like a child, it will never be the same again. You think that over before you say another bad thing against my friend.”

“What do you mean your friend Amylia?” Dakota asked and walked over, anger and betrayal in her eyes.

“Yes my friend Dakota and right now, I would rather Brianna become my sister-in-law after I marry James than you and your bitchy

ways! You are just as bad as Augusta and that makes me angry to my core,” Amylia spat and walked out of the room, dragging me along with her.

When we got out into the hallway, Nathaniel was leaning against the wall, looking down at the ground. I pulled my hand out of Amylia’s hold and walked over to him, placing my hand on his shoulder, hoping to get some sort of response out of him. I didn’t like it when Nathaniel shut down.

“I heard everything that was just said,” he said, not taking his eyes off the ground.

“You should be happy that I care enough to defend Brianna from the harsh ones in our family,” Amylia said behind us.

“I am happy, but I can’t get over what Chase said about the depression getting worse if I lost Brianna because of them. I saw the vision you inflicted on them as well,” Nathaniel said, finally looking up from the ground and over my shoulder at Amylia but his eyes were extremely hard.

“It wasn’t pretty, but it would happen. I’m just glad that Brianna couldn’t see it. It wouldn’t have been a good sight to see your boyfriend in that state and on the verge of some sort of death that he was hoping that one of us could be able to perform to take him out of so much hate and misery.”

“Can you please stop talking like I am not in the room? I am really starting to get sick of that happening. I might not be immortal like all of you but I am a person who can hear every single word you are saying,” I said, making Nathaniel look at me.

“I need to get you home before the weather takes a turn for the worst and I don’t want you out in something bad. I think I have pushed my luck enough with Marie,” he said suddenly and raced into his bedroom.

He came back out with my bag and grabbed my hand, making me walk down the hallway. I barely got a chance to say goodbye to everyone since he was in such a hurry to leave. On the walk home, he wasn’t even talking. When I arrived back home, he briefly kissed me on the lips and left without a goodbye. What Chase said had gotten to Nathaniel,

and I didn't know how long it was going to be before the old Nathaniel came back.

I was only hoping that Nathaniel wasn't going to be like this all the time. I wouldn't want Chase ruining his happiness.

11. Pain

“What do you mean this isn’t going to work out?” I asked, two weeks later after the tension Chase forced into the Pryor house hold with his stubborn ways.

Nathaniel started walking around his dining room and I placed my hands on the table. I couldn’t believe that he was saying something like this.

“I mean, Chase is going to give us even more stress if we stay together.”

“So you are going to let him dictate to our relationship? That is so pathetic Nathaniel. I’ll tell you what, how about I go and date Jason because of his interference? Would that make him happy?” I asked, my voice getting louder with each word.

“That would make me kill him and Jason with my bare hands in a second,” Nathaniel hissed, making me take a step back from the tone he was using.

“Then don’t let him come between us Nathaniel! You are letting him dictate to everything!” I shouted, not giving up on this argument.

“It’s hard Brianna! Chase and I have always been close and now, we aren’t because of our relationship and I don’t know what I can do about that!” Nathaniel yelled.

“Then you shouldn’t have fallen for a human,” I spat and walked out of the room.

He called my name, but I ignored him. I was too angry. I slammed the back door, hearing the glass shake. Walking down the steps and crossing my arms, I was hoping that Nathaniel didn’t decide to follow me. I wasn’t in the mood to speak to him and if I saw Chase, he wasn’t going to escape my anger either. Something crashing in the garage

caught my attention, and I made my way over there.

Chase was underneath his car. I kicked his foot, getting his attention. He crawled out from under and looked at me with questions in his eyes and I was making sure that he knew that I wasn't going to be playing nice.

"I hope you are happy now Chase. You got your way," I seethed, grabbing the tool he had in his hand and throwing it on his car with a brutal force.

"What over?" he asked, sounding confused.

"The fact that you have now driven a divide between my relationships with your brother; you just can't handle seeing him happy, can you?" I asked.

"That isn't the reason!"

"Then what the hell is it Chase? Is it the fact that I am human and weaker than you? Are you worried that I will leave Nathaniel for someone else? Or are you that terrified I will reveal your secret to everyone else?"

"Brianna, you don't belong in our world. Nathaniel should be with a vampire, not a weak human."

"Then I hope you enjoy the fact that Nathaniel will never forgive you if I walk out of his life due to an arrogant vampire that can't handle the fact his brother is happy with someone different and not dating in the faith," I said calmly and walked out of the room.

"Brianna, wait!" Chase called out to me, catching up in a heartbeat and forcing me to stop walking by standing in front of me. "You are right. Nathaniel is happy and I just can't understand why he would fall for a human when we have spent time trying to set him up with vampires."

I sighed and shut my eyes, processing what he was saying. I wasn't good enough for his brother. I opened them and stared blankly at Chase.

"Chase, I have a heart and warmth that attracted Nathaniel to begin with and what I am about to tell you is something no one knows. I was hoping that you would become like a brother towards me, like James has, but you haven't because you can't accept me for one reason.

I have a heart beat and blood running through my veins,” I muttered.

“There isn’t anything I could give you to have what you have. I would love to be human again, but there is no way that will happen.”

“Don’t you think that if you accept me, you might get all of that? I mean, do you feel the heat coming off Nathaniel when he is around me?”

“Why do you have the urge to keep Nathaniel? Over the past two weeks, you have changed, and it isn’t for the good, either,” Chase pointed out.

“I just feel threatened by someone,” I whispered and looked down at the ground.

“By that someone, you mean Augusta right?”

I looked up shocked. I thought that I had hid that well, but it seemed I was wrong. My fear was that...witch was going to steal Nathaniel and if things with my father get any bitterer than I thought they could, she would win. Taking a deep breath, I nodded.

“What is going on?”

“I am aware that Nathaniel told you about my father, but he didn’t tell you that he is back in town. He is only here because Augusta tracked him down and told him I was here to hurt me in the worst possible way. What she doesn’t realise is I’m not the only one she has hurt by doing that.”

“You mean your mother?”

“We never wanted to see him again, and now he is back in my life. It is the only way I can be destroyed and Augusta will use that to her advantage to get Nathaniel.”

“Nathaniel would have to be the biggest idiot if he went to Augusta because of the inflicted pain from your father. He isn’t like that, and I know that I haven’t been supportive of the relationship, but I can tell that Nathaniel is crazy about you Brianna. He didn’t eat or hunt for the first week when you arrived in town, and we didn’t know why until we met you. The way he looked at you made us see that he was crazy about you.”

“Then why did he treat me like the way he did? I mean, we were always fighting and I still don’t understand why we are together now.

We are totally different. I'm human, and he isn't and that is the main thing that you didn't like our relationship."

"Brianna, there is another thing I don't like about your relationship with Nathaniel and I don't like saying this, but I am jealous because of it."

"What do you have to be jealous of? You have everything Chase. You have Dakota, beauty, wealth and everything that I dream of having you can afford."

"There is one thing that you can give Nathaniel that I can't give Dakota."

"And what is that?"

"A baby," Chase announced.

I looked at him in shock. Did Chase really want a child of his own or was he just saying that to make me feel bad?

"You want a baby?" I asked.

"I don't really want one, but every time Dakota and I pass someone with one in the street, she gazes at them and won't take her eyes off them until I have to wave a hand in her face or they vanish. I crave to give Dakota a child, even though I am not a fan of them," he said, and slid down the wall.

"What makes you think that Nathaniel even wants a baby? I mean, I'm not even sure about that," I said and sat next to him.

"He has always told us about his desire of becoming a father to his prince or princess that he can spoil and you might be the girl that can make it happen," he said, looking over to me.

"Are you serious? I'll break in half from being so big. I am quite thin and petite."

"Then we need to fatten you up then," he said and patted my stomach.

This was the most Chase and I had gotten along. He usually left the room or didn't say anything while I was around. Nathaniel walked around the corner and slowed down his walking when he saw us together, getting along for once.

"What is going on?" he asked.

"Nothing is going on, dear brother," Chase said, getting up from the

floor and walking over towards his way before speaking and saying something that I wasn't expecting. "She is a keeper. Don't stuff it up."

For once, Nathaniel was speechless. Chase patted him on the shoulder and left the room. Nathaniel came over to where I was sitting and stood in front of me. I looked up at him and waited for him to start speaking.

"Are we okay?" he asked.

"I don't know. Are we?" I asked, not knowing what to say.

"Brianna, I regret saying what I did before," he said, coming down to the height I was.

"Then why did you? Did you enjoy the pain or something that you like putting me through when you know that I have been through enough?" I asked, standing up.

"That isn't it! I just thought it would be easier to end everything because of Chase. I didn't know that he had finally accepted you into the family. How did you get him to do so?"

"We just had a chat over a few things, and must have bonded over them."

"Do you still love me?"

"Why wouldn't I? Every couple have their faults, but it seems that we have a lot more than normal, but we always work through them and besides, since when are we a normal couple?"

"Let's go for a walk," Nathaniel said, grabbing my hand and leading me outside.

Half way down the street, I wanted to kill him for suggesting a walk. Augusta came over to us with a glint in her eye that told me she was up to something and it wasn't going to be pretty.

"Nathaniel, I didn't think I would be seeing you today and especially with Brianna," she said, looking me up and down.

"And why is that?" he asked, biting the inside of his cheek.

"Well, with her father back in town, I thought that you wouldn't want to be around the circus in her life caused by it. I mean, I just thought that you would be after some fun and not having someone that would drag you down," she said and brushed her hand against his chest.

"I'm not leaving Brianna due to the fact her life is slowly turning up-

side down when mine has been like that for a very long time.”

“We’ll see about that. Did you know that she once got a birthday card from her father and waited up all night for him to come to her birthday, but he didn’t arrive? Apparently, she spent most of the day fighting back tears over it,” Augusta said, looking over at me smugly.

“Who told you that?” I asked, trying to hold back my anger and from hitting her clean across the face.

“Your cousin can be really truthful when forced and bribed,” she said, making me close my eyes.

“Why didn’t I know about this?” Nathaniel asked, hurt lacing his voice.

“I was going to tell you about this the other day, but if you remember, we were fighting from something you said.”

“Oh, is there trouble in paradise?”

Nathaniel and I looked at Augusta. She was doing this to drive a wedge between us and wasn’t going to stop until we were broken up. I took a deep breath and walked past Augusta, glaring at her at the same time. I felt angry and depressed at what she was trying to do. If I lost Nathaniel to her, I didn’t know what I was going to do to get over the pain that would be inflicted from her.

“Baby, where are you going?” Nathaniel asked, stopping me from walking.

“Away from here before I do something that I will regret,” I said, not looking behind me.

“Like what? Crying?” Augusta asked.

I clenched my fists and took some deep breaths. Nathaniel shook his head and walked over to me, leaving Augusta standing there with her mouth wide open in shock over the fact Nathaniel had walked away from her when she revealed something about my father to Nathaniel that I hadn’t told him.

“Where are you going?” she asked, her voice whining like a child that couldn’t get what they wanted.

“Away from you before I do something that I will regret for the rest of my life. You can try your hardest to drive me and Brianna apart, but it will never work. Brianna has my heart and soul and she is the only one

that will have that. I love Brianna so much, and I will never, ever love you. You are someone I pity Augusta. All you care about is having power and being rich by stealing some guy that has more money than anyone could ever dream of, like me.”

“What are you saying Nathaniel?”

“I’m saying that if you keep on acting like the way you are, you will end up alone because you are spoilt brat who gets everything that they want. You are the type that makes me sick to my stomach. Brianna isn’t like that, and that is what made me fall for her in the first place,” Nathaniel said, wrapping his arm around me tightly.

“You mean that you would rather someone that is poor to someone that is like me?”

“At least Brianna covers up. I would never let her wear what you are currently wearing right now,” Nathaniel said, looking her up and down before grabbing my hand and dragging me away from her.

“You are making a huge mistake Nathaniel! When everything comes out into the open, you are going to wish you left in the first place!” Augusta yelled behind us, but Nathaniel didn’t say or do anything.

“Are you alright?” I asked when we were around the corner and out of Augusta’s sight.

“For once, I would just like her to stop trying to break our relationship. I have never shown any interest in her to begin with but she couldn’t understand that!” Nathaniel seethed.

“Then why do you continue talking to her? Don’t you think that maybe she might think that since you are paying her attention that she might believe she has a chance with you?” I asked.

“Amylia has pressed that idea before, and we tried stopping, but it made things worse. In the end, she became all stalker like on all of us, and only because of us being vampires and not wanting her to know, we started speaking to her again,” Nathaniel explained.

“So basically, you feared that she would find out that you aren’t human and that you are immortal for the rest of your life?” I asked, crossing my arms.

Nathaniel didn’t say anything in response. He just stared blankly up ahead towards the sky. Amylia came around the corner with bags in

each arm.

“Brianna, there you are. I have been looking all over the place for you,” she exclaimed and handed me a bag.

“What is going on?” I asked, hoping that my bones wouldn’t shatter from the weight she had just inflicted on me.

“I just thought we could go over some wedding plans that Dakota didn’t want to have anything to do with. I could use someone that has a completely different style that would help the wedding in a big way,” she said, looking towards Nathaniel with a strange look in her eye.

“What even makes you think that Brianna wants to help you plan this wedding?” Nathaniel asked, looking at his future sister with what appeared to be anger in his eyes.

“Nate, disappear and leave us to talk, okay?” Amylia said, grabbing my hand and dragging me away.

“Do you really need help?” I asked after a while and when I was sure we were out of Nathaniel’s hearing range.

“Brianna, I wouldn’t be asking if I didn’t need your help. Anyway, you are basically my sister now, so you should be included in making the right choices with everything in life,” she said, looking over at me.

“If only doing those things were easy, especially in my life,” I muttered, mostly to myself.

“What do you mean by that?” Amylia asked, making me mentally kick myself.

“It’s nothing important. Now, what do you want me to help with?” I asked, making Amylia slip into her wedding world.

“I have decided that I want you as a bridesmaid with Dakota, so I want you to have your say in this also. James wants me to have a fluoro wedding cake, but I don’t want that, so our first task is to drive to Melbourne and try different wedding cakes.”

“Does James have any say in the wedding?”

“He is meeting us in Melbourne to help out,” she said, her eyes still burning into my soul. “There is something wrong, isn’t there?”

“How do you know?” I asked.

“The sparkle in your eyes has gone. They just look dull and lifeless. You can tell me,” she whispered, placing her hand on my arm, making

the skin on that arm break out in goose bumps.

“I’m scared that Nathaniel is going to realise how much a basket case my life is and will leave me,” I admitted.

Amylia sighed and closed her eyes. I knew that she would have never thought in a million years that Nathaniel would fall for a human, not a vampire, so all of this was new for her as it was for me. She reopened her eyes and looked down at the ground.

“He would be a huge idiot if he did something like that and Bethany would be the first to inflict some sort of pain onto him, followed closely by me. You are the best thing that has ever happened to this family, and there is no way in hell Nathaniel or anyone is going to ruin that.”

“Tell that to Augusta,” I whispered.

“She is easily dealt with if it comes to that,” she said, a glint in her eyes.

Violence had to be in that plan somewhere. Her voice was too calm for nothing that didn’t involve bloodshed, violence or pure and utter torture. Shaking my head, I forced that vision out of my mind. I didn’t want to see the horror anymore.

“What happens if that doesn’t work?”

“Brianna, there is something that you don’t know about vampires that you don’t ever want to see. I’ll just leave it as that. I don’t want to give you nightmares for a long time and I don’t think Nathaniel would be happy with me if you found out from me and not from him,” she said, and slowly started to walk away.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“Back home. We aren’t going to more wedding plans for a week. I just want to have you on board before I started all the major things,” she announced and left me standing there in shock and with a rubbish bag full of something.

I heard a throat clear behind me. I turned around and saw Nathaniel standing there. “Did you listen in to what we were talking about?” I asked.

“No Brianna. I was under strict instruction from Amylia in her thoughts not to listen in or my car would cop it. I didn’t want to take that risk,” he said and took the bag off me.

“She wouldn’t have caused that much damage, would she?”

“You haven’t met Hurricane Amylia,” Nathaniel said and took my hand.

“She sounds interesting.”

“Come on,” he said and started walking. “It’s going to get dark soon and I don’t want you to get eaten alive by mosquitoes when your blood is mine.”

I looked at Nathaniel and shook my head, not believing that he added in something about my blood. He led me back inside his place and walked past the lounge room, where Dakota was. She looked up from the magazine she was reading, and glared at me before looking down at Nathaniel’s hand wrapped in mine.

“Why couldn’t you have gone out with a vampire?” Dakota asked.

“Why can’t you just be happy for me? You knew I was slowly slipping into something bad, and you still can’t get over the fact I am happy. What did you want to see Dakota? Do you want to see me committing suicide?” Nathaniel asked, his voice holding nothing but rage.

“No I don’t want to see that. I just can’t understand what made you fall for someone so plain and has a heartbeat.”

Nathaniel dropped the bag onto the floor and clenched his fists. I grabbed the bag and opened it, seeing what was in there.

“Oh my god,” I whispered and pulled out a pale strapless dress with crystals on the front.

Dakota looked down and hissed in fury before grabbing the dress out of my hands and looking at it.

“Where did you get that from?” she snarled at me.

“I gave it to her because I wanted her to have it. That bag and the other one is full of clothes that I planned on giving Dakota, but I decided to give them to you Brianna,” Amylia said, looking over at me. “You deserve them.”

“You promised me that I would be getting these things and now you have changed your mind? What the hell happened?” Dakota asked through clenched teeth.

“It’s your own fault Dakota. If you didn’t start acting like you are, we wouldn’t be having this fight right now. If you are going to keep on

treating Brianna the way you are, then you can forget about getting anything off me ever again. I am actually dreading to have you as a sister in law if Chase ever asks you to marry him,” Amylia said, walking out of the room.

Once she was out of the room, Dakota came right up to me and grabbed my arm, stopping me from getting away.

“Let go of her!” Nathaniel demanded as Chase walked into the room.

“This is your entire fault Brianna. If you never arrived into this town and made Nathaniel fall in love with you, none of this would be happening right now. Amylia and I would still be close and so would Nate and Chase,” she hissed.

“Actually, you are wrong about that,” Chase said, making Dakota look over at him. “Nathaniel and I are close again for the one reason. I have accepted Brianna into the family as she makes him happy like he has never been before. It is only you that can’t seem to move past the fact he is happy.”

“So you like the human now?”

“Let go of her Dakota,” Nathaniel said one more time, but she didn’t. She just held onto my arm tighter.

“Listen to Nathaniel. I don’t think he really wants to use violence to get you to let go of his girlfriend.”

“She has ruined everything! I want Brianna out of this family forever and if you won’t help me Chase, then I have no idea where we stand anymore,” Dakota threatened.

“If I have to pick between my brother’s happiness and you, I will be going with my brother. I don’t know why I didn’t see this sooner Dakota. You aren’t happy unless everything goes your way. You are just as shallow as Augusta is and that is sickening,” Chase said.

Dakota gasped at what Chase said, and let go of my arm. I grabbed where she had the pressure and tried to flex my arm without hurting it anymore. Nathaniel gently took it and tried to find the problem, but couldn’t seem to do so.

“You mean that you are going to break up with me over this?” Dakota screeched.

“Maybe if you weren’t acting like the way you are, none of this

would be happening,” Amylia said, walking back into the room with four bags in her hands. “Since it is obvious that your relationship with Chase is ending, I don’t want you involved in my wedding anymore. You are no longer my maid of honour.”

“Chase, fix this now!”

“You have blown it. I want you out of this house and out of my life. We are finished forever, Dakota. I don’t know why I didn’t see this earlier. It could have saved me from all of this stress and anger,” Chase said and left the room.

It was quiet for a split second before Dakota let out a blood curdling scream and lunged for me, but Jack pulled her back.

“What is going on?” Bethany asked, walking into the room and looking at all of us.

“She has ruined everything that we have built!” Dakota screamed, pointing her finger at me.

“Dakota just leave and never return,” Amylia said.

“What has happened? Why is Dakota leaving?” James asked, walking into where we all were.

“We will explain later,” Nathaniel said, crossing his arms.

“Fine, I will go,” Dakota said and walked out of the room with the bags and slammed the door.

It was far too quiet after she left. You would be able to hear a pin drop. A massive crash from the bedroom caught our attention. James ran down the hallway at vampire speed.

“Did that just happen?” I asked, breaking the silence.

“It was coming. Way before you entered our lives, their relationship was falling apart, but they didn’t really know it. They weren’t really mates, but Chase didn’t realise until now. Dakota was just stringing him along, and realised once you entered, everything would come unstuck and tried to stop it from happening,” Amylia said, glancing over at me.

“Will Chase be alright though?” Bethany asked.

“I honestly don’t know the answer to that right now,” Amylia said, walking down the hallway.

Bethany and Jack left the room, leaving Nathaniel and I alone. The pain was slowly getting worse, but I didn’t want to say anything. I didn’t

know if Nathaniel was angry at me or not over what had just happened.

“How is your wrist?” he asked walking over to me and lightly touching it.

“You aren’t mad at me?” I asked, shocked.

“Why would I be mad at you for?” he asked, confused.

“I just helped break up Chase and Dakota,” I cried and sat on the couch.

“Honey it was bound to happen. The whole time they had been together, Dakota had played Chase along, but he couldn’t see it while we all did. She didn’t really love him. She just pretended to so she would be able to keep him under her spell. You helped him realise what she was doing all because you made me so happy. Dakota would never be able to give him that kind of joy that you give me,” Nathaniel sitting next to me.

“Chase told me just before he wanted to give Dakota a child and now this has happened. I feel so responsible for it all,” I said, my tone flat and sighing depressively.

“This isn’t your fault Brianna,” Chase said, walking into the room and standing in front of me. “I want to thank you for saving me from another year of a loveless relationship. I don’t know why I didn’t see it earlier.”

“The fact she didn’t want me to be happy with Brianna was the first clue,” Nathaniel grumbled next to me.

I looked over at him and tried my hardest not to glare at his attitude towards his brother. I lightly hit Nathaniel on the arm, making him jump. “Stop acting like a child, Nathaniel,” I hissed.

“I am not acting like a child,” Nathaniel said, looking over at me.

“Anyway, will Dakota plan some sort of revenge since you have now ended the relationship?” I asked.

“Now that she knows she has been caught out, she might think of something, but now since she has been banished from the coven, she might not. If Dakota tried to do something that would harm this family, Bethany would put a stop to it and her in a second. She won’t stand for her family to be harmed,” Chase said.

I opened my mouth to say something, but was interrupted by Betha-

ny thundering into the room with Jack and Amylia behind her. Bethany walked over to the photos hanging up on the entire wall and grabbed the ones of Dakota, throwing them to the ground. I jumped and grabbed Nathaniel's arm, holding it tight as my human strength would let me.

"Why are you doing that for?" Nathaniel asked.

"She is no longer welcome into this family and if she ever tries to come back, I will make sure she will be never found again and I swear that I would mangle her into a million pieces," Bethany said, still smashing photos.

I looked over at Amylia in shock. I had never seen Bethany like this before and it was scary. Jack placed a hand on her shoulder, but she didn't stop. It was like she had become possessed with rage and nothing would stop her.

"Beth, please calm down," Jack pleaded.

"She hurt my son, Jack," Bethany said. "And if it wasn't for Brianna making me see the truth about her, this family would have fallen into pieces because she would have forced Nathaniel and Brianna away from each other."

"Take a few deep breaths and make yourself a hot drink. You need to calm down as you are starting to scare Brianna," Jack said, looking over at me.

"I'm not scared," I said quickly. "I understand that Bethany is mad and needs to vent her anger and taking it on photos is the better way than mum did back in Melbourne."

Nathaniel looked over at me but didn't say anything. I knew that he would force it out of me later tonight or even ask mum when he makes sure I get home safe, even though I just live around the corner.

Later that day as Nathaniel and I were walking back to my place, he asked the question I was waiting for. "So how did Marie vent her anger back in Melbourne when she was angry when your father left?"

"It happened no longer after dad left us, and from what I remember, she grabbed a baseball bat and smashed everything that he left behind into a thousand pieces and then burned them in the fire that night. Grandfather almost had heart failure when he saw what she did," I said.

“So it was safe to say that she was angry?” he asked.

“I wouldn’t say angry. I would say furiously bitter that she was tempted to hunt him down and commit a murder with her bare hands.”

Nathaniel stopped walking when I said that. There were times that you didn’t want to cross my mother, and that day was one of them.

“I can’t imagine her like that though.”

“It is safe to say that she was and still angry at him, and I can’t blame her for being so. I don’t even know the man well enough to really call him my father and I am just as angry as mum is.”

“That is understandable. What would things be like if he didn’t walk out?” Nathaniel asked.

“I honestly have no idea. I would like to know or to dream it, but I can’t and don’t,” I admitted.

He didn’t say anymore. Walking up my driveway, I looked up at the house and sighed. Thinking back to when we first moved here, I had nothing but bad thoughts for this place, but now I was slowly starting to fall in love with it. It was my home. The front door opened and mum walked outside to greet us.

“Nathaniel, do you think you could give me a hand?” mum asked.

“Of course I can. What seems to be the problem?” he asked, using his vampiric charm.

“The washing machine keeps on stopping and I have a few loads that I need to do today,” mum said.

Nathaniel nodded and walked inside, leaving mum and me outside in the cold wind when it was meant to be summer.

“How is everything going?” she asked.

“Don’t ask,” I muttered and walked inside.

Nathaniel was already hard at work trying to find the problem for my mother. I walked into the kitchen and grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl and a knife. I wasn’t paying much attention while I was cutting and the blade caught my finger, droplets of blood falling onto the bench.

“Damn it,” I muttered and turned the tap on, placing my finger under the water.

“Brianna, what are you...doing?” Nathaniel asked, his eyes zoning onto the blood red water I currently had my finger under.

“Don’t come any closer. I just cut myself and I am still bleeding.”

“Are you right though?” he asked.

“I’ll be fine. Just get yourself under control as I don’t want you to still look the way you are when mum comes back in. She might know you are a vampire, but she doesn’t need to see her possible future son-in-law blood thirsty from a small cut on his girlfriend’s finger,” I said.

“I’ll be fine. Now let me help you,” Nathaniel said, coming over to where I was standing.

“You mean that you don’t want to drain me?” I asked, not believing what I was hearing.

“Of course I do Brianna, but I need to learn to have blood lust control over you. I had excellent control before we got close and now look at me. I am like a newborn all over again, trying to learn how to get control.”

Mum walked into the room and looked at us concerned. She then looked down at my finger under the water.

“What happened?” she asked.

“I cut myself by mistake,” I muttered.

“Take your finger out from under the water and put something on it to help stop the bleeding,” mum said, walking into the laundry.

“Short and sweet,” Nathaniel muttered and followed her.

I turned the tap off and grabbed a Band Aid, placing it over the cut. As I was about to see what they were up to, there was a knock on the door. I made my way to the door and opened it, seeing Jason standing there.

“What do you want?” I asked, getting straight to the point.

“Why hello to you too Brianna; I was just wondering what you are doing this weekend?” he asked

“Sharpening my dagger,” I replied.

“So then you wouldn’t be interested in spending some time with me on Saturday alone?” he suggested, raising his eyebrows at me, like he was expecting me to say yes. I had other news for him.

“Look Jason, you know that I am in a relationship and even if I wasn’t my answer still would be no,” I said, trying my hardest not to snap at him.

“What happened to your wrist?” Jason asked, looking down at it. “It’s all bruised.”

“It got hurt as you can see,” I said and moved it behind me so he couldn’t see it any longer than he had to

“You mean Nathaniel grabbed it and hurt it during one of his temper fits that I have seen him have before,” he said.

“He didn’t do nor does anything to hurt me like you wish he would so I would leave him.”

“What does Nathaniel have that I don’t?” he asked, fire burning in the pits of his eyes.

It wasn’t my fault that I wasn’t attracted to Jason, and I am glad that I did end up falling for Nathaniel. He would be the only one that would be able to stop me from attacking Jason if he ended up doing something to harm my relationship.

“He doesn’t stalk me like you do and can give me breathing space when I ask for it,” I said and slammed the door in his face.

I closed my eyes and sighed, frustrated at Jason. Why couldn’t he just get the hint for once in his life? I would never, ever leave Nathaniel for him; no matter how hard he tried.

“What did he want?” Nathaniel asked, making me jump in fright.

I turned around and placed a hand over my heart, feeling it race against my ribcage. I wasn’t expecting him to appear out of thin air, but it was to be expected since he was a vampire.

“You mean that you couldn’t hear what he wanted?” I asked.

“Of course I could, but I just wanted to ask like a human would for once so I could see what it would be like,” he replied, looking down to the floor.

That, of course, was something Nathaniel would do. I knew his desire to be human, and I becoming his girlfriend wouldn’t be helping his life in any single way that he would want it to. It would make the yearning even stronger. I grabbed his hand and rubbed soothing circles on his palm. He might never be human again, but that couldn’t mean I could bring some light into his dark and dull life.

“Natey,” I whispered, making him look up. “I love the fact that you are different and that is something that I never want to change.”

“But wouldn’t you love to date a human instead of something that wants your blood?” he asked.

“I have fallen for you, not a human. What is that telling you Natey?”

“That you are insane and need to get your head checked before it becomes worse,” he said, making me laugh. “What is this Natey business?”

“Don’t you like it?” I asked, embarrassment washing over me over my stupid nickname I thought of for him.

“I didn’t say that Brianna,” he murmured and placed a cold hand on my cheek.

“All I want is a nickname that I can call you without anyone else stealing it or thinking of it first as that is what usually happens,” I admitted.

“I love it like I love you Brianna,” he whispered and kissed my forehead.

The way Nathaniel treated me was like a princess when we weren’t disagreeing over something or someone and that was enough to take my mind off the pain Augusta was trying put me through and the fact my father was in town, but life wasn’t meant to be easy and something was telling me that this was only just the beginning.

12. Injury

A week later, I was sitting bored in music. Nathaniel hadn't showed up today, and that wasn't like him.

The only one that was at school was James who was currently trying to keep me entertained but it wasn't working. I asked him about Nathaniel, but he wouldn't give anything away. They were up to something and I did not like it at all. I thought I was a part of their family? Right now, it felt like I wasn't.

"Believe me Brianna, I want to tell you where Nathaniel is, but he forced me not tell you as he was worried that you would be angry with him," James said.

"Nathaniel should know by now that I get even angrier when things are being kept from me, especially when it involves someone I love," I said and looked over at James.

"Then I guess he didn't take that into account. What is going to happen when you see Nathaniel next?"

"It's a good thing he is a vampire so I won't kill him with my bare

hands," I muttered so only James could hear me and no one else. We didn't need strangers knowing that they weren't human.

James glanced at me but didn't say anything. On the outside I seemed calm but on the inside, I was fuming at Nathaniel. He usually told me if he was going somewhere, and when I made my way to visit him at his place, I was informed by Bethany that he had gone away, and didn't want me knowing. What kind of boyfriend is that?

At vampire speed, James got his phone out of his pocket and glanced at it before looking at me. He leaned in close and whispered into my ear. "That was Amylia who just informed me that Nathaniel is home."

"Guess where we are going after school," I said.

"Don't be too harsh on Nathaniel."

"He shouldn't leave without telling me. I don't like the fact I went to see him and was informed that he wasn't in Forrest and didn't want me knowing where he was," I spat.

The rest of the day went fast. James led me over to his HSV Ute and threw our school bags in the back before placing the cover back on the tray. I crossed my arms and looked around the school ground, spotting Hudson sitting under a tree on her own.

"I'll be back," I said to James and made my way over to her.

When I got closer, I saw she was crying and that concerned me. I sat down, making her look up at me with red rimmed eyes.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Brandon and I had a fight," she said, sniffing. "But I never usually cry like this."

"Where is he?"

"Coming behind you," Hudson said, making me turn around.

"I'll let you talk. I have to have a nice word to Nathaniel."

"Is he back from whatever it was? Brandon said but I can't remember."

"You knew about this?" I asked, feeling horrified.

"Nate said something about it before you arrived in town."

Nodding to myself, I walked back to where James was waiting. His arms were crossed as he leaned against his car.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

“Yeah I need to have a nice word to Nathaniel,” I said and got into the passengers set.

The drive back was quiet since I had nothing to say. When James pulled into the driveway, Nathaniel was standing outside, waiting. I got out of the car and crossed my arms, looking at him. James gave me my school bag and walked inside, leaving us alone.

“I see that you are back,” I said, my eyes narrowing.

“Brianna I know that you would be mad at me for leaving without telling you, but I did get you something,” he said, pulling out a bag from behind his back.

“You think that giving me a present from some expensive shop is going to make me forgive you for leaving without telling me? Your whole family wouldn’t tell me where you were because you told them not to tell me. I am your girlfriend Nathaniel and I think I have a right to know!” I shouted.

“It was nothing important that you needed to know about, so that’s why I didn’t want you knowing about it,” Nathaniel said, walking over to me.

Something was telling me that he was lying about it. For some reason, he didn’t want me knowing what he was really up to. Why could Hudson and Brandon know about it, but I couldn’t? Shaking my head, I turned around and started to walk away.

“Where are you going?” Nathaniel asked, following me.

“Away from here and from you before I end up saying something that I’m going to regret later on in life,” I replied, not stopping.

“Don’t be like this,” Nathaniel pleaded.

“What do you expect me to be like? You had vanished for almost week and because of that, you had me worried sick. No one was telling me anything and it wasn’t until I saw Augusta at school, I knew that you didn’t run away with her so forgive me if I am not all over you since you are back again.” With that, I walked away leaving him standing there.

I just kept on walking and didn’t stop until I was deep in the Ot-way’s. I looked around and saw a fallen tree. As usual it was covered in green moss, but I didn’t care. Walking over to it, I sat on it and hoped to myself that Nathaniel wouldn’t decide to follow me. That didn’t come

true. Five minutes later, Nathaniel appeared from behind all the trees and approached me.

“It’s like you keep on forgetting that I can track your scent and find you,” he said, standing in front of me.

“What if I don’t want to be found?” I asked.

“Then you would have gone to a place that would have been difficult for me to track your scent.”

“What do you want Nathaniel?” I asked.

He didn’t say anything. I wasn’t in the mood for his games. I was too angry and upset. Nathaniel soon realised that.

“I know that you are angry about me going and not telling you, but there was a reason for me not telling you,” Nathaniel said and sat on the damp ground next to me.

“And what’s that?” I asked, looking over at him.

“You would be even more upset if you knew the truth than me lying to you. I don’t want to put you through pain when you are going through hell right now.”

“Nate, you sound like you have made a sin or something. What is going on?”

He looked blankly at me and that scared me. Nathaniel had done something that he didn’t want me knowing all because it would hurt me, but everyone else could know what was going on? That wasn’t fair.

“I would love to tell you, but I don’t know what would happen,” he said.

“Can you at least tell me where you had gone?”

“I went to Melbourne,” he muttered. “Do you want your gift I brought you?”

“All depends on what it is Nathaniel.”

“It is fairly expensive, but I couldn’t help myself,” he said and handed me the bag.

“You know about my dislike for over the top expensive things,” I said and pulled out a wrapped box which looked like it was from Tiffany.

“It made me think of you when I saw it and I thought that you would like it.”

Grumbling to myself, I pulled at the ribbon and lifted the lid on the

box. My breath got caught in my throat. I pulled out a silver necklace with a red ruby sitting in the middle of it.

“It is like the ring,” I whispered.

“It reminded me of your hair so I knew that you had to have it and I also knew that it would match the ring that I got for you as well,” Nathaniel said and kissed my pulse point on my neck.

“It is really beautiful but I can’t take this,” I said and looked in his eyes. “It’s too expensive.”

“Brianna, I enjoy buying you these sorts of things because I love you. It doesn’t matter to me that you can’t really afford much because I crave to see the look of happiness on your face.”

I knew I wasn’t going to win this battle, so it seemed that I had to grin and bear it. I closed the lid and placed it back in the bag.

“Thank you,” I said. “But you do know I haven’t forgiven you. You had me worried sick to my core from your vanishing act.”

Nathaniel sighed and looked down at the damp ground. This was killing him and I could see that with my own eyes, but hurting me by keeping whatever he had gone there for was going to destroy him after the feel of him not being able to fully trust me made its way to the surface.

“Are you that worried that I am going to spread whatever it is around the town or something?” I pressed.

“That is not it Brianna.”

“Then what is it?” I asked feeling defeated.

“Can you not worry about it?” Nathaniel suddenly exploded, getting up off the ground.

“Well forgive me for loving you and caring about your safety. Next time, I won’t even bother to care,” I retorted.

Then I was alone. Nathaniel had vanished into thin air. Looking around me, I pushed myself off the tree trunk and walked around, calling for Nathaniel but was only greeted by a chilly silence that wanted to make my bones shiver. Time had gotten out of my control as it started to get darker and was struggling to find my way back. I had two choices and both were a risk for this time of night. I looked up at the sky and saw the moon had started to get higher in the sky.

I decided to risk it and make the walk back home in the pitch black and risk someone stealing me.

I started to walk in the dead forest, not knowing which way I was going or what I was going to walk into. Feeling my way around, I wasn't paying any attention to where I was walking and tripped over something. I fell and started to roll down a hill, screaming as my body started hitting twigs and sharp edged rocks before I stopped from my right leg hitting a tree extremely hard. Clenching my teeth from the pain, I placed a hand on the side and felt something seeping through onto my jeans. Only one word came to mind; blood. And it was mine.

Forcing myself off the ground, I tried walking, but once I put an ounce of pressure on my leg, I screamed in total agony. I fell back onto the ground, bleeding and sobbing in pain and from being alone and frightened.

Two hours had passed and I was still alone. I didn't know if someone was going to find me or if I was stuck here. A cold wind blew; going right through me and making me shake to the bone. Not long after, I rested my head against the tree with my teeth chattering. I wanted to close my eyes, but I didn't know if I would awake again. I was either going to die from blood loss or severe hypothermia.

My leg was still bleeding and I had no idea how to stop it from continuing. In my half alert state, it sounded like there were voices somewhere in the forest, but I couldn't be too sure. Closing my eyes, I took a few deep breaths and tried to think of happy thoughts, but all the bad things in my life were the only things present and that even included Nathaniel.

I moved my leg just not even an inch, causing my eyes to open and both my hands to grab at it to stop the pain that was starting to slowly move around my body. The voices were still around, but still muffled. I knew what I had to do to be found alive.

"Help me!" I screamed with as much voice I had left in my body but that even felt like it was taking the last of my energy that I really needed.

It was quiet again. I must have been thinking they were around when they weren't. I kept on screaming and crying for help. I just wanted to

be found. Just as I was about to give up and wait for death to take me, I believed I heard Amylia's voice in the distance, calling for me.

"Amylia," I screamed, but it came out in a hoarse whisper and I knew she wouldn't be able to hear me even though her hearing is much better than mine.

She kept on walking and calling for me when I was nearby. I could see her body outline in the moonlight. Taking a deep breath and preparing myself for what I was about to do, I moved my injured leg and cried out in pure agony. The body stopped and looked over to where I was.

"Help me," I shouted.

"Brianna," Amylia said and ran over to where I was using her vampire speed.

"Help me please," I begged, actually scared that I was going to die.

Amylia called for Nathaniel who appeared out of nowhere and ran over to me, grabbing me tightly and sucking all the air out of my body.

"I thought you were missing for good," Nathaniel whispered.

"We need to move her before her body temperature drops even more and it gets even more deadly for her to be out here without some sort of warmth," Amylia said, narrowing her eyes at Nathaniel for some reason.

"I am not moving her and that is final. I don't know what sort of damage has been done," Nathaniel hissed at Amylia.

"Nate, stop holding your breath and smell what I can!" Amylia demanded.

"Why should I?"

I wanted them to stop fighting, but the one thing I wasn't expecting was Nathaniel grabbing my injured leg and moving it. I cried out, making both Amylia and Nathaniel freeze. He moved his hand over the blood spot and brought his hand to his face.

"Blood," he whispered.

"There is a high chance that she might have severed a main vein in her leg. We have to get Brianna back to the house and to a hospital to stop this from continuing. You don't want her bleeding to death, do you?"

"How did this happen anyway?" Nathaniel asked and looked over at

me, fear and dread in his eyes.

“I slipped and bashed my leg against this tree when I came to a halt and I have been out here since,” I whispered and closed my eyes.

“Don’t you dare close your eyes,” Nathaniel pleaded, grabbing my cold hand that was clammy.

I heard something tearing and felt cloth being placed on the wound. Arms wrapped around me and lifted my weak body up off the ground and started running. I realised it was Nathaniel that had me. After five minutes, I heard a door fly open in my hazy state and a bright light shining into my eyes, causing a dull pain in my head.

“I have found her,” Nathaniel said.

“Where was she?” I heard mum ask.

“Sitting against a tree,” Amylia said, coming over to me.

Nathaniel placed me on the couch and tightened the cloth that was tied around the wound. I hissed and dug my fingers into the leather of the couch from the burning sensation it caused.

“What happened to her leg?” mum asked, her voice laced with horror.

I didn’t know who replied as it was the last thing I heard.

A beeping noise woke me up from my peaceful sleep. The sheets on the bed I was laying in were hard and itchy and it felt like I was weighed down by something. My mind was extremely foggy and clouded over.

“Brianna, can you hear me?” a voice said.

“Nate, she almost died. I don’t think she would be able to hear you right now. Think of what the doctor said,” another voice said.

I wanted to answer them, but I couldn’t find my voice. I didn’t even know where I was.

“There is nothing wrong with hoping,” Nathaniel said.

After that it was quiet. I forced my eyes to open and looked around the room. Nathaniel was sitting in the corner, looking down while Amylia was looking out the window, in her own world and not aware that I was awake.

“Nate,” I whispered, making him look up.

He said something at vampire speed before coming over to me and pulling me in for a hug. My whole body felt weak and there was something pulling in my arm, limiting the movement.

“Be careful with all the wires connected to her,” Amylia said over in the corner. “You don’t want to knock them out by mistake.”

“The smell of blood in that bag is making me go strange,” Nathaniel said, letting me go.

What blood in a bag? I looked up and saw I was connected to a blood transfusion bag. What happened to me? Flash backs started entering my mind and I remembered what happened to me; the harsh cold, the twigs and sharp rocks, the tree and worst of all; the blood.

“It is your own fault. I told you to go and get blood, but you didn’t. You haven’t left Brianna’s side since she has been in here!”

“She’s my girlfriend Amylia.”

“And yet you left her during a fight. That’s what got her here in the first place and you know that Nathaniel. You need to learn how to control your temper before you end up getting Brianna killed. We don’t want that happening.”

I decided to speak up then. “Can I speak to Nathaniel alone?”

“I don’t think that would be wise right now,” Amylia said.

“Take a hint. She doesn’t want you in here at the moment. Go find a nurse or something,” Nathaniel said, pushing her out of the hospital room.

I knew Nathaniel would beat himself up over what happened to me, but now that I think of it, he was entitled to some secrets and he would have told me everything when he was ready. Maybe I was wrong to have pushed him the way I did. Nathaniel slowly made his way over to me. It was like he was afraid of something, but I don’t know what though. Maybe he thought I was angry at him for what had now happened to me.

“I’m sorry that I left the way I did. If I didn’t, I might have been able to stop you from falling and almost dying,” he said, sitting on the edge on the bed and his voice haunted.

“This isn’t your fault. I’m the one that started walking in the dark

when I knew that I should have just stayed where I was because someone would have started looking for me eventually.”

“You were right. I should have told you the reason for my trip to Melbourne, but I just can’t. You would be devastated once you knew the truth. I don’t want to see that happening,” he said and grabbed my hand.

“Don’t you think I would be even more distressed once I find out?” I asked, glancing down at the pale white sheets.

“I’ll tell you everything once you have recovered. I don’t really want to get hit by a crutch when I do tell you.”

“It wouldn’t even hurt. You are immortal,” I pointed out.

“But I have to act human around others.”

The door opened and a nurse walked into the room, looking between Nathaniel and me.

“How are you feeling Brianna?” she asked and grabbed a chart from the end of the bed.

“Tired and still a bit weak,” I said.

“That is to be expected. You tore a vein in your leg that caused all the bleeding, but you are extremely lucky that you didn’t shatter the bone in your leg. All you did was bruise the bone, which should take about six weeks to heal. Those trees are extremely tough, so I wouldn’t go picking fights with them often,” she said and disconnected the blood bag.

“I plan on staying away from that area for a very long time.”

She nodded and went back to doing her job. Nathaniel was quiet the whole time and didn’t even say anything after she had left.

“Are you alright?” I asked.

“I am just thinking about some stuff.”

“Would Amylia tell mum that I am awake?” I asked, changing the subject.

“She is doing that now. Marie threatened her if she didn’t tell her if or when you woke up since I wasn’t in any state to.”

“How long have I been in here for?”

“Five days,” Amylia replied as she walked back into the room. “Marie is on her way.”

“How did my mum threaten you?”

“She might be human, but when it comes to my clothes and shoes, she wins on anything.”

“She threatened to cut and burn them, didn’t she?” Nathaniel said, trying not to laugh.

“Like a bat out of hell,” she replied and crossed her arms.

The door opened, making me look over to it. Mum and Bethany walked into the room, looking flustered.

“That is the last time I am letting Jack drive,” Bethany said and placed her bag on the floor.

“What happened this time?” Nathaniel asked.

“Your adopted father parked five blocks away from the hospital. It would have been quicker just to walk from in town to here,” she said and walked over to the bed.

Mum came over to me and pulled me in for a tight hug. I tried to hug her back, but Nathaniel still had my hand in his tight grip. I narrowed my eyes at him, but it didn’t work. It seemed my vampire was in his own world.

“Nate, can I have my hand back?” I asked, making him snap out of his world and let go.

“And you also need blood. If I see you looking like death anymore, I will drag you to our supply and force it down your throat and I won’t be gentle while doing it either,” Bethany said to her son.

“I will be fine,” he argued.

“Nathaniel, don’t fight back. Go get your blood that you need,” I said and placed my hand on his arm.

“I don’t want to leave your side.”

“Don’t argue with me Nathaniel Monroe. You aren’t going to win on this one.”

He said something under his breath and moved from where he was sitting. Bethany looked over at me and smiled before following him out.

“Nathaniel doesn’t like it when he gets orders,” Amylia said.

“Then he has to learn the hard way.”

“What happens if a vampire starts lacking blood?” mum asked.

I was interested in knowing that also. Amylia deeply sighed and

spoke. "A vampire's body is dependent on blood. If we deprive it of its life source for too long, darkness forms underneath our eyes, we become snappy and not pleasant to be around. Just like Nathaniel was and is most times," she said. "Our body slowly starts to starve itself into a sure death if we don't do anything to stop it."

"Why did he do that for?" I asked.

"Because he was worried that once he left the room, something would happen to you."

"What would he have done?" mum asked.

"Something that he doesn't want to do but knows that he won't have a choice one day; turning Brianna into a vampire," Amylia said, looking out the window.

"Doesn't Nathaniel want me to be like him?" I asked, shock lacing my voice.

Amylia came over to where I was and sat on the bed. She grabbed my hand, but had a sombre look on her face. That's when I knew the answer. He didn't want me to become a vampire and spend the rest of my life with him.

"When can I go home?" I asked.

"Um, I don't know," mum said.

"Can someone go ask or something?" I pressed. I wanted to get out of here and fire a lot of questions towards Nathaniel.

Before anyone could do anything, a doctor walked into the room. He grabbed my chart from the end of the bed and glanced down at it.

"Brianna, I presume?" he asked, looking at me.

"Yes," I said.

"I am doctor Holland and the good news is that you can go home today," he said.

"That is great," Amylia said and smiled a toothy smile, making him take a step back.

"Whoever will be driving her home will have to come with me and fill in a few forms before Brianna can leave."

"That will be me," mum said and followed him out of the room.

I pulled the covers off me and forced myself out of the hard bed. Amylia looked at me concerned, but I needed to walk and use my good

leg. Once my feet touched the ground, I hissed through my teeth.

“How are you going to walk?” asked Amylia.

“I am going to fight through the pain like I have with everything else in my life, so this won’t be much different,” I said, grimacing as I walked.

“Nate is going to have heart failure once he sees this,” Amylia said, sounding concerned.

“Don’t you think I know that Amylia? So to save him an attack of some sort, I am walking so I can hide the grimace and screams that want to break through the surface,” I said, glancing over at her.

“Good luck with that as Nathaniel can see right through people when it comes to pain and secrets.”

“Oh don’t I know that,” I said under my breath.

Nathaniel sometimes hovered like a hawk and was able to sniff out when something was wrong like a blood hound, but this was something that I didn’t want him to know about. He was protective of me as it was and I didn’t want that getting any worse. After a couple more steps, the pain slowly started to dissipate and I could place more pressure.

“Well that is better,” Amylia said.

“How am I going to keep this a secret?” I asked.

“Sweetie, I think you are going to have to tell Nathaniel about this all because there’s something you should know.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“He plans on staying with you and Marie until you are able to walk and do things without any help. Nate doesn’t want your mother to carry the burden on her own, as she would have to take time off from work, which she can’t afford.”

I almost collapsed to the floor when she said that. How was I going to hide my walking trouble from him now?

“What has made him decide to do that?” I asked, horrified.

“His overprotective nature of you and his continuing fear that something might happen that could result in death if he isn’t around you twenty fours a day, seven days a week,” she said and grimaced.

Mum walked back into the room, but took a step back when she saw me standing upright. The look on her face would have made me laugh if I wasn’t in so much pain and trying not to be sick from the wave of nau-

sea that was starting to hit me.

“How did you manage that?” she asked.

“With great difficulty,” I said. “Do you know about what Nathaniel has planned?” I asked.

“About him coming to stay with us?” she asked.

“Why am I the last to know about everything?”

“Brianna, you have been passed out for five days, so even if we did tell you about this, you would still have no idea as you won’t be able to remember. They did put a lot of drugs in your system to help numb the pain,” Amylia pointed out.

“There is no need to use your wisdom around Brianna,” Nathaniel said, walking back into the room.

“And you weren’t gone long. Did you get any blood?” Amylia asked.

“Yes, I did,” Nathaniel snapped at his vampire companion.

“But not enough; what are you going to be like when you stay with Brianna? I think that your girlfriend would want you to be happy, not like the way you are right now and that is like you have turned into a girl and started on your menstrual cycle.”

“I will be fine; when can she go home Marie?” he asked.

“Uh Nate, have you noticed anything different about your girlfriend?” Amylia asked, looking at him with raised eyebrows.

He looked around the room before his eyes landed on me, and gasping in shock. His mouth opened a few times, but no words came out of it. Amylia laughed and walked out of the room.

“Are you ready to leave this place and take me with you?” I asked.

“Only if you tell me how you got up without any difficulties,” he argued.

I should have known that Nathaniel would have something like that to say.

“You should know that it isn’t easy when you are crippled, but I managed and not in that much pain that I thought I would be,” I lied, not wanting him to know about the pain that was currently screaming out to me in my leg.

“Then let’s go home,” Nathaniel said, taking my hand and picking up the bag I didn’t even know that was on the floor.

Once I got outside, one of the nurses handed Nathaniel crutches that I would need to help me walk. I stopped moving and just looked at them, trying to see what was going on between my boyfriend and the nurse.

“Thank you for that,” Nathaniel said, using his charm and breathtaking smile.

It took me a few seconds to realise that he was giving her my smile. My anger was starting to brew at what I was seeing.

“You are most welcome,” she said, looking my boyfriend up and down with what I thought to be lust in her eyes.

“I have never met anyone so willing to help and be so supportive over the past few days that have been the toughest of my life,” Nathaniel replied.

“Well, there has to be someone like this on the nursing staff to offer support to people in their times of need,” she said and walked back into the hospital.

My eyes narrowed and I clenched my fists, my nails digging into the soft skin of my palm. She couldn’t have been that much older than me and was a lot prettier. That shook my confidence of holding onto Nathaniel.

“Hey, are you alright?” he asked, noticing the ashen look on my face.

“I’m fine,” I said and tried to smile.

“You don’t look it Brianna,” he said and helped me into the front seat of mum’s car.

“It’s just that nurse has me shaken from her looks and everything else that is perfect with her,” I admitted.

“There is nothing to worry about Brianna. I love you and no one else.”

“Did you flirt with her at all while I was out of it and going through blood transfusions?” I asked suddenly.

“She did with me, but I didn’t respond to her advances that much.”

“What do you mean by that Nathaniel?” I asked, narrowing my eyes at him.

“I might have smiled at her the way I do with you,” he admitted.

“And why did you do that for?” I asked.

“I don’t know Brianna. I was a nervous wreck not knowing if you were going to survive or not and she tried to comfort me and I guess I slipped and gave her that smile,” Nathaniel tried to explain.

“Then how do I know that when you aren’t around me, you aren’t trying to pick up girls that have more beauty or are completely fake?” I asked.

“Baby, if I wanted fake, I would be with Augusta right now and not you,” Nathaniel stated.

Before I could say anything, mum came out from inside the hospital and walked over to us. I crossed my arms and glared at Nathaniel, but he wouldn’t even look me in the eye. I shook my head in disbelief.

“Are you ready to go home?” mum asked.

“Yeah, let’s get out of here,” Nathaniel said, getting in the back seat.

I felt like the trust I had in Nathaniel was shaken, and I didn’t know what affect this would have in our relationship.

13. The truth

The past week, I didn't have to lift a finger. Nathaniel had made sure of that.

I didn't know if it had something do with the fact that he flirted with someone while I was in hospital and was trying to earn back my trust or if it was because I had almost killed myself from falling and suffering hypothermia.

"Brianna, are you ready to see if you can put more pressure on your leg?" mum asked the one day Nathaniel was out.

I looked up from the book I was reading in the living room to occupy my time and opened my mouth to reply, but a knock on the door stopped me. Mum walked to the front door and opened it, revealing

Amylia standing outside with a thick envelope in her hand.

“Hello Marie is Nathaniel here?” she asked sweetly.

“He went out about an hour ago. You are quite welcome to wait if you want to,” mum said and stepped aside.

Amylia walked into the room and looked at me before raising her eyebrows.

“What are you doing here?” I asked.

“I just have some things Nathaniel might be interested in,” she replied and sat next to me.

“What do you mean?” I asked, trying to get a good look at the envelope.

“You mean he hasn’t told you?” she asked, sounding shocked.

“The only thing Nathaniel has been doing is fussing over me. I mean, it’s a miracle that I am in the lounge room and not tied to my bed with chains and a padlock holding me in place so I can’t move and cause more damage to myself!”

“Becoming overbearing, I see,” Amylia said, trying not to snicker.

“Overbearing isn’t the word I would use,” I muttered.

Amylia just looked at me, but didn’t say anything. She kept on glancing down at what she had in her hands and looked nervous over something. What that something was, I didn’t know.

Half an hour later, Nathaniel walked into the lounge room, but froze when he saw Amylia sitting next to me. She looked over at him and smiled like she was up to something that he wouldn’t like.

“What are you doing here?” Nathaniel asked.

“Mail arrived for you at home, and I thought that you might be interested in seeing what it is,” she said, getting up and handed him the thick envelope.

I could only hope that it wasn’t something bad that they weren’t telling me about. I didn’t like it when secrets were being kept from me. Nathaniel’s eyes narrowed when he looked down and gripped the paper so hard, I thought that he was going to tear it in half.

“And you couldn’t have brought this around later?” he asked, venom lacing his voice.

“You are gonna have to tell Brianna. She has the right to know what

you have planned,” Amylia said, and left the room, leaving Nathaniel seething and me confused.

“What’s going on Nate?” I asked.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said, leaving the room.

Nathaniel had dropped the envelope on the ground, but I couldn’t reach out to get it. Making sure that no one was going to come into the room, I shifted myself to the edge of the couch and pulled myself up. I started walking slowly, gritting my teeth so I wouldn’t make a sound and get caught walking without any aid.

I grabbed it and made my way back to where I was resting just in time. Mum and Amylia walked into the room, shaking their heads.

“Brianna, has Nathaniel been acting any different this past week?” Amylia asked, sitting in front of me.

“He has been more protective and a bit secretive, I guess. Why do you ask?”

“That’s what I was afraid of,” Amylia muttered.

“What is going on?” I asked, getting sick of these games.

“I want to tell you, but I can’t. That is up to Nathaniel.”

“Mum, do you know?” I asked.

“I have heard something’s, but I can’t go into detail either darling.”

I had heard enough. Forcing myself to get up from where I was sitting and away from Amylia and my mother, I started walking through the pain.

“Where are you going?” Amylia asked.

“Away from here before I say something that I will regret,” I replied.

“But you need your crutches,” mum said.

“Right now, I don’t care that my leg is killing me and that I want to scream out in pain because of it. I just want to be alone and you both should know by now my distaste for secrets. You are just lucky I didn’t make a big deal when I found out you were vampires, but I knew it was serious.”

“Nathaniel told us not to tell you anything because of your temper. He didn’t want you exploding with rage.”

“He hasn’t seen anything yet, and where is my vampire? I want to have some kind words to him.”

“Nate has gone on what you would call a vampire run,” Amylia replied.

“Then he better hope that I will be in a better mood when he gets back,” I said and limped my way out of the room.

When I got into my room, I was tempted to place something against the door to stop people from entering, but then I remembered the strength the vampires would support and I don’t think mum would be happy with a broken down door.

I sat on my bed with my arms crossed and my fingers digging into the palm of my hands and when I heard yelling from in the lounge room, I knew Nathaniel was back from his escape plan and wasn’t aware of the hell I was about to raise. He had vanished for half an hour, and my mood was still sour. The bedroom door opened, making me glance at it.

“Why are you in here for?” Nathaniel asked, coming into my room.

“Maybe because I wanted to be alone,” I snapped back at him.

“I understand that you are angry about this, but I know that you will resort to some sort of violence once you find out what is going to happen,” he said, walking over to my bed and sitting on it.

“I am tempted to use some sort of violence now Nathaniel to get the answer that I want from you.”

Nathaniel just stared at me with a blank look on his face. I wasn’t going to back down from this and he knew that.

“So start talking,” I finally said, breaking eye contact with him.

“Brianna, I planned on telling you Saturday night,” Nathaniel said quietly.

“Saturday night?”

“Yes. I have plans for us and I was going to tell you what is going on, but if you really want to know what is going on, I guess I can tell you now.”

I closed my eyes, feeling my anger start to reach boiling point. We both were good at playing these games, but I wanted to stop this.

“Just tell me Nathaniel,” I whispered.

“It’s about my schooling,” he stated.

“What was so bad about telling me?” I asked, my tone still hard

“I’m finally going to university,” he stated, grabbing my hand.

“What?” I asked, my jaw dropping open.

“I have been accepted into university and I plan on taking this chance to finally make something out of myself for once in my life and not repeat high school over and over again.”

“Nathaniel, that is really, really good. I’m really happy that you are going to university. Where are you going?” I asked, feeling happy.

“Victoria University in Melbourne,” he replied, making my happiness disappear.

“You’re leaving me?” I asked with my voice going hoarse.

“Baby, you have to understand that this was my dream when I was human and I don’t want to give this up.”

It felt like a ton of bricks had landed on me. Nathaniel had this dream that he wanted to make come true and I understood that, but at the same time, he was willing to leave me for I didn’t know how long.

“Brianna, are you alright?” Nathaniel asked when I didn’t reply.

“How long is this going to be for?”

“Two years living in the city.”

“I think I’m going to be sick,” I said after hearing that.

“We don’t have to worry about this until the end of February next year, so we still have all this time to spend together.”

“Is this why you were in Melbourne not long ago?” I asked, finally putting the pieces in place.

“We had to go over final details, but I had this planned way before you entered my life and I couldn’t let this past me.”

“Then we should be celebrating this,” I announced, putting on my best brave face I could manage. “It’s not every day that someone I love gets into university.”

Nathaniel looked shocked at this. I think he was more expecting fights and screaming matches than me accepting this. But what he didn’t know was I was dying on the inside because of this. My boyfriend hadn’t thought about how this would affect me.

“I love you so much Brianna,” he said and pulled me in for a hug.

“I love you too.”

I rested my head on his shoulder and closed my eyes, forcing the

tears that wanted to fall to stay back.

"You finally told her," Amylia said, opening my bedroom door.

"I see that you heard everything," Nathaniel said, keeping his grip on me.

"What I wanted to hear. Are you okay though, Brianna?"

I opened my eyes and just stared at her, giving away my answer. She nodded and walked out of my room, leaving Nathaniel and myself alone once again.

"So how are we going to celebrate?" Nathaniel asked, finally letting me go.

"How about with Hudson and Brandon or we can just do something ourselves?"

"The Hudson and Brandon idea sounds good, but so does the one when we are alone."

"Then how about we do both?"

Nathaniel smiled and kissed me lightly before getting off my bed and leaving the room. When I was sure that he wasn't going to come back, I allowed the tears I was forcing back to fall silently. The main thing that worried me was the fact I wouldn't know where this left us in the future.

Taking a deep breath, I got off my bed and made my way to the bathroom, only stopping when I heard voices sounding close by. I didn't want them to see me like this. Splashing some cold water on my face, I felt a bit more human.

"Brianna, where are you?" Amylia asked from in the hallway.

"I'm in here," I said, opening the bathroom door.

"How are you coping with all of this?" she asked, cutting the chase and getting to the point.

"I can't give you a straight answer as this hasn't really hit me," I replied.

"But what about when it does? I know that you are young and strong, but this would have me on a breakdown of some sorts, knowing that my partner would be leaving me."

"Who says that I am that strong? I have to deal with Augusta, Jason, my father being back in town and now Nathaniel leaving me in twelve

months. None of this has hit me yet, but when it does, I am worried about the affects it's going to have on me."

"This is why we are here, Brianna. Nathaniel wants us to make sure that you don't do anything or that anything happens to you once he is at school and away from you, and I thought that I would get some practice in before that time comes so I know what to do."

"Did you know that he had this planned?"

"Nate had this planned since Christmas last year. He thought that if he enrolled into university that it might help with his depression as there is a lot more to do there to keep your mind occupied and when you came into the picture and caught Nathaniel's attention, I had hoped that he wouldn't go through with this plan and stay here with you and with us, but he isn't..." Amylia trailed off, her eyes becoming empty before shaking her head.

"What are you both doing in here?" Nathaniel asked, sticking his head into the bathroom.

"Talking," Amylia replied.

"Don't you know there is a perfectly good bedroom or lounge room to do that?"

"Of course we knew that, but we just wanted to be different," she said, leaving.

Nathaniel said something under his breath before turning his gaze back onto me. His eyes became concerned after a while.

"Baby, are you sure everything is alright?"

"If something was bothering me I would tell you," I said, trying to walk out of the room, but he stopped me.

"Don't lie to me Brianna," he whispered.

"Nate, what gossip is Augusta going to spread once she finds out about this? What is my cousin going to do to you once he finds out about this?" I asked, my tone becoming cold.

"First, we can work through the gossip and drama that she will cause and second, I can deal with Alexander when the time comes. He plans on doing the same thing as me."

"Why didn't I know that?" I asked feeling like the world was starting to turn against me.

"I only found out because Alexander told me when he told me about your father and I promised him that I wouldn't tell you, but as you can see, I just broke that promise."

"That reminds me that I haven't really forgiven both of you about that. I still need to find out what he wants."

"I'm sure that you will find the answer to that in time," he said.

"He never created contact with me and I know for a fact that he is only back because Augusta somehow found him. He hasn't paid my mother a cent of money since I was sixteen and during that time, we had fallen behind on bills, food and everything else that was needed to survive. It is a miracle that I could even go to school here, and if it wasn't for my grandparents, I wouldn't be and we wouldn't be together!" I shouted.

All Nathaniel did was staring at me like he did on my second day of school. It was like everything I just said had gone over the top of his head. I shook my head and tried to hobble out of the room.

"Let me help you get over all of this Brianna. I want to be the perfect boyfriend to you, but right now, all I am doing is causing you heart-ache," he said, making me stop and look at him.

The look on his face almost broke my heart. I knew that he was trying hard, and I was making it very difficult for him to do that. Taking a deep breath, I forced more tears that wanted fall back into my body.

"The only thing I want is answers from my father and then I can finally forget about him," I said.

"I know that you have anger that you want to unleash, and I am giving you permission to do that on me," Nathaniel said, making me take a step back.

"You do realise what you are saying, don't you? I'm not going to unleash anything that you don't deserve and this is something that you haven't done wrong and don't need to be punished for," I said, grabbing his hand.

"Are you sure about that?"

To shut my vampire up, I wrapped a hand around the back of his neck, brung his face down to my height and glued my lips to his and kissed him hard. When I pulled back to catch my breath, Nathaniel had a

look of shock on his face.

“Does that answer your question now, Nate?” I asked. “Or do you still have more that haven’t been answered?”

“Wow,” he breathed.

“You recover and I will be in the kitchen if you need me,” I said, leaving him the in hallway.

Amylia was sitting at the kitchen table with mum; looking over documents. Amylia glanced up at me before going back to doing whatever she was before I entered the room.

“What are you both doing?” I asked, sitting down at the table in front of them.

“I’m helping Marie with the support documents. Bethany said something about them to me not long ago, since I am the brains that handles the finances for us Pryor’s,” Amylia replied, punching some numbers on the calculator.

“How much does he now owe, dear?” mum asked.

“Seven thousand,” she said and looked at her.

“And will they be seeing that?” Nathaniel asked, sitting next to me and looking at his future sister in law.

“Nate, I would love you give you an answer, but that is up to Saul if he comes to the party on this one. He is the one that will owe ten thousand dollars by the time Brianna turns eighteen years of age.”

“Not if I have something to do with it, it won’t be,” he whispered.

“Don’t go doing anything stupid Nathaniel. We don’t need you in jail for assault or even murder. Just let everything run its course in life. I mean, who knows, this could be the reason he is back in town right now,” Amylia said.

“You are aware that Augusta is causing this trouble, right?” I asked.

“That bitch has it coming to her. I would give great pleasure on bringing her down to her knees,” she said and smirked at Nathaniel. “But you won’t let me have my fun!”

“You tell me to behave and the same goes for you as well,” he said, grabbing my hand.

“All I want is that money as it will be very handy for things that we need,” mum said, grabbing the papers and placing them in her cabinet.

"I mean, your birthday is coming up soon, and I still have no idea what we are going to be doing just yet."

"Birthday?" Nathaniel asked.

"Don't even think about doing anything," I replied.

"Leave the planning to us Marie. I'm sure that we can put together a party of some sorts in a few weeks," Amylia said, getting up.

"I don't want anything though," I argued.

"Sweetheart, let us have our fun," Nathaniel said.

"Fine you win," I muttered and crossed my arms.

"See you tomorrow at school," Amylia said, and left.

I shot daggers into the back of mum's head. I didn't want them knowing about my birthday for that reason, and now they do and I have no way of getting out of it.

"So Nathaniel how is Brianna's bed treating you?" mum asked, turning to look at us.

"It's different to mine, but I will get used to it," he said and smiled at her.

"You can go home after tomorrow," I said, catching his attention with my cold tone.

Mum also looked up from what she was doing and turned around, looking at me with concern. I never usually spoke with such a hard, cold tone to my voice and when I only did, something was making me upset, and right now, there was a lot of things just doing that.

"Are you alright Brianna? It is rare that you speak like that," mum said, worry lacing her voice.

"I'm fine," I replied, getting up from where I was sitting.

"Baby, are you sure about that?" Nathaniel asked.

My temper was going to get the best of me. I could feel it and it wasn't going to be pretty.

"You want to know what is bothering me. How can my father get away with not paying this money that he clearly owes to us? How can you and my own *cousin* lie to me and not feel any sort of regret of putting me through even more pain?" I asked, my voice breaking towards the end.

"We didn't know how you were going to take it. Your father just ar-

rived back in town and we didn't want to cause a breakdown or something similar like that," Nathaniel said, getting up also.

"I think it would have been better for me to find out about you going off to university than seeing my father with Augusta on our date and knowing in the pit of my stomach the pain this was about to cause my mother," I said quietly.

"Brianna, why can't you just get over this? I told you that I was sorry about going behind your back and asking Alexander those questions, but I truly believed that you weren't going to tell me any of this and I resorted to my last choice," he explained.

"Was Alex willing to tell you everything or did you have to push the questions?" I asked.

Nathaniel didn't say anything for a few minutes. He just stared at the ground. "I had to ask him the questions, but he answered them straight to the point," he finally said.

Now the truth was starting to come out into the open. I still felt betrayed and it wasn't a pleasant feeling.

"I'm so sorry about this," he whispered when I didn't reply.

"I know you are, but you were willing to tell me about your past as a human, so I think it's time that I did the same, but without the changing into a vampire part of it."

Fair was fair and I had promised that I would tell him about it when he had admitted everything in his past life, but I didn't and now was the time to do so. Nathaniel grabbed my hand and led me up to my bedroom, shutting the door once we were inside.

"Where do I start?" I asked once we were sitting on my bed.

"From wherever you wish," Nathaniel said, sitting next to me.

"Well, I was born in Melton that you already knew."

"I remember you saying something about that from our first fight."

"Apparently once I was born, everything started to fall apart. For eighteen months, my father was bitter towards me as for some reason, he didn't believe I was his as I looked nothing like him. He had thought that I would be a splitting image of him, but I wasn't. My parents started fighting a lot, but I don't remember any of that as when things got too bad, I was given to my grandmother until the water had calmed down,"

I said, my throat burning.

Nathaniel moved a bit closer to me, but I knew that I had to continue with this. There wasn't any way on making this any better for me, but if Nathaniel knew more than before, that might make me feel better on the inside.

"One day, he just got up and left without a reason and we never heard from him again. The only way we knew that he was still alive was the fact he was paying money to mum, but now that has stopped. Mum put all of that towards a house and worked the two jobs just to support us. We were extremely lucky that we found this one, but I didn't want to live here. I wanted something more flash, but you can't get everything that you want.

"Over time, I started to grow bitterer towards him, but then on my thirteenth birthday, he decided to send me a card in the mail. Being so young, I thought that he wanted something to do with me and was going to show up, hoping to smooth over the waters and that I would have a father again. I spent the whole night awake, looking out the window of my grandmother's house and even got to see the sun rise for the very first time in my whole life. But my happiness soon turned to disappointment when I realised that he wasn't going to show up.

"I spent the whole day fighting back tears and pretending that I was happy when I wasn't. I was miserable and felt...dead inside. Alex pulled me aside and forced me to admit everything and I broke down for the very first time in my life. My cousin and I had forged a bond that we never had before from that day. I could go and talk to him about things and know that I wasn't going to get judged and I can still do that to this day."

"What about me though?" Nathaniel asked. "You can come to me about anything. I love you and I would never judge you on anything."

"You did when I first arrived in town. You made my life a living hell," I reminded him.

"I thought that you were like your cousin and every other girl in the school. Once I realised that you weren't, I started to grow fond of you and now look where we are. We are in love."

"But on the brink of collapse after everything that has been placed on

us and not knowing how to deal with it all.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” Nathaniel said, appearing to grow restless on me stopping my story.

“Anyway, over time, I developed a strong bond with my grandfather as he was my father figure. He is the one that will be walking me down the aisle when I finally decide I want to get married. He helped us find this place as he wanted the best for his daughter and granddaughter,” I said, only stopping when Nathaniel furrowed his eyebrows.

“What about Alexander and his mother?” Nathaniel asked, sitting upright.

“They were looked after also, but they didn’t have the struggle that we had. Alex has contact with his father and I don’t. Rachel can go to her ex-husband and ask for money if it is needed and he will willingly hand it over to her, no questions asked.”

“I didn’t know that she was married before,” Nathaniel said shocked.

“That’s what happens when you don’t get along with my cousin. You don’t find out these sorts of things. Why don’t you get along with my cousin anyway? Hudson said it was because you felt he was a rebel and he felt that you were a spoilt brat, but I think there is more to this than anyone is telling me,” I said.

“Alexander and I have never been the type that got along to begin with. He struck up a friendship with James almost straight away, like James did with you, and I didn’t approve of that as I felt that Alexander might be getting too close for comfort and we didn’t want him knowing that we were vampires, just like we didn’t want you knowing. Over time, we had started to fly insults at each other about our different lifestyle, and then got to the stage where we couldn’t even stand each other.

“I am surprised that we are even in the same classroom as Aubrey knows about our dislike for each other, but that is Mrs. Franklin for you.”

“Do you think that you might be able to be nice to my cousin for me just for once?” I asked, not knowing what answer Nathaniel would give me.

“What do you think I have been doing lately? When I am not around

you, I am forcing myself to form a friendship with Alexander for your sake, but we just have grudges that will be hard to let go, but I am sure that we will be able to move forward in the future somehow so it won't affect you," he said.

"At least it is something," I muttered.

"Brianna, I tolerate Alexander more than I do with Augusta so he has to be happy with that. If I usually don't like someone, I will let them know that straight away, so it is different for me and for anyone else when I start being nice to them and that I actually want to make friends with them for once," Nathaniel pointed out.

"Nate, anyone would tolerate my cousin more than Augusta. You would have to be crazy not to," I said, looking into his green eyes.

"You do have a point."

A knock on my door stopped us from talking. Nathaniel got up from my bed and opened the door, taking a step back. I strained my neck and was shocked to see Chase standing there.

"Can I come in?" he asked.

Nathaniel stepped aside, allowing Chase to enter the room. He looked at me and slowly approached.

"What's up Chase?" I asked.

"I just wanted to see how you were going with a busted leg," he said and sat next to me.

"Well, I can now walk without help so that is an improvement," I said, smiling at him.

"And Nathaniel, how are you coping?" he asked, looking over at his brother.

"I am coping fine," Nathaniel said, his tone sounding strange.

"With everything that has happened so far, I am surprised to hear that," he said, looking down at my floor.

There was an awkward silence between us after that. Nathaniel kept his eyes glued onto Chase, but didn't say anything. I cleared my throat, catching both their attention.

"So um, this is awkward," I finally said.

"I knew this was a bad idea," Chase said, getting up from where he was sitting. "I should have never listened to Bethany and Jack."

“What do you mean?” Nathaniel asked.

“Beth basically threw me out of the house for a few hours as she thought I was spending too much time locked inside after everything that has happened between Dakota and me,” Chase said, his tone flat.

“Chase, these things happen. You can’t keep on living in the past,” Nathaniel said, earning himself and glare from both myself and Chase.

“And you can?” he growled.

“Our pasts are different and you know that,” Nathaniel said.

“I think you have said enough that I want to listen to,” Chase said to him before looking at me. “Brianna, I am glad that you are starting to get better and I will see you at school tomorrow.” And he was gone.

“He has been in nothing but a mood since Dakota left,” Nathaniel muttered, sitting back down next to me.

“And do you blame him?” I asked, making Nathaniel stare at me. “His relationship with the love of his life just ended and he would be grieving for it. I know that Dakota had her opinion about me that no one agreed with, but maybe, cutting her out of the family wasn’t the right thing to do. Maybe we needed to sit down and talk about our differences and see what happened from there without jumping into the deep end.”

“Baby, Dakota would have forced us apart if it didn’t come out into the open that she was only using Chase and she didn’t love him at all.”

“Would she have really done that?” I asked, half believing what he was telling me.

“Believe me Brianna. That was the kind of person that she was on the inside.”

After hearing all that, I was still feeling guilty that I broke up a relationship, but I didn’t have any sort of involvement. I could only start to hope that Chase wouldn’t start to resent me for making him lose Dakota. I didn’t want to drive anymore wedges or divides in that family anymore.

14. Sleepover

Friday morning, I was awoken by rocks getting thrown at my bedroom window.

Groaning, I looked over at my alarm clock and saw that I didn't have to be up for another two hours. Whoever it was must have had a death wish from waking me up so early and I was happy to oblige if it came down to that matter. I stayed still for five minutes, hoping that they would leave, but they didn't. The noise only got worse and I worried that it would end up waking up mum and she would automatically freak out, thinking that someone was trying to break in by smashing our windows, leaving me with no choice but to leave my bed.

I walked over to my window and pulled my curtain back in anger and frustration, seeing Nathaniel standing there with James, looking intimidated and so they should have been. They both should have known that I hated being woken up when it wasn't time for my body to be awake and they were both going to know about this.

"What are you both doing here so early for? You both do realise that most people would still be asleep at this hour, right? Don't you remember that I hate being woken up this early or did you do this on purpose?" I asked when I opened my window, rubbing my eyes to try and get some of the sleep out and trying not to snap at them.

"I just wanted to ask if you wanted to sleep over tonight," Nathaniel said, smiling.

"And you couldn't have asked me at school because?" I asked, not feeling happy.

"Because I am not going to be there today and won't be back in Forrest until this evening."

"Where are you going?"

"Melbourne again; Bethany wants to take me there to look at furniture for houses and to have a look at a few places."

“Then don’t you think I should be coming as well?” I asked.

“Yeah Nathaniel; don’t you think your own girlfriend should see where you could be living?” James asked, hinting at something.

“I said that you could only come here if you didn’t say anything,” Nathaniel hissed, looking over towards James.

“Boys, I would love to stand here and watch the sunrise again for the second time in my life, but I do have school this morning and would love a few more hours sleep so I will be alert and with it for the day.”

“So will you stay overnight?”

“I will ask mum and will let Amylia know at school. Will she be there or is she going to Melbourne with you and Beth?” I asked.

“She will be there today. She wants to spend some time with her best friend.”

“Best friend?” I asked.

“You Brianna; you are her best friend,” Nathaniel replied, giving me a half smile.

“Let’s go Nathaniel. I can hear Bethany getting restless and Augusta’s thoughts from around the corner for the school day,” James said and took a few steps back.

Nathaniel nodded and walked away with him. I shut the window and made my way back to bed, knowing in my mind that I wouldn’t get any more sleep. Sitting on my bed, I glared over to my window, cursing the fact Nathaniel and his brother had decided to wake me up. I stayed there for half an hour before I decided to make my way down into the living room. Before I got out my bedroom door, I noticed that the flowers I got before Nathaniel and I became a couple hadn’t died.

I walked over to them and grabbed one out of the water and felt the petals. They felt real, but still alive. I made a mental note to ask Amylia about them at school. Placing it back in its spot, I walked out of the room. I walked into the living room and went straight for the window, looking out of it and making sure that there was no one standing out the front of my home.

The past couple of incidents had freaked me out and I was now paranoid on checking all the time and making sure that no one was there, looking at me. Twenty minutes later, mum came down into the kitchen.

“What are you doing up so early for?” she asked as she flicked on the hallway light.

“Got an early wake up call,” I muttered and tried not to yawn.

“Who woke you up so early?” mum asked.

“Nathaniel and James,” I said, looking at her. “They decided to throw rocks at my window to wake me up. They are lucky that they are immortal or they might not be alive right now because I was really tempted to kill them.”

“What did they want?”

“Nate wants me to spend the night at his place.”

“And why couldn’t he ask you at school like a normal person would?”

“He won’t be there. He is going to Melbourne with Bethany and won’t be back until this evening,” I muttered, looking down at my hands before looking up at her. “And since when is Nathaniel normal?”

Mum looked deep in thought. I knew that she would let me spend the night there, but I couldn’t understand the look on her face.

“Is the whole family going to be there?” she finally asked.

“I believe so,” I replied, confused to where she was going.

“Then I am not stopping you from going,” mum said and walked into the kitchen.

“Is everything alright?” I asked, following her.

“What makes you think that something is wrong?” she asked, forcing a smile.

That’s when I knew something was bothering her. I crossed my arms and raised my eyebrows, waiting for her to answer me. She had never asked if the whole family would be there so this was a first for both of us.

“I just want to know if Nathaniel has any plans for when you go there tonight,” she finally said.

“He usually does have plans for us when I do arrive,” I told her, wondering why she wanted to know this.

“That isn’t what I meant Brianna.”

“Then what do you mean? If you don’t tell me, then I won’t be able to give you the answer that you want. I am not a mind reader, and even

if I was, I would leave that to Nathaniel.”

“So you and Nathaniel haven’t...” she trailed off.

“Mum!” I exclaimed, my face going hot. “No we haven’t done anything like that. Nathaniel is a gentleman.”

She breathed a sigh of relief. Did she think I would rush into something that big? I knew that Nathaniel had done...that before, but I wasn’t sure if he knew that I was still pure. I was sure that things would come out into the open tonight.

The rest of the morning had gone fast and when mum pulled up out the front of the school, Amylia was waiting out the front with a bored expression on her face. When she saw the car, she stood upright and smiled a warm, welcoming smile. I grabbed my school bag from the backseat and got out of the car. To save myself from going back home before making my way to the Pryor’s, I packed everything in my school bag and planned on going with Amylia back to their place.

“Are you staying tonight? Nathaniel has been hounding me since they left an hour ago. That boy is so impatient. I am hoping they will teach him some at university and make him put it to use for exams and such,” Amylia said as I walked over to where she was standing.

“It is fine with mum so you can let him know,” I replied, looking around to make sure that the two people I didn’t want to see were around.

Amylia clapped her hands in glee and pulled out her phone, messaging Nathaniel at a faster pace than most humans, but they did have to keep up with appearances. I started walking when I felt someone brush up against my hand, making me look up. The one person I didn’t want to see had to be standing there.

“What do you want Jason?” I asked, crossing my arms.

“I don’t see Nathaniel here today with Chase and Amylia. Where is he today?” he asked, a glint in his eyes.

“He is in Melbourne with his mother,” I replied, trying not to snap at him.

“And he didn’t take you? I know that if I was your boyfriend, I would take you everywhere with me,” he said and started to rub my arm with his hand.

"If you know what is good for you Jason, you would stop that," I said slowly.

"Just admit Brianna; you want me just as much as I want you," he breathed and moved in closer.

"What are you doing?" Amylia asked from behind us.

Jason turned around and glared at Amylia. She crossed her arms and smirked at him, knowing that she had interrupted him and basically saving me from doing some sort of injury. I breathed a sigh of relief.

"What do you want Amylia? Shouldn't you be making sure that you look like a Barbie doll?" he asked.

"Not when you are harassing my friend," she retorted.

"Maybe Brianna wants to hang around me and doesn't want you controlling her like you have been lately. I don't see her hanging around anyone else but all of you and sometimes her cousin and Hudson. What sort of spell have you got her under Amylia? What lies did you tell her to make her hate me?" he spat.

"We haven't got her under anything. She just has good taste and knows not to hang around you. I mean, you are friends with Augusta and that would be enough to turn anyone off dating you. you and I both know she is a total bitch and will scare off anybody when she feels threatened by someone who is way better so I think you are gonna spend the rest of your life alone," she taunted.

Jason lifted up his hand and tried to slap Amylia, but a hand grabbed his wrist, making him stop and look over.

"First you injure Brianna and now you are trying to hurt Amylia. Didn't your father teach you it is wrong to hit a woman?" Chase asked in an eerily calm voice.

"Can you let go of me?" he asked.

"Give me one reason why I should?" Chase asked, tightening his grip on Jason, but not enough to crush the bones in his wrist.

"Brianna, can you tell Nathaniel that he is crap at basketball and he shouldn't even be on the team," Jason said and looked over at me.

"He knows where you live," Chase whispered. "I hope you are ready for some disfigurement once Nathaniel knows what you just said about him."

Chase let go of his wrist and wrapped his arms around Amylia and me, leading us away from Jason. The anger and tension was coming off his body in waves and I glanced over to Amylia. She had a grim look on her face.

“Why doesn’t he get the hint?” I finally asked.

“Because he wants the lifestyle Nathaniel has. He only went to hit Amylia because she said what was true. He has trouble finding a girl-friend because of Augusta and he didn’t want you knowing that because he still has it locked in his head that he has a chance with dating you,” Chase replied, looking down at me.

“Then he must be delusional or something thinking that he has a chance with me. I have made my disinterest to date him clear since day one. With his bleached blonde hair and greasy stare, he gave me the creeps and the fact he was in the same spot that I was in at the same time made me feel like he was stalking me,” I admitted, looking down at my beat up ballet flats

“We read his thoughts not long ago and he was stalking you, hoping that he would get to know you better than we would so he had something to rub in our faces but that backfired as we all know,” Amylia said.

I didn’t say anything. I walked into my first class late, making everyone look up at me. Mrs. Franklin opened her mouth, but didn’t say anything. She knew that this day was going to be hell on me without Nathaniel by my side. I knew that I should be able to cope without him, but there was the doubt in my mind that he would leave me due to the distance that was going to be between us come next year.

“Brianna, are you okay?” Mrs. Franklin asked while everyone else was busy with their school work.

“I think I am,” I replied. “It is just weird without Nathaniel by my side, but I guess I will have to get used to it with him leaving next year. I can class this as good practice.”

“I knew that Nathaniel had plans on going to Melbourne for school, but I thought that he wouldn’t have followed through with them once you entered his life,” she told me.

“Mrs. Franklin, I plan on supporting Nathaniel on anything he does, and I will be supporting him on this one as well, even though it is slowly

killing me on the inside with the fact that he will be leaving me.”

“You are a strong girl Brianna and I am sure that whatever happens between you and Nathaniel will make both of you even stronger,” she whispered and walked back over to her desk.

Mrs. Franklin was a wise woman and no doubt a couple of hundred years old and not taking her advice to heart would have been the craziest thing I could ever do in my life. That would be one stupid mistake. Turning around, I caught Hudson’s stare.

“Are you alright?” she mouthed.

I nodded and turned back around, going back in my thoughts. I was not liking the way I was feeling without Nathaniel next to me and I had to learn to stop being like this. My life couldn’t revolve around him.

The bell rang and I was packing everything in my bag when Hudson came over to me. I looked at her and smiled.

“Is Nathaniel in Melbourne?” she asked.

“Yeah he is,” I replied.

“Then why aren’t you with him?”

“I don’t have an answer for that. I guess I will have to ask Nathaniel when I see him tonight at his place,” I said and flung my school bag over my shoulder.

“You mean that you are staying at his place tonight with the whole family? Don’t you think that they might cramp his style or something?” she asked and started walking with me.

I looked at her and shook my head. It didn’t bother me that his family was going to be there with us and I wasn’t ready to take things to the next level, so that gave me a sense of calm.

“I am actually glad that his family will be there tonight because I know that it won’t give Nathaniel the incentive to try something with me.”

“You mean sex?”

I just looked at her, not liking the fact she was right. I wasn’t ready for something like that. “Yes, that,” I said.

“I know Nate and he would never rush you into anything. He loves you too much to do something stupid.”

“Well, I now know that, but he is a man and we all know what urges

that they can get.”

After that talk with Hudson, I felt better and started to look forward to spending the night there. When the final bell rang, Amylia and Chase were leaning against the car, waiting for me.

“Are you ready to go and pack?” Chase asked as I approached.

“I already have everything. I packed this morning to save me going back home,” I told them, earning a smile off Amylia.

“Talk about a time saver. I have so much planned for us to do while we are waiting for Nathaniel to return from his trip and knowing Bethany, she would have forced him to buy things for an apartment that he doesn’t even have yet,” she said, wrapping her arm around my shoulder.

“She likes to be prepared for any case possible,” Chase added, a slight smile starting to grace his face.

“Where the hell is Nathaniel?” a voice said from behind us.

My blood ran cold at that voice. The whole day I had avoided Augusta and now she had found me. I turned around to see her arms crossed and an icy stare at me.

“He wasn’t here today,” I replied.

“I can see that, red. Why wasn’t he here is what I want to know!” she demanded and grabbed my top by the collar.

“Let her go Augusta,” Chase said, catching her attention.

“Chase darling, I heard about your break up with Dakota. I had a feeling that your relationship with her would end since Brianna had entered your lives. Do you need any sort of cheering up as I am available tonight?”

“I am fine thank you,” he replied and took my school bag off me.

“Is there a reason why you are here?” Amylia asked looking at her like the piece of trash she was.

“I just wanted to know where Nate was and I still haven’t got my answer,” she said, turning her icy stare back on me.

“Well good luck with getting that information out of me as I am not telling you a single thing. I think Nathaniel has had enough of you stalking him and trying to make my life a living hell. Oh by the way, thank you for sending my father back in town. My mother really is grateful

towards you right now with making her life a living hell also. Your funeral will be in a week once she sees you and tears you apart with her bare hands," I said in a cold voice and got in the car before rolling down the window to say a bit more. "You really need to learn the consequences for your mistakes that you have now made. You are a sickening piece of street trash that will never make it anywhere in life as you are the cold hearted bitch your mother raised you to be! No one will ever want you, unless they are that desperate that they pick you out of the rest. Enjoy smoking on the truth Augusta and now try to destroy my life now as you already have done so and countless others."

Augusta's mouth dropped open and didn't have anything to say after I finished saying what she was to her face. I felt...lighter after getting all that off my chest. It was like something had snapped inside of me. Both Chase and Amylia got into the car without saying a word to me. I looked out the back window and saw that Augusta was in the same spot I had left her in, but in a heap on the ground. I usually would have felt some sort of regret from being that cruel, but I couldn't find it in me to care.

"I have never heard you speak that way before," Amylia said after a while.

"I had needed to say that for a long time now, but have always stopped myself from doing so. Today I just couldn't do it. With Nathaniel leaving and with everything else that is happening in my life, I snapped."

"Nate is going to be so pissed that he missed that. His sweet, innocent Brianna snapping and telling the resident witch what she really is to her face," Chase said.

"I'm pretty sure that we can show him in our minds Chase," Amylia said and looked over at him.

"But it still won't be the same Amylia. Nathaniel likes to see people that cause trouble fall on their knees by hearing the truth about them from the one person they least expect and this time, it happened to be Brianna that did damage control to Augusta and made her fall to her knees."

"Well he missed out for a change. That teaches him for going to Melbourne and not staying here today with us."

It sounded like they didn't support what Nathaniel had decided on. I mean, the new school year had only started and I couldn't understand why he had been accepted so early for, but I didn't want to ask any questions.

"You are quiet Brianna," Amylia said and looked over at me.

"I'm fine," I replied and smiled at her.

"I know that Nathaniel has given you a glimpse into the beauty room, but I can't wait to show you everything up close and the same goes with my closet. We are going to have so much fun playing dress up and everything else I have planned for us when you come around for sleepovers."

Every time she said those words, my blood ran cold. I didn't want to do those things, but something told me that I wouldn't have a say in what would happen. Amylia could be very persuasive when she wants to be and I was going to be no exception.

"Amy, did you think that maybe that Brianna might just want to spend time with Nathaniel and no one else?" Chase asked.

"I did think of that, but why should she spend all her time with him when she can spend time with me as well."

"I think that is a fight that you will need to have with Nathaniel on sharing Brianna. We all know that he can be possessive when it comes to something that he loves," Chase said, slowing down and turning down a dirt path half way to Forrest. "We are going a different way this time."

"Brianna, can you please try and convince Nathaniel to share you with me?" Amylia asked.

"Since when do I win fights with Nathaniel?" I asked back, already knowing the answer to that question.

"Just use some sort of human charm that Nathaniel was telling me about the other night," Chase said, glancing at me in the revision mirror. "He loves your warmth so just threaten him that he can't touch you or something. That should get the ball moving somehow."

I was shaking my head at their crazy suggestions. For vampires, they sometimes sounded just like humans. I wasn't worried about getting Nathaniel to let me spend time with Amylia. I was more worried about

Jason doing something to me in front of Nathaniel and making him slip, revealing that he's a vampire.

Fifteen minutes later, Chase pulled into the garage and turned off the car. I grabbed my school bag and got out, making my way into the kitchen. Jack was on a laptop and looked up when I walked into the room.

"Ah Brianna, it is nice to see you again," he said, smiling at me.

"Hello Jack. I wasn't expecting to see you here today," I told him and placed my bag on the floor out of the way.

"I am taking a well-earned day off work for a change and leaving my assistant to take charge and hopefully put Erica in her place plus Bethany wanted me to keep an eye on Chase and Amylia as well since she will be shopping up a storm with her credit card and not sure when she and Nathaniel will be back."

"I heard that," Amylia said, walking into the room with Chase behind her.

"You both might be vampires, but sometimes you both act like little kids. Now what do you have planned to keep Brianna occupied while Nathaniel isn't home?" Jack asked, like the parent he was.

"I plan on showing her the beauty room and my room. Where is Jay?" Amylia asked, suddenly looking around the room for her partner, but he wasn't anywhere to be seen.

"Fetching blood for us somewhere in Victoria but he will be back sometime tonight and hopefully not in too much of a mess," Jack replied, looking at me the whole time. "We don't want to scare Brianna with our lifestyle and I don't think a human would want to see what we look like after a hunt to stop us from attacking."

"You haven't scared me yet," I said.

"It isn't a pretty sight when we come back. We have to fight animals to get the blood, which I hate doing so I refuse to go and get the blood. Our clothes are ripped and blood laces our skin, but we do get most of it in the bags Jack gets from his vampire friend at the hospital," Amylia said, shuddering at the end.

I didn't want to hear anymore. I knew it wouldn't be pretty living as a vampire, but I didn't think that it would be that gruesome. Nathaniel

had never told me how they got the blood and seemed like he would never tell me, and Amylia had just done so.

“Well I think that would be enough to give me nightmares for about a week,” I muttered and crossed my arms.

“That is one of the main reasons that Nathaniel doesn’t want to tell you most things about vampires,” Chase added.

“Does he think that he is going to scare me or something?”

“The things we haven’t told you will scare you and I don’t want to be the one that will have to try and calm you down.”

“That is enough Chase,” Amylia said and grabbed my hand. “I want to do things with Brianna before Nate comes home and I don’t need to scaring Brianna and making her run off, screaming for her life and saying that a coven of vampires live in the most expensive house in the town.”

When Amylia stopped in front of the beauty room, I froze in my spot. I didn’t want to be guinea pig for a vampire to try new trends on. She looked over at me and smiled before opening the door.

“In you go,” she said and pushed me into the room.

“Please don’t torture me with all of these beauty products,” I pleaded.

“Look, I know that you don’t really wear makeup nor do anything with your hair, and yet you still manage to get the messy look without doing anything, but I know that Nathaniel would love to see you indulge your inner goddess and dress up every now and then. I want to help you learn how to do all of this, especially if you and Nathaniel get married and with the honeymoon comes dress up-”

“Okay I get the picture Amylia,” I said, cutting her off.

“Now, I am going to take you through everything one by one and we will start with the least expensive just in case you ever want to buy something like this for yourself,” she said, grabbing some foundation off the shelf.

Two hours later, she had taken me through all the makeup and now was starting on all the hair products that I knew she planned on using on me. There was a knock on the door, making both of us look up.

“Nate and Beth are back,” Chase said and left again.

“Let’s go and greet them before Nate comes up here and break all

the Chanel perfumes I have,” Amylia said and grabbed my hand before leading me back down to the kitchen.

“Where is Brianna?” I heard Nathaniel ask someone.

“She is with Amylia in the beauty room and we all know what Amylia is like. They won’t be back down until Amylia has finished playing with your human,” Chase replied, sounding smug, but was unaware that we were currently walking down the hallway and in hearing range.

“You want a bet?” she replied and walked into the room, making Chase go silent.

Nathaniel looked up and smiled when he saw me, but I could tell something was bothering him on the inside. I placed my warm hand on his shoulder, feeling the cold temperature of his skin through the clothes. He leaned into the warmth I was providing before sighing.

“What did Amylia torture you with?” he asked, trying to hide what looked like to be pain in his eyes.

“I did nothing to her Nate and you see that. I was just showing her the makeup and everything I have in the beauty room and explaining that you would love to see Brianna done up one day and I explained that I was going to help her do that for you,” Amylia said, speaking up before I had the chance to say anything.

“Amylia, I told you not tell Brianna that. I don’t want her to feel that she has to do something that she doesn’t have to,” Nathaniel said, his eyes narrowing at Amylia.

“Deal with it Nathaniel as I know that you would be dropping hints about it in the near future. I am just preparing her.”

Nathaniel removed my hand from his shoulder and held it before grabbing my bag and leading me to his bedroom. He placed the bag on his bed and closed his door before stalking over to me, looking at me like I was his prey. He stopped in front of me and wrapped his arms around my small frame and brung his lips down onto mine. He kissed me that hard; I knew I was going to have bruised lips.

I pulled away and took some much needed breath. “What was that about?” I finally asked.

“Can’t I kiss my girlfriend like that?” he asked, looking down at me.

“Of course you can, but I just wasn’t expecting it to be so passionate

like that. You have never done that before so I was shocked.”

“I know that you are human, but natural urges take over my body and I can’t stop them until it is almost too late. I’m not going to rush you into anything baby, and I want you to know that. Now tell me about this confrontation you had with Augusta. It is all that Chase can think about,” Nate said and led me over to his bed.

“It was nothing,” I said, hoping that I wouldn’t have to explain myself.

Nathaniel raised his eyebrows at me and moved in closer. His eyes became different, like they were glazed over and hypnotising me. “Tell me,” he whispered.

“She was just getting on my nerves and I snapped. With everything that is happening in my life, it was amazing that I hadn’t done it before hand.”

“I remember when you first arrived in town that you were trying not to snap at me from all the torment I was putting you through.”

“I have seen torment through my own eyes and that wasn’t it,” I pointed out.

“But you didn’t know what I was thinking Brianna and that only stopped when I realised that you belonged to me in music.”

“I still haven’t forgiven you for all the sleepless nights that you forced on me. You were always on my thoughts and it drove me crazy as I couldn’t understand why until Amylia asked me how I felt about you and everything started to fall into place before my eyes.”

“Leave it to everyone else to figure out our feelings before we did,” he said, making me laugh.

“So, what do you have planned for me tonight?” I asked.

“I want to tell you more about me and more about vampires. You need to know the horrors that you are getting yourself involved with and I know that you were told about the hunting for blood. That would be enough to scare a normal human.”

“But I’m not normal though. I have fallen for a vampire and I don’t care about the danger that comes with it.”

“I will tell you everything after everyone goes to sleep. We don’t need them to hear us talking and I know that they will obey that or

there will be trouble.”

“You don’t need to get so serious Nathaniel,” Amylia said, opening his bedroom door and walking into the room. “We know not to listen into what you will be telling Brianna and vice versa.”

“What do you want? Can’t I spend some time with Brianna alone without you spoiling my party or is that now your job?”

“I am only here to let you know that our worst nightmare is out front and is demanding to see you Nate,” she replied. “And you know that she won’t leave until that has happened.”

“Just forgive me if I lose my temper,” he muttered as he flew out of the room.

Amylia walked over to his bedroom window and looked towards the direction of the footpath with a concerned look on her face. I got up from where I was sitting and walked over there, not knowing what sight I was going to see. I could see their mouths moving, but I couldn’t make out what they were saying to each other. The other thing I noticed was that Nathaniel was looking angry.

I rested a hand on the window and sighed, looking down. The whole time I had been in town, all I did was cause fights to happen. Chase and Dakota had broken up due to my arrival into the family and there was visible tension between Nathaniel and Chase.

“Brianna, what’s wrong?” Amylia asked.

“I’m just thinking about everything,” I replied, still not looking up.

“Listen, I know a lot of things have happened in our family since you arrived, but they were going to happen anyway. Chase was starting to resent the depression Nathaniel was forcing onto himself even though we had tried countless times to find him his life partner in a vampire, but it wasn’t enough to make him happy and Chase didn’t like that, thinking that Nathaniel was just being self-centred and didn’t appreciate what we were trying to do for him. James knew not to force Nathaniel into doing something that he didn’t want to, while the rest of us are still learning to do that. Usually when vampires tell someone to do something, they do it without a second glance, but with Nathaniel, the more you force something onto him, the more he shuts down and becomes even more of a nightmare to live with.”

“His past,” I breathed and glanced over towards Amylia.

“What do you mean?” Amylia asked, sounding confused to what I was getting at.

“He was forced into things his whole life and no doubt when someone forces something onto him now, he would get some sort of flashback of when he was human and automatically shuts down to protect himself from more pain and heartache,” I stated.

“Of course that would happen. We were all too busy trying to find him a mate and we didn’t see the damage that was already done to his fragile soul coming onto the surface. Each day his depression got worse and every day we couldn’t figure out why until now. Nate is a very wise boy for picking you over everyone else. You are his true love and nothing is going to change that,” Amylia replied, her tone of voice sounding strange.

Before I could reply, Nathaniel stormed back into his bedroom and went straight for the bathroom. He slammed the door, making me jump. Amylia sighed and shook her head before leaving the room. I was left alone and didn’t know how to deal with this side of Nathaniel. Every day I was seeing something different and it was confronting. I had never seen this side to my vampire before. I slowly walked over to the bathroom and gently knocked on the door.

The one thing I didn’t want to do was get on the wrong side of a vampire. That would end up with me being killed for sure or losing a lot of blood from a mistake.

“Nate?” I called, only to be greeted with a stony silence.

I tried again, but nothing. I placed my hand on the handle and found that it wasn’t locked.

“Now or never Brianna,” I whispered to myself and let myself in.

The room was damage free, which was surprising to see. I was expecting everything to be damaged or broken in his fit of rage. Nathaniel was standing in front of the mirror, looking down into the sink. Walking over to him, I stood next to him and looked into the sink, and almost throwing up. There was blood in it. I was only hoping that it wasn’t Augusta’s.

Nathaniel glanced over to me and I saw tears of blood running down

his face. My vampire was crying. He collapsed to the floor and started sobbing, making me go down to his height and wrap my arms around him, pulling his head to my chest. I didn't care that my top was going to get soaked with blood.

"Natey, what's wrong?" I asked, kissing his hair.

"She reminds me too much of Mary and for some reason, it brought me to tears. When she started saying that everything about you is wrong for me, I just wanted to grab her by the throat and drain her until she was dry then bury her bloodless corpse of a body where no one would ever dream of finding it and let her rot in the ground. I feel so protective of you Brianna and now it looks like you can fight your own battles that you won't need me to do anything for you anymore."

"I have always been able to fight my own battles and that won't ever change, but of course I am going to need you to protect me from danger and everything else. I am just a human and you are a vampire that is way stronger than I am."

"I love you Brianna," Nathaniel whispered. "More than you will ever know."

"I love you too," I whispered back.

He moved his body so he was looking at me. The blood had dried onto his face but he still looked beautiful. I looked down at my top and saw that it was stained red.

"Let me just clean myself up and then we can get ready for dinner. I have a night under the stars planned for us and I don't want to look like this for the rest of the night," he said and got up off the floor.

"Let me go change my top then," I said and pulled myself up from out of his embrace.

I walked out of the room and went straight for my bag, pulling out a long sleeved black top and putting that on. Nathaniel came out of the bathroom just as I was trying to get the creases out of my top.

"As it is twilight, I shall escort you out into the open for a wonderful evening that we will both enjoy," Nathaniel said and placed my arm through his.

"You sound so sure about that," I replied, looking up at him and smiling.

“That is because I am sure about this Brianna. I have gone over this countless times in my mind and have had Amylia look into the future to see what this would look like and I can tell you that it will end perfectly.”

“What aren’t you telling me Nathaniel?” I asked feeling and getting suspicious.

“Nothing Brianna,” he replied as we walked out of his bedroom.

I glanced up at him, but didn’t say anything. I knew not to push Nathaniel too far and I didn’t want to face his fury that he wasn’t afraid to unleash. When we entered the lounge room, Bethany came over and stopped us from going any further.

“Nathaniel, are you sure that you want to have a night out under the stars with Brianna with what you are going to tell her?” she asked.

“Look, I know that you are worried about what I will tell Brianna, but Bethany; she is the love of my life and I want her to know everything, and that includes all the horrors in this lifestyle,” Nathaniel said.

Bethany closed her eyes and finally nodded, realising that she wasn’t going to win this battle. Jack came into the room and looked between the three of us. Nathaniel led me out before anyone could say anything.

“What was that about?” I asked when we got outside.

“They are all worried about what will happen when I do tell you everything about vampires,” he replied, looking straight ahead.

“I haven’t run away yet and they all know that I won’t be doing that either, so what is there to be worried about?”

“Baby, I will explain everything later, but now, I really want to show you what meal I have planned for you tonight.”

He led me over to where all the candles were lit and I sat down on the rug he had on the grass.

“Now, you know that I really can’t cook, but I am learning for you so hopefully this will be nice,” he said and placed a salad in front of me.

“The easiest meal out there,” I replied and grabbed my fork.

As I was eating, I could feel Nathaniel’s eyes on me the whole time. I looked over to his plate and saw that he had hardly touched his meal. He had always finished before me so this was strange.

“Nate, is something bothering you? You had hardly touched your

meal," I said, looking up at him.

"Everything is fine. I am just watching you eat and getting ready just in case something happened," he replied.

"I won't choke on anything Nathaniel as you can see because I have finished eating."

Nathaniel smiled before moving everything out of the way at vampire speed. I didn't know what I could say.

"What time is James due back?" I asked.

"In about two hours' time. I just hope he has a shower before appearing in front of you. I am not ready for you to see that just yet. That would be enough to give you nightmares for the rest of the month."

"From what I have been told, I can tell that it isn't a pretty sight."

"Mostly James or Chase go and do that as Amylia and Bethany don't want to and Jack is usually always too busy with work or something like that."

"What about you? Why don't you go and do it?"

"Because I don't want to be apart from you; Amylia and James have been together for a very long time and they can go a couple of nights without seeing each other, but I do hate being around them when they are reunited. I don't want to leave you for too long and it kills me when we are apart for too long. Before we started dating, I didn't like it when you weren't at school or away from me, like when you weren't there those few days."

"You mean when I was sick?" I asked.

"Yes Brianna. I know that Amylia had told me that you were unwell, but I still didn't like it. You were already my half and I felt like I was empty."

"Did you think that I had stood you up as we were meant to meet?"

"You didn't arrive for basketball practice and I thought that was because of Jason and I couldn't blame you for being a no show, but then you didn't meet me like you said you would. I was furious thinking that you had gone back on your word and took my anger out on everyone, including a photo that Amylia had taken of you for me until Amylia said that you had gone home sick and Jack backed her up as he showed me in his mind that you came into the pharmacy and went home with your

mother. Regret washed through me over my actions and I begged her to take another of you and I was so lucky that she agreed as I didn't want to make up a lie to let me take one of you," Nathaniel admitted.

"Tell me more about vampires," I said suddenly.

"What do you want to know?" he asked, his tone of voice starting to get defensive.

"Everything and I don't want you to hold nothing back. I need to know this if we are going to move forward in our relationship," I said.

"Then let's go up to my room and then we can talk then. I don't want you getting bitten from any wildlife. I don't share."

Knowing that he was right, I got up from where I sitting and walked inside. All the Pryor's were sitting around the kitchen table and only Bethany looked up when I walked into the room. I didn't have a chance to say anything as Nathaniel came in behind me and grabbed my hand, leading me out of the room. He literally shoved me in his bedroom and I caught myself from falling face first on the floor. I turned around at Nathaniel, shock written on my face.

"I would sit down if I was you," Nathaniel said after he closed his bedroom door.

"Why do I need to do that for?" I asked.

"Because after I tell you more about vampires, you will need to sit," he replied.

"You make it sound like that you have a horror story to tell."

Nathaniel just glared at me, but I didn't care. I didn't like it when people told me what to do. It made me feel like a child. I crossed my arms and waited for Nathaniel to start speaking. There was no way that he was getting himself out of this one.

"Fine Brianna, you win," he relented. "Well, most things that have been written about vampires are a total myth."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I come out in daylight; I wear silver jewellery and so does everyone else in this vampire coven; I can't die with a wooden stake to the heart and garlic can't kill me and neither can holy water. The only way a vampire can die is by fire. You already know that I have immortal beauty, cold skin, no heart beat and super speed. Our vampire clan is a modern

one and lives among the humans in the world. We all have an insanely amount of money that we can spend and spend on things that we don't need, and we never notice a huge hole in our bank accounts."

"That explains why you want to give me everything in the whole, wide world," I muttered.

"Anyway, we are all insanely in love with our mates and would do anything for them, no matter what the risk is or how dangerous it can be sometimes, and we also live by the seven deadly sins."

"What are they?" I asked.

"Pride, lust, anger, greed, gluttony, envy and sloth," he replied, looking straight at me.

"That does sound like something vampires would live by for some strange reason."

Nathaniel laughed and shook his head at what I said. I walked over to his bed and sat on it, looking down at the floor and only looked up when Nathaniel's feet came into view.

"Do you want me to continue or stop for the night?" he asked and sat next to me.

"I want you to continue," I replied and looked over at him.

"You know, the only reason we sleep is to keep our beauty and corpse like pallor that we have."

"Then what would happen if you didn't sleep?"

He didn't answer that. Instead he said something else. "There is something that I want to try with you."

"What's that?" I asked.

"It's called a dark embrace," he replied and kept his eyes glued to my wrist.

"What is that Nathaniel?" I asked.

"It is where I drink your blood and you drink mine and it will entwine us for eternity. All vampires do it to their mates," he said.

"And I am sure that the other half is a vampire also and not a human like I am," I said, not sure about what he wanted to do.

It wasn't that I didn't trust Nathaniel, because I did. I just didn't know if he could stop once he got a taste of my blood. And I didn't want to taste blood while I had a beating heart. It wouldn't be a pleasant expe-

rience for me.

“Brianna, we don’t have to do this. I said that I just want to try it, not that we were going to do it,” Nate said, trying to hide his disappointment in his tone of voice.

I sighed and moved my hair to the side, leaving my neck on display. Nathaniel looked over to see what I was doing and his eyes widen in shock when he realised I was going to allow him to take blood from me.

“Brianna,” he breathed.

“Do it,” I said and closed my eyes, moving my head to the side.

I could feel Nathaniel move closer and place his hand on my waist, his cold breath making the hairs on my neck stand up on end. He placed a few light kisses on the area before biting down. I gasped in pain and placed my hands on his shoulders. I could feel the blood leaving my body, which suddenly stopped when Nathaniel pulled away.

He lifted his wrist up to his mouth and bit down on it, and then offering it to me. I brung his wrist up to my mouth, but didn’t do anything. I looked down at the blood oozing out of it, feeling my stomach churn at the thought of drinking that.

“It is the only way we are going to be bonded for all eternity,” Nathaniel pleaded. “I have had your blood and I think it is only fair that you have my blood as well.”

I placed his wrist to my mouth and started drinking, forcing myself not to gag on the taste of blood. The metallic taste made my stomach churn even more. I had to pull away from him or I would have been sick. The look on Nathaniel’s face was one of pride.

“I can’t believe I just did that,” I said, the metallic taste of the blood still in my mouth.

“Brianna, this now means that you are mine forever and no one will ever take you away from me,” Nathaniel said and started playing with my hair.

“I would be totally crazy to leave you after I just did that,” I replied.

“You know that if you ever did leave me; it would literally kill me. It would be extremely rare for a vampire to die of a broken heart but it does happen,” he muttered.

“I love you too much to do that.”

Not long after, I had started to feel sleepy and placed my head on Nathaniel's pillow. I raised my hand and placed it where Nathaniel had bitten me. It wasn't even bleeding, which shocked me. I was expecting to remove my hand and see blood.

"You still won't be bleeding now with vampire blood running through your veins."

"What about the venom from vampires?" I asked.

"I didn't inject any in your system so you won't change into a vampire."

"What will happen now since you have drunk my blood and I have had yours?"

"It means that if I ever have to turn you into a vampire, god forbid, then it would be easier for me to do so. The transformation won't last as long as someone who hasn't been bitten by a vampire, but it still will be an incredibly painful experience for you to go through."

I nodded and closed my eyes. Nathaniel wrapped his cold arms around my body and pulled me in closer. He whispered that he loved me over and over in my ear until I fell asleep.

15. Wedding plans

I slowly opened my eyes to see a dark room.

I glanced over to see that Nathaniel was still asleep next to me. He had a slight smile on his face as he slept. The sun hadn't even started to rise and my body was awake, telling me to get up from comfort. Lifting my head up, the room had begun to spin, making me place it back down on the pillow. I was putting it down to the blood loss that I had experienced.

After I forced my body to sit up, I gently got out of Nathaniel's bed so I wouldn't wake him up and decided to splash some cold water on my face.

"Brianna?" he murmured, making me stop walking and look back over to the bed.

He was still sound asleep, but was reaching out over to my spot. It was like he could sense that I was missing. I knew I was going to have to be quick so he wouldn't wake up and find me missing. That would make him worry after taking my blood. I got to the bathroom door and placed my hand on the handle when I heard his body move in bed. I slowly turned around saw Nathaniel sitting upright, looking confused.

"Where are you going?" he asked, sounding unsure.

"Bathroom," I replied. "How did you wake up? I made sure that I was extremely quiet so this wouldn't happen."

"I usually wake up around this time and was expecting to see my girlfriend still sleeping next to me and not an empty spot."

"Well, I was coming back. I was only going to splash some water on my face to make me feel human."

"Come back to bed and keep this cold vampire warm," Nathaniel muttered and opened his arms for me.

I sighed and walked back over to his bed. Nathaniel moved over and allowed me to lie on his cold side of the bed. After resting my head on his hard and cold chest, Amylia opened up the bedroom door and looked at the two of us.

“Now, isn’t this a pretty sight to see,” she said and crossed her arms, leaning against the door frame.

“What do you want?” Nathaniel asked, looking over at her.

“I was just coming to see if Brianna was ready,” she replied.

“As you can see, she isn’t so come back later on this morning after I have finished lavishing her with love and attention.”

I looked between and got up. Nathaniel looked at me confused but realised what I was doing when I pulled out what I wanted to wear. Amylia smiled and walked away, leaving us alone.

“Why have you given in to her orders for?” he asked, following me with his eyes.

“I haven’t given into anyone’s orders Nathaniel,” I replied.

Once I had gotten dressed in his bathroom, I made my way down into the living room, seeing that Amylia and James were ready to leave.

“You do realise that the sun isn’t even up yet,” Nathaniel said behind me.

“Of course I realise that. I wanted to go early as I want to beat the traffic rush in Melbourne. You know what it can get like when it is early morning peak and everyone is in a hurry,” Amylia pointed out.

“We’ll have fun. I will be here, waiting for you to return Brianna to me,” Nathaniel replied and walked into the kitchen.

“Shall we go?” James asked and led us to the garage.

Once we got on the road, I thought that I would have been able to get a bit more sleep. I was wrong about that one. Amylia had taken it in her pride to bombard me with ideas for the wedding.

“Amylia, maybe we should wait until we organise a few more things before doing anything else,” James said.

“I just want most of the things done so I don’t have to worry about them anymore.”

“We still have eleven months until the wedding, don’t forget,” I said.

“Of course we do,” she replied and took a deep breath. “I just want everything to be perfect.”

“And it will be, but just don’t rush it,” I whispered.

“Am I getting my cake that I want?” James asked.

“No you aren’t. We are getting something basic but beautiful,” Amylia said, glaring at him.

“Amy, you said that I could have my own touch at this wedding.”

“I know I did, but I want this to be perfect. You can help with everything else.”

That was the end to that argument. Most of the car ride to Melbourne was quiet, besides the occasional word or sentence. My thoughts drifted back to Nathaniel and I wondered what he was doing. I knew that he would be a nervous wreck with me being with Amylia, but I trusted her.

“So Brianna, do you have any idea what Nathaniel is doing while you are with us?” James asked.

“I don’t know. He didn’t say what he had planned,” I replied.

“I just hope that Augusta doesn’t decide to keep him company while we are gone,” Amylia muttered. “I don’t know how that would turn out after their little confrontation.”

“Does she even know that we have gone out and have Brianna with us?” James asked, looking over at her.

“You know that she tends to go for a walk around this time and once she sees that my car is gone, she will pounce.”

“Then we are only doing this and going straight home,” James announced.

Amylia just looked at him, but didn’t say a word. I was glad that he had decided on going straight home after this stop in Melbourne. I didn’t want to do anything else. I just wanted to spend some time with Nathaniel and then go home to mum.

James parked out front of the cake shop, making Amylia smile and clap her hands. I opened the car door and looked around me. Seeing the city again brought some of my emotions back into my body that I had forgotten about when I left.

“Do you feel home sick?” Amylia asked, and placed her hand on my

arm.

I looked at her and sighed. "I don't really feel home sick. I just miss my grandfather."

She got a strange look in her eyes, but didn't say anything. Nodding, she removed her hand and walked inside the shop. Shaking my head, I followed and saw that Amylia was glancing at everything in the shop.

"Can I help you?" a young woman asked, coming out from the back.

"My name is Amylia Mallory and I have appointment to look at some wedding cakes," Amylia replied.

"Of course; it is the Mallory-Riley wedding?" she asked.

"Yes," James replied, speaking up.

The woman nodded and looked over at me with questions in her eyes before they narrowed. Amylia looked at me with questions in her eyes, making me shrug. I didn't know what was wrong with this woman and why she was looking at me all the time for.

"Shall we start?" the woman asked, her eyes still glued on me.

"How long will you need me for?" I asked Amylia.

"You are my bridesmaid and I want you to help me plan this wedding. I have seen the style that you have when it comes to designing things. You do have some talent."

"I wouldn't call that talent," I muttered.

"Amylia, we are here to pick the cake," James muttered.

"Then let's pick one so we can get back to Forrest. Nathaniel keeps on ringing and I am tired of my leg vibrating from his phone calls," Amylia replied and turned on her heel.

"Yes boss," James said and saluted.

I lightly slapped him on the arm and walked over to where Amylia was standing. She was flicking through a thick book, but didn't look happy.

"You don't look happy," I said, making her look up at me.

"This isn't what I want," she replied. "They are too basic for my liking. I want something that no one would have ever thought of."

She closed the book in frustration and sighed. I looked around the shop and saw the woman that approached us and walked over to her. She glanced up at me, but didn't say anything.

“Excuse me, Emily,” I said, glancing down to her name tag. “Are there any other books that Amylia can look through? The bride is really struggling to decide.”

“It all depends on the price range that the bride and groom,” she replied, the tone in her voice making my eyes narrow a little bit towards her.

“James, what is your price range for this wedding that Amy is planning?” I asked, looking over my shoulder at him.

“Unlimited. The bride spends what she likes and not a cent more,” he replied, without looking up from his phone.

I looked back at Emily and raised my eyebrows at her. She nodded and walked behind the counter and pulled out some more books before walking over to Amylia.

“I’m glad that you did that,” James said, making me turn around and look at him.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because her thoughts were starting to drive me crazy,” he replied, looking up from his phone.

“You can read them too?”

“We all can, but we refuse to read your thoughts. We think that you need privacy and if we read something that you thought and Nathaniel didn’t know about it, he would kill us for breaking a promise.”

“What promise?” I asked, confused.

“We all promised Nathaniel that we wouldn’t go reading your thoughts or spy on you, making sure that you were safe at all times.”

“You mean he didn’t force you into not stalking me and reading my mind?”

“Brianna, I need your help,” Amylia said, before James had a chance to reply.

“What do you need?” I asked as I walked over to her.

“I can’t decide what cake I want for the wedding,” she replied.

“Don’t you think that James should be the one helping you pick it?”

Amylia glanced at me and flicked onto the next page, giving me my answer to that question.

“Have you found anything that you like?” Emily asked, coming over

to us.

“They all seem too basic,” Amylia replied.

“What sort of wedding are you having?” Emily asked.

“Winter wonderland themed wedding in January,” James said, walking over to where we were standing.

Emily nodded, but turned her gaze back onto me. I crossed my arms and looked down at the floor, not saying anything. Why did she always look at me like I was devil’s child?

“And is this girl that is with you involved in the wedding?” Emily asked, looking me up and down.

“Of course she is. She is my brother’s girlfriend and Amylia’s bridesmaid,” James spoke up, beating both Amylia and me to it.

James mobile phone rang and he pulled it out of his pocket before handing it to me.

“It’s Nathaniel,” he muttered.

I walked outside before flipping the lid and placing it to my ear.

“Nate, is everything alright?”

“Everything is fine baby. I was just ringing to see how you were coping,” he replied.

“I want to come home,” I whispered and sat on the seat on the footpath.

“Do you want me to come and pick you up?” Nathaniel asked, sounding happy for some strange reason.

“Can you?”

“I will be there in about five minutes.”

“Nathaniel, are you even in Forrest or did you follow us?” I asked.

“Bethany wanted me to go to Melbourne to get her some things, so I am doing that and then I was going to surprise you,” he replied.

“Then I will wait outside for you. The woman that is helping Amylia is giving me the creeps,” I admitted.

“What is she doing?”

“Looking at me like I am the devils child; she has never met me before, and she is acting like I have created some sort of sin that she knows about or something.”

“Hang tight,” he replied and hung up.

I got up from where I was sitting and went back inside the shop. James was sitting back in the corner with a bored look on his face. I walked over to him and gave him back his mobile phone.

“Is Nathaniel coming to get you?” he asked.

I sat next to him and nodded. Amylia and Emily were still going over the wedding cakes, so I had no idea why I was even invited. James had hardly done anything, so why are the two of us here? About five minutes later, the bells above the door chimed, making Emily abandoned Amylia and raced over to Nathaniel.

“Can I help you find your perfect cake for your event?” she asked, making sure her left hand was hidden and the wedding ring was out of view.

“Nate, what are you doing here?” Amylia asked.

“Can’t I see how everything is going?” he asked.

“Real reason Nathaniel Monroe,” she demanded.

“I am here to take Brianna back home.”

“And why are you going to do that for?” Amylia asked.

“Because I don’t really want to be here; I personally think that it should just be you and James that are in charge of the wedding and only call on me when it comes to trying on bridesmaid dresses,” I whispered.

“I guess you do have a point,” Amylia said, before glancing at Nathaniel and James.

“On that note, I am taking Brianna back to Forrest,” Nathaniel said, grabbing my hand and leading me outside.

“Thank you,” I breathed and wrapped my arms around Nathaniel.

“Was that the woman that was looking at you like the spawn of Satan?” he asked.

“Yes that was her. What was she thinking?” I asked, feeling curious to know her thoughts. There was a bonus of dating a vampire.

“Emily couldn’t understand how someone like you could end up being in a relationship with someone like me. She was also trying her hardest not to think about the fact she was married to a middle aged man when she really wants someone that is young like me,” Nathaniel said, shuddering at the end.

I looked back into the shop and glared at Emily. She was a married

woman, and she wanted my vampire? I don't think so. Nathaniel was my mate and no one was going to steal him from me.

"Can we go home before I do something that I will regret?" I asked and walked over to his car.

"Now you do know that violence is never the answer, right?" Nathaniel asked, making me stop walking.

"And what makes you think that I will be turning to violence Nathaniel Monroe?" I asked.

"Why does everyone call me that when I state the obvious?" he asked, sounding frustrated and angry.

"Maybe because people don't want to know the truth; it is easier to lie to someone than stating the facts to their face and you should know that as you have been on this earth longer than I have," I replied.

Nathaniel looked at me, but didn't say anything in response. I opened the car door and sat in the seat, staring straight ahead. Nathaniel opened his door and got into the driver's seat, not saying anything.

"Have you gotten what Bethany wanted or did you plan on picking me up first?" I asked, looking over at him.

"Yes, I have got what Bethany asked for," he replied and started the car.

Just as Nathaniel turned the corner, I looked through the side mirrors and saw James and Amylia walk out of the cake shop with papers in hand. They must have found what they were looking for. I was only hoping that they didn't hire Emily for any other event. I didn't want to deal with her ever again.

"Is there anything that you want to do before we head back home?" Nathaniel asked.

"Not that I can think of," I replied, glancing over at him.

Nathaniel looked like he was going to say something, but didn't. I spent the last minutes looking out the side mirror while he was driving, watching the city, and watching my home fade in the distance and become smaller, making the pain in my chest become bigger.

The car ride back home was quiet and the only thing you could hear was my breathing. Nathaniel kept his eyes glued onto the road and only

glanced my way a few times. Something was bothering him and I thought that it was due to that Emily and her thoughts. They would be enough to upset anybody that could read minds, but I was getting a feeling. A feeling that something else was going on that Nathaniel didn't want me knowing about.

When we got back to Forrest, it was mid-afternoon and a few people on the streets and around the general store, taking advantage of the nice day that it turned out to be. Nate pulled into a car park and walked inside the shop, leaving me alone in the car. As I was looking out the window, I spotted Jason talking to Daniel.

Great, that was all I needed.

Jason looked over to the car and smirked when he saw me sitting. I slithered my way down the seat, but got stuck to the leather.

"Why do you hate me? What have I done in my life time to deserve this kind of punishment? Is it because I'm dating someone from the undead?" I asked, and looked up at the sky, feeling frustrated.

A tap on the window made me jump and sit upright and look out the passenger window. Jason was standing there, with a greedy smile on his face. I had two options. I could either ignore him or see what he wanted. I went with the latter.

"Yes Jason?" I asked after I rolled down my window.

"What are you doing here Brianna?" he asked.

"Waiting for Nathaniel to come back from inside the store," I replied.

"So do you want company?" he asked, leaning on the car.

"No, thank you," I replied and crossed my arms.

"Get your eyes off my girlfriend's chest. You are not allowed to look," Nathaniel said, walking over to Jason with a few magazines in hand.

Jason turned around and narrowed his eyes. I stuck my hands out and Nathaniel handed the magazines that he brought to me.

"You know that Brianna will leave you one day Nathaniel. The main basketball game is coming up soon, and once she sees how badly you play, she will fall into my arms," Jason said.

"So you think Jason. Brianna loves me and I love her, so keep on dreaming," Nathaniel says and walked away from him.

"Would Brianna still love you if you didn't have beauty or money?"

Jason asked, making Nathaniel stop walking.

I knew I had to intervene before this turned deadly.

“Stop talking now Jason. I wouldn’t hesitate to hit you,” I said, narrowing my eyes. “And money means nothing to me. Nathaniel knows how to treat a girl, and that is why I am in a relationship with him.”

“Brianna baby, I could give you more than you could ever dream of in your life time,” Jason said, smirking.

“Would you leave me a single rose on my pillow before I go to sleep? Would you treat me like a princess? Would you give me breathing space when I wanted it and not force me into doing things I don’t want to do? No, I don’t think so,” I said and rolled up my window.

“Fine choice of words there Brianna.”

“How am I going to make him realise that I am not interested in him?” I asked, frustrated.

“I don’t know baby, but what I do know is that we need to get out of here right now,” he said, his voice vague.

I furrowed my eyebrows before realising what he was looking at. Augusta had spotted the car and was now making her way over. Before she could get any closer, Nathaniel started the car and put it in reverse, then took off once it was in drive.

“She is going to haunt you come Monday morning,” I muttered and placed the books on the floor.

“If she didn’t remind me so much of Mary, I might actually like her,” he replied and turned into his street.

Bethany was in her garden when Nathaniel pulled into the garage. I got out of the car and made my way over to her, seeing that she was planting more roses and other flowers that I couldn’t place.

“I had a feeling that Nathaniel would have brought you back with him,” she said without looking up from planting.

“What did you expect,” I heard Nathaniel say.

“Did Amylia pick a cake for the wedding?” Beth asked, ignoring her son.

“I think so.”

“I just don’t understand why she just wouldn’t let me bake a cake for her wedding. It would have saved her all this frustration that she is cur-

rently placing herself in," she said and sighed.

"Because Amylia wanted to spend money on her wedding, and not get her family to do everything. You should know what she is like by now Beth," Nate said and walked over to us, wrapping his arm around my waist.

He placed a box in front of Bethany before grabbing my hand.

"Take Brianna inside Nathaniel and enjoy the few hours you have together before you need to hand Brianna back to Marie," Bethany ordered.

Nodding, he led me inside and up to his room. Keeping his door opened, he led me over to his bed, pushing me down onto it. Crashes in a bedroom made me jump and Nathaniel curse and close his eyes.

"What was that?" I asked, looking at Nathaniel.

"The real reason why I came to Melbourne," he replied, his eyes narrowing.

"The real reason? You mean that Bethany didn't want you to go there?" I asked, slowly starting to put everything together.

"She did want me going there, but then this has happened."

He wasn't giving me any idea on what he was talking about. I heard a woman's voice rise in the hallway, followed by a male voice, but I couldn't understand what they were saying.

"Nate, I really need your help," Chase said, walking into this room.

"Just tell her to leave and never return."

"You know what Dakota is like."

"Wait, Dakota's back?" I asked, looking between them.

"She arrived not long after you left with Amylia and James. They left to keep you away from her as they didn't know what mood she was going to be in," Chase said.

"Really now? And you didn't think to tell me about this Nathaniel?" I asked, looking at him while narrowing my eyes.

"Baby, I felt that you didn't need to know that she was coming back. The only reason she is here is because she wants the rest of things," Nathaniel said, trying to keep me calm.

"It doesn't matter. You should have told me," I argued.

"Told you what? That I was coming back?" Dakota said, making all

three of us looking over at her.

She had her arms crossed and her eyes were cold. I knew straight away that she didn't like that I was around or even in Nathaniel's life.

"I thought you only came here to get your things? You have them, so you can now leave," Chase said coldly.

"Chase, don't you even think that there might be a chance that we still belong together?" she asked.

I looked at Nathaniel and raised my eyebrows at her question. What would Chase say? Did he still have feelings for her? I was expecting something to still be there deep inside.

"I said go. I never want to see you again Dakota, and I am sure as hell that I can find someone for the wedding as well."

"Yeah, who?" Dakota asked, smirking. "Face it Chase, you will have to take me to the wedding whether you like it or not."

"Or he can take no one," Nathaniel said, sitting down next to me.

"I know someone he can take to the wedding," I said, speaking up and making all three of them look at me.

"Who?" Dakota demanded, hissing out the word.

I slithered into the side of Nathaniel and placed my hand on his back, feeling comforted straight away. Chase walked over and stood in front of me, looking hopeful.

"Her name is Lucinda Smith and we went to primary school together in Melton," I said, looking down at my hands.

"And do you keep in contact with her?" Chase said.

I looked up at him and nodded, not saying anything in fear of Dakota. She hurt me once before and she was capable of doing it again, only no doubt killing me.

"Chase, she will be human. Remember that we don't usually date humans. They are our prey," Dakota hissed.

"Would she go with a stranger though?" Nathaniel asked.

"Lucy is always looking for an excuse to have fun, and I am sure that this will suit her perfectly and plus if she isn't sure, she will just hang around with me for the night."

"A useless human being hanging around a vampires wedding is not what I want. Have fun explaining everything to her Chase, but I will be

waiting for the phone call from you for a date,” Dakota said and walked out of the room.

“Do you have her phone number?” Chase asked.

I nodded, and grabbed my wallet, pulling out a piece of paper and handing it to him. Chase nodded and walked out of the room, looking down at the paper.

“Hopefully this turns out well for Chase,” Nathaniel said.

“Why wouldn’t it? Lucy could be perfect for him,” I replied.

“What is she like?”

“Lucy is very quiet, but likes to have a good time with people she likes. We were best friends in primary school, but drifted apart during high school. She has dark brown hair and hazel eyes with pale skin and around my height. She is very soft spoken,” I said, thinking back to memories we had as children.

“Well we are about to find out as Chase is talking to her on the phone right now and it seems to be going well,” Nathaniel said.

“I still feel so guilty about what happened between Chase and Dakota. I feel that if I didn’t enter your life, none of this would be happening.”

“Baby, if you didn’t enter my life, I don’t know what I would be doing at the moment. Bethany was worried that I might have runaway or even worse.”

I looked at him and nodded, not saying what I really wanted to say. I knew Nathaniel had battled depression in the past and that was clearing up because of me, but the thought my vampire had thought about death to get out of everything was something I didn’t want to talk about.

Chase came back into Nathaniel’s room with a smile on his face.

“I take it that everything went well with Lucinda?” Nate asked.

“Everything went perfectly well,” he replied.

“That is good. Now all you need to do is tell her you are vampire and hope that she will believe it,” Nathaniel said, smirking to Chase. “It is going to be so much fun watching you going through all the torment that I went through before I got Brianna.”

“It can’t be that bad telling someone that you love and that isn’t from

the world of immortality that you live forever and need blood to survive?"

"We will talk about this when I get back Chase, but right now, I am going to walk Brianna home."

"I think I can walk myself home Nathaniel," I said.

"I am coming with you Brianna and that is final."

Getting off the bed, I grabbed my bag and threw it over my shoulder. Turning around, I saw that Nathaniel was at the door, waiting for me.

"I'm saying goodbye to Bethany before we leave," I said and walked out of his room.

Bethany was humming a happy tune when I spotted her in the lounge room, dusting the already immaculate room. She stopped and looked over at me, smiling.

"Nathaniel is escorting me home," I said, making her laugh.

"You only live around the corner. I think you can get home safe and sound."

"Mother, you never know with all the dangers that are around these days," Nathaniel said, walking into the room and wrapping an arm around my shoulder.

"Get Brianna home before it gets too dark. I know that you don't have any problems seeing in the dark with vampiric vision, but Brianna doesn't have that."

When Nathaniel opened the front door, we came face to face with Augusta who had something in her hands.

"Mum forced me to come over and give you this," she said, looking directly at Nathaniel.

"And what is it?" he asked, flipping the envelope over and opening it.

"A cheque for ten thousand dollars," Augusta replied.

"With a note," Nathaniel muttered and quickly read it before shaking his head and looking up to Augusta. "Bribing me with money will not make me date you and you can go and tell your mother that. If I was cold hearted, I would take this cheque and cash it in, using it to buy something extremely expensive for Brianna, but I'm not, so you take this back to your mother also."

"Nate, you have money and so do I. That is one thing we have in

common. I also have beauty; another thing in common with you.”

“You remind me too much of my previous girlfriend, and that is sickening.”

“Girlfriend?” Augusta asked.

“Brianna is not my first girlfriend. She happens to be my second.”

“And what happened to your first girlfriend?”

Nathaniel didn’t reply. He just grabbed my hand and started walking away from Augusta, dragging me along with him. I looked over my shoulder to see that Augusta was still in the spot where he had left her standing.

“What is that on your neck Nathaniel? It looks like a bite mark,” I heard Augusta say, making both of us stop walking.

I looked up at Nathaniel’s neck to see a bite mark on his neck from me. If he had one, then I sure had one.

“I’m not giving you an answer Augusta.”

Nathaniel started walking again, picking up his pace. When we got into my street, he slowed down and looked over his shoulder, making sure that she wasn’t following us.

“If she can see my bite mark, then people will be able to see your one as well,” Nate said, moving my hair to the side and covering the bite mark.

“What am I going to tell mum? She was a bit on edge when I left for school yesterday morning and I don’t want her having heart failure seeing this!” I cried.

“We have to tell her the truth Brianna.”

“And what would that be Nathaniel? That you took my blood for moral purposes?”

“Don’t you think that maybe we should tell her that we are bonded together for all eternity?”

“Who is bonded for all eternity?” mum asked behind us.

I closed my eyes and turned around, facing my mother and seeing a confused look on her face.

“Brianna tasted my blood last night and I tasted her blood. It has bonded us and it now means that Brianna is mine and no one else can ever date her. The hold of a mate’s blood is too strong to break,” Na-

thaniel said, keeping his eyes glued to the ground.

“Will the bite marks go down on my daughter or is she scarred for life?”

“It will be gone in a week. Our bites don’t usually scar the love of our lives.”

“That is good to know. I don’t know how Brianna would have explained the bite like scar on her neck to her grandparents when they come up for her birthday.”

Nathaniel slowly nodded his head. His facial expression told me that he was planning something in his head, and it was to do with my impending birthday. I stepped away from Nathaniel and mum, making my way home.

16. Supportive

Monday morning rolled around and that could only mean one thing.

It was the start of autumn.

I walked down the hallway with an extra spring in my step and a smile on my face. Mum looked up from her coffee when I entered the room before realising what it was that made me so happy this early in the morning.

“Nathaniel is going to be very happy to see you this jolly on a school day for a change,” mum said and glanced back down at the newspaper she had in front of her.

“It’s the first day of the season I love the most, so of course I am going to be happy and not miserable,” I replied and grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl Bethany had brought mum for a welcoming gift.

“And it is almost your birthday and we haven’t figured out what we are going to do,” mum happened to remind me.

“Yeah, I know. Can’t we just forget about it for one year and just worry about it when I am eighteen?” I asked.

“Sweetheart, this will be your first birthday with a new family. It won’t just be us, your grandparents and Rachel and Alexander. You now have Nathaniel and his family and I am sure that they would love to meet Rachel and my parents.”

“Who are we meeting?” Amylia asked, stepping into the kitchen with her schoolbag hanging off her shoulder.

“No one,” I replied and walked back up to my bedroom.

I was alone for five minutes until Amylia made her way up. She didn't say anything, and just only watched me get ready for school.

"I guess mum has told you about my birthday in two weeks?" I asked.

Amylia nodded before crossing her arms. "Brianna, why are you so against celebrating it for?"

"It brings back memories that I would rather forget," I said quietly.

"You mean with your father?"

"I would rather not celebrate it for that reason. Why celebrate that I ruined my mum's life and her relationship?" I asked and crossed my arms.

Amylia sighed and walked over to my closet, pulling out a thin jacket for me to wear. I slipped it over my shoulders and turned around so I could look at her.

"Nathaniel would love for you to do something for your birthday and if you wanted to, we could always plan something for you. It would be nothing to fancy or expensive, but it would make us happy, especially Nathaniel and Bethany."

"Fine, you can plan something, but can you all please act human on the day? The rest of my family don't know about you all being vampires and I don't want them catching onto anything. My grandparents would have heart failure knowing that I am involved with someone who is lives on blood and is basically dead."

"That is easily done. We don't want other people knowing anything. Now come on, we have a bus to catch," Amylia announced and grabbed my school bag from off the floor.

"The bus?" I asked, confused.

Why did they want to do something like that when each of them had expensive cars they all loved driving and showing off to everyone?

"Nathaniel wants to become more human, so he decided today that we are all going to catch the bus with you," Amylia explained.

I knew that was something Nathaniel would do. But the more I thought about it, the more I realised that everyone would be looking at us and no doubt making up rumours to spread around the school.

"Have a good day at school girls," mum said as we walked past the

lounge room.

“Well, we will try to,” Amylia replied and opened up the front door.

It was quiet between Amylia and me as we walked to where the bus picks some of the kids up. Nathaniel, Chase and James were already waiting when we turned the corner. All three of them were looking down at the ground and ignoring everyone around them.

“This is a sight to see,” I said, catching their attention.

“You can blame Nate for this idea,” Chase said and crossed his arms, glaring at his adopted brother.

“What is wrong with catching the bus?” Nate asked, narrowing his eyes at Chase.

“Just some of the people that go to our school who happen to like spreading rumours about people. Do you not remember everything that was said about us when we first arrived in town?” James asked and tapped his foot on the ground.

“Suck it up,” Amylia said, glaring at Chase and James. “You both want to support Nathaniel’s happiness and that means you will do this without complaints. Do I make myself clear?”

“We all know who it was spreading those rumours about us and that person hasn’t given up on making everyone else’s life a living hell,” Chase said.

I rested my head on Nathaniel’s arm and sighed, looking around at everything and being on the lookout from the one person I didn’t want to see. Everyone was looking at us with shock. I guess the Pryor’s had never caught the bus to school and everyone was wondering why the change of heart. They would never know the real reason.

“What time does the bus get here?” James asked, pulling me out of my thoughts.

“Any time between now and eight,” I replied.

“Devil approaching and no one shall escape the scorn she shall inflict,” Chase announced, making us all look over to where he was looking.

Nathaniel snarled and only stopped when I placed my hand on his chest. He looked down at my and tried to smile, but it didn’t reach his eyes. Augusta stopped in front of us, and looked between each of us.

Chase crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes at her while James grabbed Amylia's hand, playing with her engagement ring.

"What is going on here?" she asked, glaring straight at me but not at anyone else

"We are waiting for the school bus," Amylia said, her voice cold.

"Why though? Only people who can't afford cars take the bus and you can afford everything like me."

"Maybe because we wanted to be different for a change," Nathaniel spoke up.

"Nate, you can always come to school with me in my car," Augusta purred.

"Thanks but no thanks. I am happy taking the bus with my girlfriend and family."

"Have fun then. I will see you at school," she said and walked away.

Chase uncrossed his arms and clenched his hands. Amylia said something that I couldn't understand, but Chase nodded. The bus pulled to a stop and everyone scrambled to get on. We waited until everyone had gotten on and made our way inside. As we walked to the back of the bus, everyone had their eyes on us. Nathaniel swung his arm around my shoulder as I looked down at the floor.

"At least we don't have to fight for a parking space this morning," Chase said as he sat in a seat and placed his school bag on the floor.

"That is a bonus," Amylia replied and sat next to James.

"I have to talk to Hudson during lunch," I said to Nathaniel, making him look concerned.

"Why?"

"I feel our friendship is growing apart for some reason and I don't want to lose her as a friend since she accepted me straight away when I first moved here. She is basically the only person I've got besides your family and mine," I admitted.

"Then I will distract Brandon so you can talk to her in peace. I will take him down to the basketball courts and show him what coach has been making us learn for the game," Nate said and grabbed his phone out of his pocket as it beeped.

"Thank you."

“We don’t need to worry about me taking Brandon away from you and Hudson,” Nathaniel suddenly said.

“Why is that?” I asked, confused.

“Brandon wants me to ask you if you will talk to Hudson during lunch as she is acting strange and won’t tell him what is going on,” he said and looked at me.

“And what makes him think that I will be able to get her to tell me what is wrong? She might not want anyone knowing.”

“Because you are her friend and you are human. Hudson might feel more comfortable telling you what is wrong,” he whispered. “You can’t get wrapped up in your anger like we can and accidentally harm someone.”

I nodded, knowing that he was right. If Hudson was going to tell someone what was bothering her, it would most likely be me.

As I stepped off the bus, I spotted Hudson standing near the lunch room, biting her lip and looking concerned over something.

“Maybe you should go and talk to her now and see what is going on,” Nathaniel whispered into my ear.

“Okay,” I replied and walked over to her.

Hudson looked up as I approached her and tried to smile, even though it didn’t reach her eyes. She kept on looking around her for some reason.

“Hey,” I said and stopped in front of her.

“Hi Brianna,” she replied in a shaky voice.

“Is everything alright?” I asked.

“Yeah everything is perfect,” she replied, forcing a smile.

I raised my eyebrows, making her sigh. Hudson opened the door to the lunch room and walked inside. I followed her and sat down at the table she gestured to.

“Okay, what is going on? Nate got a message from Brandon this morning and said that you were acting strange but you wouldn’t tell him what was going on,” I said after she sat in front of me.

“Something is wrong, and I don’t really know how Brandon will take it once I know for sure,” Hudson said and looked down.

Once she looked back up, the look on her face was one of uncertainty

and sadness. Something was really wrong.

"You can tell me what is wrong. You know that I won't tell Brandon a thing. It's not like we really get along anyway."

"I think I'm pregnant," she said very quietly.

"What?" I asked, not sure if I had heard her correctly.

"I'm late and three days ago, I started throwing up which started the alarm bells in my head. What am I going to do? I haven't even finished school and I am not even ready to be a mother, let alone a teenage one."

"Have you found out for sure?"

"I'm too scared to go and buy a test on my own. Will you come with me during lunch?"

"Yeah, I will. Now come on, we are going to be late for class and knowing Nathaniel, he will worry and start looking for us," I said and got up.

We walked to class without saying anything. I opened the door and walked inside, making Nathaniel look up at me.

"I'll see you at lunch," Hudson said and walked over to her seat.

"Everything good?" Nathaniel asked as I sat down.

"Yeah," I said, but didn't sound convincing.

"Are you sure about that?" he asked, frowning.

"We had a talk and are going to meet at lunch," I said, not adding in where we were going.

"Why is Hudson blocking her thoughts?"

Before I could reply, Mrs. Franklin walked into the room with a stack of papers. She started handing them out one by one, but didn't say anything. I could feel Nathaniel's eyes burning holes into the side of my head, but I didn't look at him. The last thing I needed was to blurt out what Hudson had told me. I didn't know how he would take that as I knew he wanted a child of his own. I didn't want to make him livid.

Looking over my shoulder at Hudson, I saw that she had her hand on her stomach and sighed. She looked up at me and had a grim look on her face.

"Are you okay?" I mouthed.

"I will be," she mouthed back.

Mrs. Franklin decided that we had to fill in a questionnaire for some reason. I kept my eyes glued down to the paper, ignoring Nathaniel, which was hard to do when he was still staring holes into the side of my head.

“Why do I get the feeling that you are hiding something from me?” he asked suddenly.

“I’m not hiding anything from you. I don’t know where you are getting that from,” I lied, looking down at the paper.

“You know that I can see through your lies Brianna. You aren’t even making eye contact with me.”

“Nate, leave it alone.”

“If this involves Brandon, don’t you think he and I have the right to know what is going on? When something is wrong with Hudson, Brandon is a nightmare to be around,” Nathaniel hissed.

“Hudson is my friend and it will be up to her to tell Brandon what is bothering her. I am just her moral support.”

“Moral support over what?”

I looked over at Nathaniel with a hard stare. “Something that you would break you.”

Nothing else was spoken between us. I looked up at the clock on the wall and saw that it was almost lunch time. Had we been in this class for almost 4 hours? I heard footsteps and looked over my shoulder, seeing Hudson approaching where we were sitting.

“Nathaniel,” she said, catching his attention. “Tell Brandon not to worry about me and please don’t be mad at Brianna. This isn’t her fault that she won’t say anything.”

“How can Brianna know what is wrong and Brandon can’t?” Nathaniel asked.

“Because it is girl related.”

Nathaniel looked over at me for conformation. I nodded, making Nathaniel close his eyes.

“Why do I always overreact to everything?”

“Because it is in your nature,” Hudson whispered and crouched down next to me, staring straight into my eyes. “Are you still coming with me at lunch?”

“Yes,” I replied and placed my school bag in my lap.

“Where are you going?” Nathaniel asked.

“Brianna is coming with me to get a few things,” Hudson said in a calm voice.

The bell finally rang, making everyone scramble out of the room. Nathaniel looked at both of us and left without saying a word.

“What do you girls have planned for your lunch break?” Mrs. Franklin asked, smiling at us while shuffling some papers.

“Not a lot,” Hudson said before looking down at the floor.

“Is everything alright?” Mrs. Franklin asked, sounding concerned and leaning on her desk.

“She would be the best one to tell, Hudson. Mrs. Franklin would never judge any of us for anything that we did. She is the good vampire, not the enemy,” I said, reassuringly.

Hudson looked at me and nodded, realising that I was right. “I’m going to the chemist to get a pregnancy test,” she admitted.

Mrs. Franklin’s eyes became wide. She walked over to the door and opened it before closing and locking it. She walked back to her desk and pulled out two slips of some sort. After writing on them, she handed one to Hudson and one to me.

“What is this for?” Hudson asked, looking at it.

“For you and Brianna not worrying about having to come back to school. Go buy the test and then do whatever you have to do,” Mrs. Franklin replied.

“What about Nate and Brandon? They will know something is up if we don’t return after lunch and we don’t really want to deal with two angry and concerned vampires because we vanished without a trace,” Hudson said.

“I will deal with them if they start asking questions.”

Leaving the classroom, I stared down at the slip and tried to think of an excuse to give Nathaniel after school, knowing that he would be the first to ask questions. Once we had gotten outside, Brandon and Nathaniel had come straight over to us.

“Why do you have leaving slips?” Brandon asked.

“Because I am not feeling well so Mrs. Franklin wrote them out for

both of us as Brianna offered to stay with me," Hudson lied.

"And where are you off to?"

"To the chemist to see if they can help me," Hudson said before realising what she said.

I looked over at her and shook my head lightly. This wasn't going to turn out the way Hudson wanted.

"I'll come," Brandon said, making Hudson's eyes become wide.

"No you don't have to," she said.

"You are sick so I will be coming with you and make sure that nothing is seriously wrong with you."

He grabbed Hudson's arm and started walking. She looked over her shoulder at me with a look of fear on her face. I shrugged my shoulders and tried to think of a plan to get Brandon away, but nothing came to mind.

"What was that about?" Nathaniel asked. "Hudson has never looked like that before. Has Brandon done something to her?"

"Something happens to be wrong," I said, hoping that he wouldn't ask any more questions and go to Brandon.

"Like what?" he pressed like the vampire he was.

"If I tell you, promise me that you will not tell Brandon a single thing. This can't come out into the open just yet," I said, looking up to him with pleading eyes.

"Why would I tell Brandon?" he asked, sounding confused.

"Because Hudson thinks she is pregnant and doesn't want Brandon knowing until she knows for sure and I don't want him finding out from anyone else but her."

Nathaniel's jaw became slack once I finished talking. He closed his eyes and breathed through his nose.

"Were you going with her to buy the test to find out if she is pregnant or not?" he finally asked, opening his eyes.

"Yes I was going but as you can see that didn't turn out well."

"Let's go find Brandon and I will tell him something has come up and then you can go with Hudson and find out," Nate said, but his tone had changed. It had become clipped and short.

We had found them outside a chemist and walked over to them.

Brandon looked at us confused about why we were there. I hit Nathaniel lightly on back, making him jump into action.

“Brandon, I just remembered that Hudson prefers to be alone when she is sick, so what I was thinking was that we leave Brianna with her and make sure that she gets home safe,” Nate said, glancing down at me.

“I think I should stay with my girlfriend if she is sick,” Brandon argued.

“Just go with Nathaniel,” Hudson said her tone angry.

“Baby, why are you acting like this for?” Brandon asked, sounding shocked.

“I want to talk to Brianna alone as she can understand what I am going through,” Hudson said, looking at me.

“It’s girl related,” I spoke up.

“Fine,” Brandon said and walked away with Nathaniel following him.

“Thank you,” she said and looked inside.

“No worries. Now, let’s go find out if you are going to be a mother or not,” I said and wrapped my arm around her shoulder, leading her inside.

Fifteen minutes later, I was sitting on the edge of Hudson’s bed, waiting for her to come back from the bathroom.

“What am I going to do if it is positive?” she asked as she walked into her bedroom, holding the test in her hand.

“It could be negative.”

“I am just hoping for Nathaniel’s sake that it is negative,” Hudson said and looked down at the test before placing it on her dresser and came back.

“What would Nathaniel do?” I asked.

“Shut down, become angry at everything, break a few things before breaking down,” she replied, staring straight ahead.

I knew Nathaniel’s temper would come out to play if Hudson was pregnant, and I now feared that he would do something he would later regret. Hudson’s alarm on her phone went off, making her jump. She got off her bed and walked over to her dresser.

“It’s positive,” she said, grabbing the test and walking back over to

where I was sitting.

“You have to tell Brandon right away. He has a right to know that he is going to be a father in less than nine months,” I said and looked at her.

“Are you crazy? He will be livid if he knew that you were the first one to know about it and not him,” she said, her eyes filling up with tears. “I can’t deal with an angry Brandon.”

“Then just tell him that you wanted me as support just in case it was negative and that you didn’t want to crush his spirit even though I am sure that he doesn’t even want kids,” I said quietly.

“He will be so angry,” Hudson sobbed. “But you are right; I have to tell him that he is going to be a father. I can’t keep this from him. Brandon already knows something is wrong with me and if I keep it any longer, he will find some sort of way to get what is wrong with me out of you.”

She got off her bed and grabbed her mobile before dialling a number. She spoke to the person for five minutes before hanging up.

“They are on their way. How do you think Nathaniel will take it?”

“Please, don’t tell him just yet. I don’t want to leave with a furious vampire who is capable of murder in a blink of an eye. Just wait until you start to show before you start telling people, including Nathaniel, but just make sure I am not around when you do so.”

Hudson’s bedroom door opened, revealing Brandon and Nathaniel. Sighing, I pushed myself off the bed and grabbed my school bag. Hudson had her hands behind her back, hiding the test from Nathaniel and Brandon while looking afraid. I didn’t blame her. Her life was about to change.

“I’ll see you at school,” I said and walked out of the room, gesturing at Nathaniel to follow.

I glanced over my shoulder to make sure that he was following me. He didn’t need to hear what Hudson planned on telling Brandon. I would leave that job to them once they were ready to announce it.

“So, is Hudson pregnant or not?” he asked as we walked to Jack’s chemist.

“No, she isn’t,” I lied, hoping he would believe me.

“Good. I don’t think Brandon would be ready for a huge step like that just yet.”

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes really. Brandon has never really been the one to want a child, but he loves Hudson that much that if she ever wanted a child, he would try his hardest to give that to her,” he said and looked down at me.

I nodded, but didn’t say anything. I was hoping that Brandon would be taking this well and not doing something to scare Hudson in her fragile state of mind.

“Do you want to do something for the rest of the afternoon?” Nathaniel asked.

“What did you have planned?” I asked.

“Anything that you wanted to do,” he replied and grabbed my hand.

“I don’t really want to do anything. I just want to go home,” I replied.

“Well then, let’s go to see Jack and he might bring us home today since he finishes in thirty minutes,” Nathaniel replied.

When we entered, Erica glared at us when we walked past her. Jack looked up from the counter and saw us standing there.

“Why aren’t you and Brianna in class?” Jack asked.

“Aubrey let us go early,” he replied. “So can we just hang here to kill some time before we catch the bus home?”

“Well, I finish soon, so I can take you and Brianna home. Just hang in the staff room,” Jack said.

Nathaniel nodded and started walking, dragging me along with him. He opened the door and led me inside and dumping our school bags on the table.

“Amylia was telling me in her thoughts before that it is almost your birthday and you don’t want to celebrate it,” Nathaniel said and sat down.

“Why should I have to celebrate another year of getting older? It’s only reminding me that I am getting closer to death,” I replied.

“Brianna, please let us celebrate your birthday. We will have a family barbeque at your house. Jack and I will bring around one we use for when we go camping and you can use that one,” Nathaniel pleaded.

“I guess it would be the perfect chance for you to meet my grandpar-

ents," I muttered.

"Then please tell me that I can plan something for the love of my life's birthday?" he asked, actually pouting and making me feel guilty.

"Fine," I relented.

The door opened and Erica walked into the room, glaring at me. I crossed my arms and looked down at the floor and away from her cold stare that Augusta had inherited. The room was thick with tension, and I had no intention to break that.

"You know Nathaniel; you would be perfect for my Augusta," Erica said and walked over to the cupboard.

"My heart has been taken by Brianna and it will only be freed if she gives it back."

"Augusta is more your type though. You both have money and beauty."

"Erica, I don't want to date your daughter. Not now and not ever. She is not even my type and never will be."

"My daughter is perfect for you and one day you will see that. Just like Jack will see that I am perfect for him and not Bethany."

"How dare you say anything bad about my mother in my presence? She saved me from a very dark path and I will be grateful to her for the rest of my life."

"What is going on in here?" Jack asked, walking into the room.

"Why are they in here for? You don't allow anyone else's children to come back here, and yet, you allow Brianna," Erica said and crossed her arms.

"Brianna is a part of my family and so is her mother. They have been ever since Nate won her heart."

"What does Brianna have that my Augusta doesn't?"

"She treats people like a human being and not like a piece of paper or a used Kleenex that you throw away," Jack replied and grabbed his car keys. "And if you keep on talking about the people I care about in that matter again, you will be looking for another job."

"You wouldn't dare sack me! I am the best worker you have ever had!"

"You were, but other people have now taken your crown and I know

for a fact they won't be giving it back," he replied and ushered us out of the room.

"Does she enjoy making lives a living hell like Augusta?" I asked once we were outside.

"Augusta is worse than Erica," Nate said and grabbed my hand.

"They will soon realise that they are wasting their time, but until then, we all have to deal with it," Jack replied and unlocked the car.

I glanced down at the ground, thinking of Hudson. I didn't know what was happening or even if she was alright, but I was sure that I would find out at school.

"Are you alright?" Nathaniel whispered in my ear.

"I'm just thinking about Hudson. I know that Brandon is with her, but I am still concerned."

"She is a strong girl baby, but I am glad that she has a friend like you."

"I love you Nate," I whispered.

"I love you too Brianna," he whispered back.

I knew keeping Hudson's pregnancy would affect my relationship with Nathaniel once it came out into the open. I had already lied to him saying that she isn't when she is. I could only hope that it wouldn't drive a wedge between us once it was out in the open.

17. Discoveries

The week had flown by and it was now Friday evening.

“Brianna, what’s on your mind? Do you want to talk about what is bothering you?” Hudson asked, sitting in the middle of my bed with her legs crossed and looking at me concerned.

“Just thinking about everything that has happened over the past month,” I replied, and looked up at her.

“How is everything going between you and Nate? When we last saw you, you both seemed on edge about something.”

“Hudson, I’m hiding your pregnancy from Nate and he knows that I’m hiding something. I’m surprised he hasn’t seen through my lies and demanded that I tell him the truth about this.”

“We have decided that we are going to start telling people after the basketball game. I’m further along than I thought and I will be showing very soon so we won’t be able to keep it a secret much longer,” Hudson said and placed her hand on her stomach.

“How far along are you?”

“Two and a half months.”

“Are you then going to come to Nate’s celebration get together he is having in a few hours? I’m pretty sure that there will be alcohol there.”

“Yeah, I will be there. It is only going to be the four of us right?”

I nodded. “The rest of his family are heading off to Melbourne for the weekend. That is why Amylia isn’t here with us.”

“And no doubt they will be spending that much money; they would be able to keep the retail sector alive in one hit.”

My bedroom door opened, revealing Nathaniel with a gift bag in his hand. I rolled my eyes, making Hudson look over at him.

“What have you got in that expensive looking bag?” Hudson asked.

“Brianna’s birthday present for later on in the month,” he replied, earning a glare off me.

“When is your birthday?” she asked, looking at me.

“Fifteenth of March,” I replied.

“That’s not even three weeks away.”

I nodded before looking at my vampire. “Why have you brought me something now? Mum usually waits until two days before my birthday to get me something and she never can find me something that I will like.”

“Baby, I haven’t even finished getting your birthday presents yet. I still need to visit four more shops before I am finished,” he said and sat on my bed.

“Do you have a death wish?” I asked, appalled.

“Who would want to harm me because I’m spoiling the love of my life?”

“The rest of my family that you have never met.”

“Okay, I’m sensing a fight, so I’m gonna go before it starts,” Hudson said, getting off my bed and grabbing her jacket.

“You look like you have put on a kilo or two Hudson. Has Brandon been force feeding you?” Nathaniel asked Hudson, making my eyes go wide.

I quickly glanced down at her stomach, seeing it had started to stick out a little more than normal, but that was to be expected since Hudson was about the same weight as I was and she would show much more

quickly because of that. Suddenly, I started to imagine myself with a baby bump and Nathaniel giving it nothing but attention constantly as it grew every month for nine months.

Hudson pulled me out of my thoughts. "He wishes Nate. I have just changed my diet back to the bad foods I use to enjoy before my weight loss."

She walked out of the room, and I looked at Nathaniel. "What does she mean by she lost weight?"

"When Hudson and Brandon became a couple two years ago, she was fifteen kilos heavier than now. Brandon loved the fact she had curves, but Hudson wasn't happy with the way she looked. Once Augusta found out they were a couple, she made Hudson's life a living hell. She said something about her weight that made her snap and Hudson went on a strict diet, shedding all the weight she had, making Brandon loathe Augusta."

"So what will happen now if Hudson is gaining weight again?" I asked.

"Augusta will try and use that as an advantage to take Brandon away from her and make her life a living hell until she gets the weight back off," he replied, glancing down at me.

There was a high chance that Hudson was going to gain the weight back in her pregnancy and maybe a bit more. I was only hoping that her life wouldn't be turned upside down by a certain witch.

"What do you have planned for tonight?" I asked, changing the subject.

"Jack has given me a couple of bottles of his wine from the cellar that we all will be drinking tonight. Bethany has made a whole bunch of pizzas and then we will all crash in the living room and watch movies or something like that. Beth and Jack don't want the house trashed so I am on good behaviour," he said.

"So it will be like a sleep over, but with expensive wine and home-made food?"

"Exactly; so what were you and Hudson talking about before I came into the room?" he asked, sounding interested.

"Girl things," I replied.

“You seem tense.”

“Just some things that Hudson told me I’m still trying to digest.”

“Do you want to tell me?”

“I think Brandon will tell you everything when Hudson gives him the right to do so.”

“It sounds like they have created a sin of some sorts.”

“It is in a way.”

Nathaniel frowned but didn’t say anything. Mum walked into my room, making me look over to her. She smiled and placed my folded washing on my bed next to me.

“I could have done that,” I said and moved off my bed.

“Brianna, I don’t mind doing these things for you,” mum replied.

“Marie, I was just thinking for Brianna’s birthday that we could have it at a guest house. That way, your parents will have accommodation so they can stay overnight,” Nathaniel said.

“I was happy to have it in a pub in Colac, but just as long as my parents can get a lift there and back to Forrest. I don’t really want them driving in the dark on an open road like that,” mum said.

“That can be arranged. I’m sure Beth and Jack will take them without no complaints.”

“Do I get a say in this?” I asked.

“We all know what you will say Brianna,” Nathaniel said.

“Fine, but don’t expect me to enjoy myself like everyone else will,” I said, and walked out of the room.

Opening the front door, I ran down the steps and straight for the ranges, needing to get away from everything and think. This was the time of year when I didn’t want to celebrate anything, and that included my birthday. Why couldn’t people understand that? Was it a sin not to celebrate getting older? I stopped running when I was out of seeing range and fell to the ground, wanting to scream or break something with my bare hands.

The fact Amylia and Nathaniel had guilt tripped me into doing something for my birthday made my stomach churn violently. It usually was just my family and I gathered around a homemade chocolate cake with one candle stuck on the top of it. That was enough for me to handle

every year. I didn't want or need a big celebration that I knew Nathaniel and Amylia wanted to give me.

"Why can't it be something I want?" I asked.

A tree branch snapped behind where I was sitting, making me look over my shoulder to see Chase standing there, looking straight at me.

"Brianna, what are you doing out here all alone? Where is Nathaniel?" Chase asked, approaching me.

"I think he is still at my house. He was when I left. Knowing him, he'd be looking for me about now," I said, my tone flat.

"Has something happened?"

"What makes you think something has happened?" I asked, looking up at him.

"The tone of your voice for one and your body language is another giveaway," he said and sat next to me.

"Amylia and Nate have taken it in their stride to plan my birthday this year, but they don't understand the pain that day brings for me. I just want to forget about it for a change and just spend it like a normal day."

"What day did your father leave your mother?"

"I'm not sure on the day, but it wasn't long before my second birthday. I just don't want to celebrate a day when everything fell apart of my mother without her realising it."

"Why have they taken it upon themselves to plan you something?"

"Because they are the most stubborn vampires I have ever met. I just don't want anything happening on my birthday that will ruin it and knowing my luck, something will happen that no one will be expecting."

"I'll talk to them and see if I can get this idea out of their heads this year around. I've heard that Saul is around Colac and he might be lurking around on your birthday just to see what you have planned. It wouldn't take him long to realise that we are with you. He could take it among himself to gate crash it to see what we are like and start throwing around orders like all fathers would do when their daughter starts a relationship with a boy."

"That is my greatest fear. Mum and I...we don't like showing weakness and that is a given, but if he were to show up, our weakness would

be shown and there is the high chance that my grandfather would end up killing my father if he did show up on my birthday. I don't really want a murder to remember as well. "

"Does Nate know about this?"

"I'm hoping that mum will inform Nate more about my father than I have told him," I admitted.

"I will still talk to him before I go with Amylia tonight. The whole family has been kicked out of the house tonight, so we have decided to take advantage of late night shopping in Melbourne and see if we can put a dint in our bank accounts for once in our vampiric lifestyle," Chase said and rubbed his hands together in gleam.

"Well, I am sure that you will have fun trying to do that," I replied.

"I better go, and I think you should do the same as well. Nathaniel is back at home so if you go straight there now, we will be gone by the time you arrive. Nathaniel wants you to himself until Hudson and Brandon arrive and we don't really want you staying out in the cold for too long. It brings back some memories that we would rather forget about from our human life."

I nodded and got up from where I was sitting. I went to thank Chase, but he had vanished into thin air before I got the chance. I made my way out of the ranges and walked to Nathaniel's, seeing that Chase was right about them being gone when I arrived.

Nathaniel was pacing out the front and looked up when I walked along the path to the front door.

"I had Marie pack an overnight bag for you," he said when I stopped in front of him.

"That's fine," I replied. "How long do we have before Hudson and Brandon arrives?"

"About two hours."

Nathaniel opened the front door and gestured for me to go inside. I walked into the lounge room and sat on the couch, waiting for him to come into the room.

"Hudson looked different when she was at your place before," Nathaniel said when he walked into the room.

"I didn't notice anything different about her," I said, hoping that he

wouldn't catch the shaking in my voice.

"She has this glow about her that I have never seen before. I have to ask Brandon what is going on with her," he said, sitting next to me.

My heart stopped beating before breaking into a sprint. He would find out that I was hiding Hudson's pregnancy from him and I didn't know how his temper would come out into play.

"But would Brandon tell you though?" I asked.

"Lately he has been walking with an extra spring in his step, so I want to know why he is so happy for. I know for fact that they aren't engaged as Hudson doesn't have a ring on her finger, but there is something."

"Well good luck in getting him to tell you what is going on," I said, kicking off my shoes.

"Brandon trusts me a lot Brianna so he will tell me everything in a heartbeat."

This wasn't going to plan. I would need to pull Hudson aside some-time during the night and tell her what Nathaniel had planned. I needed to see her reaction. If Brandon has decided to go around and start telling some people about the pregnancy, that wouldn't go down well with Hudson.

Nathaniel moved closer to me and started kissing my neck. He wrapped his arms around my frame, pulling me in closer. I was in shock from this sudden mood change from Nathaniel. He had never shown me this type of attention before.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Just giving you some attention," he murmured against my neck before lavishing it with attention again.

"Why though?" I asked, closing my eyes when I felt his teeth graze my neck.

"Because I love you and want to do something with you," he replied, lightly biting the area.

That told me exactly what he wanted to do with me. He wanted to drink my blood again. And the crazy thing was; I was going to allow him to drink from me.

"If you want my blood Nate, just take it and be done with it before Hudson and Brandon get here," I said, moving my hair out of the way so

I wouldn't get any blood on it.

Nathaniel bit down lightly, making me gasp from pleasure. I lightly moaned from the sensation of the blood leaving my body as it felt so strange. It would take a while to get use to that if he wanted to do it all the time.

"Do you want some of mine?" he asked after he pulled away, my blood around his mouth.

"No, I will be fine. I don't think blood will go down well on an empty stomach," I said, making his eyes narrow at my choice of words.

"Haven't you eaten anything today?" he asked.

"I had an apple for breakfast this morning, but that was about it. My stomach has been feeling funny all day and I don't really want to risk eating anything for that reason," I admitted to him.

"Then you will not be drinking anything tonight. I do not want you being sick on an empty stomach."

"Yes father," I said, making him roll his eyes.

Nathaniel looked down at the couch, not saying anything. That was a dead giveaway that something was bothering him, but I didn't ask him. I didn't want to push him. I knew he would tell me in time.

"I would do anything to become a father," he whispered after a while.

"Nate, you will become a father one day. What is the rush, anyway? We haven't even been together two months yet and there is no way I am ready to bring a baby into this world when I haven't even finished school," I said.

"Baby, there are couples out there that have a baby straight away without even really knowing each other," he pointed out.

"We aren't one to those couples."

"Anyway, we were talking about you not eating anything for most of the day. I don't really want you to develop an eating disorder on me. I don't think I would be able to handle something like that."

"Well, let me just make sure my neck isn't dripping blood and I will make myself something to eat. You will just need to show me where everything is," I said, getting up from where I was sitting.

"Your neck isn't bleeding at all. You will still have vampire blood in

your system, which will help heal injuries,” Nathaniel said, leading me into the kitchen.

He pointed to everything in the kitchen that I would be able to use and then left the room. I didn’t even want this sandwich, but I knew Nathaniel would worry about me if I didn’t eat anything. I didn’t need him breathing down my neck any more than usual.

I walked back into the living room, food in hand and saw Brandon standing in the living room with an overnight back.

“Here already?” I asked, making him look over his shoulder at me.

“Yeah we are. Nate is helping Hudson get some things out of the car for tonight,” he replied.

“Cool,” I said, sitting on the couch.

“Are you drinking tonight Hudson?” Nathaniel asked from in the hallway.

“No, I don’t think so. I thought I would stay sober just in case something happened and I needed to drive,” she replied.

Nathaniel nodded and walked down the hallway, Brandon following him. Hudson walked over to me and smiled before sitting down next to me.

“Beth left the homemade pizzas in the fridge so we can put them on when we get hungry,” Nathaniel said when he walked into the room, looking straight at me.

“Just don’t force the food down my throat. I don’t think I will be able to handle much,” I said, making Hudson look at me.

“Nate, come show me this blood supply you have been raving on about for the past two years and leave the girls alone to talk,” Brandon said, placing his hand on Nathaniel’s shoulder.

“Of course,” he replied, leading Brandon out of the room.

I smiled and watched them walk out of the room.

“Haven’t you been able to eat much?” Hudson asked, making me look at her.

“I don’t eat much anyway. You know that mum and I can’t afford much as it is.”

“That explains why you have only taken two bites out of your sandwich,” she said, looking down at it.

“Do you want it?” I asked, offering it to her.

She took it off me and bit into it before looking at my neck and raising her eyebrows at what she was seeing. I knew she would be looking at the bite mark Nathaniel inflicted on me just before they arrived.

“I see that Nathaniel has been drinking from you,” she said.

“Has Brandon done that to you?” I asked.

“He stopped for the time being,” she said, placing her hand on her growing stomach.

“Don’t you worry about the lack of iron after a while? I don’t really want to become anaemic due to Nathaniel drinking my blood.”

“It’s a risk that you have to take to make your vampire happy. Now that you have let Nathaniel have your blood willingly, he will want it more frequently. It will become a craving to him as you are his mate and he will want to keep the bond you have both made with drinking each other’s blood as strong as possible.”

“I have no plans on letting Nathaniel feed off me,” I said, looking at her.

“No one ever does. It just happens without anyone realising about it until you have lost so much blood, you almost die.”

“Has this happened to you?”

“No it hasn’t happened to me, but I have been in contact with a lot of vampires throughout my relationship with Brandon and they have a lot of stories that you wouldn’t believe.”

Nathaniel and Brandon came back into the room before I could say anymore. By looking at them, I could tell that they were freshly fed with blood. Grabbing the plate off Hudson, I got up and walked into the kitchen, brushing up against Nathaniel.

Placing the plate in the sink, I turned around and was face to face with my vampire. Wrapping his hand around the back of my neck, he crushed his lips to mine, his other hand trailing down my back and stopping at my tailbone.

He deepened the kiss while pulling me closer to his cold, hard body. I placed my hands on his chest before gripping his long sleeved top.

“What was that about?” I asked after he pulled away and tried to catch my breath.

"I have natural urges like any other guy Brianna," he said, looking me up and down, his eyes darkening.

"Okay, I hate to break up the sexual tension in here, but Hudson and I are starting to get hungry and I am starting to get a craving for expensive wine," Brandon said, walking into the kitchen and looking at both of us with a glint in his eyes.

"Alright," Nathaniel said, pulling away from me and walking over to the fridge

I went to stand in the corner, making sure that I was out of the way of Nathaniel and his food handling.

"Brianna, do you think you can handle this while I go and get the wine?" Nathaniel asked, pulling the pizzas out of the fridge and placing them on the bench.

"Sure," I replied and grabbed them.

Nathaniel left the room, leaving Brandon and I alone. I placed the pizzas in the oven and turned around so I could look at Brandon.

"It will be good practice for when you and Nathaniel get your own house and settle down," Brandon said, smirking at me.

"I know how to look after a house and prepare meals. My grandmother taught me when I was only child. I was always helping her in the kitchen," I said, looking Brandon in the eye.

"Then I happen to think that you will make a good wife if you and Nathaniel ever get married."

"Well, I think that I am a bit too young for marriage. Have you asked Hudson to marry you?" I asked.

"Not yet, but I am working up the courage to asking Hudson," he said just as Nathaniel walked back into the room.

"You're going to ask Hudson to marry you?" Nathaniel asked, placing the two bottles of wine on the bench.

"Why do you find it that hard to believe?" Brandon asked, grabbing one of the bottles of wine from the bench.

"You have never shown any desire to get married before. What has changed?" Nathaniel asked.

"I'll tell you tomorrow when Brianna and Hudson are shopping," Brandon said.

“Why are Brianna and I going shopping tomorrow?” Hudson asked, walking into the room.

“Because I want to talk to Nathaniel about something,” Brandon said, looking at her and raised his eyebrows.

I knew he was going to tell Nathaniel about the pregnancy and I was only hoping that he would be in a descent mood when we got back. I knew Nathaniel would be firing a whole bunch of questions at me and demanding answers about why I knew more about the pregnancy than Hudson’s own mother did.

“Why can’t you just tell me now?” Nathaniel asked.

“It will be better without us around, so it can wait until tomorrow. Now, how long do we have to wait before we can eat? I am very, very hungry at the moment,” Hudson said, crossing her arms.

“In about half an hour; how about I pour each of us a glass of wine and we can relax in the lounge room?” Nathaniel suggested.

“I will just have one glass and that’s it,” Hudson said, making me look at her.

“Do you want to risk drinking Brianna after what you told me before?” Nathaniel asked, looking at me.

“Just pour me a glass and be done with it,” I said, crossing my arms.

Two hours after eating, Nathaniel and Brandon had wiped themselves out on the two bottles of wine and were passed out on the two mattresses on the living room floor. I swirled around my half full third glass of wine and shaking my head.

“I can’t believe they wiped themselves out. Brandon is going to become a father in seven months’ time. He can’t keep on acting like this with Nathaniel when there is liquor involved,” Hudson said, catching my attention.

“Nathaniel has done this before?” I asked.

“They do it almost every weekend. I think it’s because most teenagers binge drink on a regular basis and they are stuck at the age of nineteen and twenty for all eternity. I guess they just want to feel young.”

I still couldn’t get over that Nathaniel was doing this. I lowered my eyes onto his sleeping form and was tempted to throw the rest of my wine over him. But then, I thought about it more and I couldn’t be angry

with him. I had happened to drink Alex under the table when I was fifteen.

"I guess I can't be angry with Nathaniel for doing this. I did the same with Alex, though it was more of a drinking game at his birthday."

"Does Nate know about that?" Hudson asked, grabbing a handful of chocolates out of the bowl on the coffee table.

"No, he doesn't know about this, but I should tell him about it."

"Yeah, you should because Alex might slip up, thinking you have told him."

"I will if everything goes smooth tomorrow. I just don't know how Nathaniel will take the news of your pregnancy. He told me before that he would do anything to become a father and I'm worried that this might push him over the edge and make him do something."

"In a way, I am sorry that I fell pregnant before you did because Nathaniel will start craving a child."

"Will he?"

"Yeah; when he was human and with Mary, he wanted a child then, but he didn't want to get her pregnant as he knew he would have to stay by her side because of the child. You and I both know that Nathaniel isn't a virgin and there are a lot of willing teenage girls out there that would give Nathaniel a child without a second glance because of his vampiric beauty, but Brianna, you will be the mother of his future Dhampir's. You are the one that will help the Norwood legacy live on into the future. I'm just worried that he might pressure you into doing something that you aren't ready for."

"I don't think Nathaniel would pressure me into anything. He wouldn't want to risk losing me over anything stupid," I said.

Hudson nodded and placed a chocolate in her mouth, chewing it slowly. Nathaniel's mobile phone started ringing suddenly, making me get up and grab it off the side table.

"Who is it?" Hudson asked.

"A blocked number; who would Nathaniel have blocked from his phone?"

"One guess would be Augusta, but I would let it ring through just to see if the person rings back."

“Why would Nathaniel have Augusta’s phone number for if it is her? He has never shown any sort of interest in her beforehand so what would have changed?”

“When the Pryor’s first moved here, Augusta handed out her number to Chase, James and Nathaniel, and what I have heard, Nathaniel was that lonely and wasn’t aware what she was like, he stored it into his phone. Once he realised what she was like, Nate changed his tune on her and blocked her number and became the cold person that he was before you melted his heart.”

“That explains a lot then.”

His phone rang again, making me answer it.

“Hello?”

“Why isn’t Nathaniel answering his phone for?” Augusta asked on the other end.

“Hello to you too Augusta; what can I help you with?” I asked, looking at Hudson.

“You can get me Nathaniel for one,” she said, coldly.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t do that,” I replied, moving Nathaniel’s mobile away from my ear and preparing for Augusta to start yelling and screaming.

“And why the hell not?” she shouted.

“Because he is asleep and I don’t want to wake him up so he can talk to you, but I will be sure to tell him tomorrow morning after breakfast that you called and wished to speak to him. If he wants to continue this call, I’m sure that he will can you back,” I said, hanging up.

“I just hope that she doesn’t decide to show up around here. I don’t think my changing hormones will be able to take her showing up,” Hudson said.

“Speaking of that, how is everything going really? I really haven’t been able to ask you much as Nathaniel has been around me a lot lately,” I said, placing his phone back on the side table and sitting back down on the couch.

“Well, for the past seventy-two hours, I have been throwing up every morning but Brandon looked up some tips that I am trying to curve that. I don’t want to spend the next couple of months being sick all the

time,” she said. “And you should see what I have been craving lately.”

“Yeah, I am imagining the cravings that you will be experiencing. Aren’t you at all a bit scared?” I asked.

“Of course I’m scared. I’m going to be a mother before school even finishes and I’m scared about the weight that I will be putting on. I know that I can’t let myself go and live off junk for seven months.”

“How do you think Brandon will cope with being a father?”

Hudson sighed, but didn’t say anything before shrugging her shoulders. This seemed to be a sensitive subject for Hudson. Did she think he was going to leave her or something?

“I think we should go to sleep. The boys will be regretting what they did tonight tomorrow morning when they wake up,” Hudson said suddenly.

“You can go. I’m gonna stay awake a bit longer,” I said and smiled at her

“Okay. I’ll see you in the morning,” she said, and lay down next to Brandon, pulling the blanket over the top of them.

I finished my glass of wine before walking into the kitchen, dimming the living room lights in the process so I could see where I was going. Placing my glass in the sink, I looked out the kitchen window, seeing the moon shine its light down the ground.

I walked back into the living room, seeing that there was no blanket on the mattress I would be sharing with Nathaniel. Walking down the hallway, I opened his bedroom door and walked inside the room, flicking a light on so I could see where I was going and made my way to his closet, hoping that was where he kept his blankets. When I opened the closet door, a shoe box fell from the top shelf onto the floor.

Picking it up, I expected it to be heavy, but it wasn’t. Shaking it, I heard something move inside of it. I spotted a blanket and grabbed that before walking over to his bed with the shoe box in hand. I wanted to know what he had in it. Opening the lid, I saw that he had a whole bunch of photos that looked new. Tipping them out, I picked up a couple and almost dropped them. Every single photo he had was of me.

“Why would he only have photos of me for?” I asked, figuring out they were taken at school without me even knowing. I thought back to

when Nathaniel gave me his drawing and said that he had Amylia take a photo of me for him to use.

Grabbing them, I placed them back in the shoe box and back on the top shelf. Blanket in hand, I turned off his light and walked out the room. I threw the blanket down on the mattress, some of it landing on Nathaniel. He groaned and opened his eyes.

“Brianna, please tell me that is you?” he asked, not lifting his head up.

“Yeah it’s me. I just grabbed a blanket from your room in case it got cold overnight,” I whispered, getting down to his height.

“What time is it?”

“After eleven; you and Brandon crashed a few hours ago, but I’m sure you will feel it in the morning.”

“Are you coming to join me?” he asked, reaching for me.

“I will soon. Just go back to sleep and I will see you in the morning,” I said, kissing his cheek and getting up.

Half an hour later, I crawled in beside Nathaniel and fell asleep almost straight away.

I woke up to Hudson talking. “That teaches you both for drinking so much in one hit.”

“Please, not so loud,” I heard Nathaniel say, his tone miserable. “It’s too early.”

“I would like to know how Brianna is going to fare. She had three glasses of wine,” Brandon said, making me open my eyes.

Standing up, I caught Nathaniel’s attention. I felt completely fine, not like how the two vampires would be faring.

“Aren’t you at all a bit hung over?” Nathaniel asked, looking at me.

“I feel completely fine,” I said, walking over to them.

Nathaniel groaned and closed his eyes. Hudson looked at me before shaking her head.

“I’m gonna go get changed” I said.

“Then we can go and have some girl time and leave our vampires to wallow in misery,” she said, smirking at the two of them.

“Sounds like a plan,” I said and walked out the room.

I knew my things would be in Nathaniel's room so I went straight there. Walking to my overnight bag, I pulled out a long sleeved top and jeans. After getting changed, I tied my hair back in a loose bun before walking back to the living room.

"You don't have to go with Hudson. You can stay here with me and Brandon," Nathaniel said, getting up from where he was sitting and walking over to me.

"I want to go with her. I think we need to have some girl time," I said, slipping on my pink ballet flats.

Nathaniel nodded before grabbing his wallet off the side table. He opened it and pulled out two one hundred dollar notes, handing them to me. I shook my head and tried to hand it back to him. "I want you to have fun on my expense. Buy whatever you want and don't worry about the price tag."

"This is way too much for me Nathaniel. I have fifty dollars on me, so I can use that. I don't need to spend your money."

"Brianna, I'm not taking it back, so put it in your purse and go have fun. I'll see you later on this afternoon," he said, lightly kissing me on the lips.

Hudson had Brandon's car keys in her hand, smiling at both of us. Grabbing my handbag from off the floor, I turned to look at Hudson, the money Nathaniel gave me still in my hand. She walked towards the front door, with me following.

"Does Nathaniel usually hand you money all the time?" Hudson asked when we were halfway to Colac.

"That is the first time that he has done that. He usually pays for everything else though and that usually ends up in a fight."

"Do you think that if you had money behind you, he wouldn't be doing this?"

"What are you trying to say?"

"I'm not trying to say anything. I'm just thinking that Nate might be doing this because of the fact you come from a family that is struggling financially and that he might be doing this to stop some sort of guilt that you don't have much."

"I don't feel guilty that I don't have a lot. I am proud that I come

from a mother that is strong willed and can raise me on only the money she brings in from work, which isn't really much when you count in bills, food and everything else that is needed to survive."

"I wasn't talking about you though. I was talking about Nathaniel. He might be feeling guilty that you don't have much and is trying to use his money to buy things that you can't afford."

Throughout the day, what Hudson said had stuck in my mind. I would need to ask him once they left but that's if he was even in a talkative mood. I didn't know what sort of mood he would slip into once he found out about Hudson's pregnancy. But I could only hope for was that he didn't become too angry. I didn't want him doing something that he would regret.

18. Open Fire

Walking through the front door with Hudson, the mood changed from happy to something else when we had left.

Brandon and Nathaniel were sitting at the table in a sombre mood, and looked up when we entered the room. The tension in the room was thick and cutting a knife through it wouldn't have done anything. It would have made it a lot worse than it was right now. I was dreading Brandon and Hudson leaving as I knew Nathaniel would go in for the kill once we were alone.

I looked over at Hudson who had her eyes on Nathaniel and a scared look on her face. She knew what he was capable of doing, just like I knew what he could do in a blink of an eye and in a fit of rage without even realising what he was doing. Hudson glanced down at my hand and grabbed it, holding it tightly while we waited for someone to speak.

"Congratulations on the pregnancy Hudson. I'm sure that you will make a wonderful mother in about seven months' time," Nathaniel said, his voice flat and bleak.

"Thank you," she said and looked at Brandon before letting go of my hand. "We should go and let Nathaniel and Brianna talk in private about some things. I don't think they will want us around while they are talking."

Brandon nodded and got up from where he was sitting. Hudson placed her hand on her stomach and rubbed it without even realising. I looked at Nathaniel and saw that he had a strange look in his eyes while he was staring at Hudson. Brandon grabbed the bag he brought and looked at Nathaniel, making him move his stare onto him.

"I'll see you at school on Monday," he said.

"Yeah," Nathaniel said his tone flat.

They walked out of the room, leaving us alone. Nathaniel got up from the table and walked over to me slowly, a look of betrayal on his face. I knew this had caused more damage than I thought it would and now I had to face the consequences of my actions that I had helped cause.

"I'm sorry that I lied about Hudson's pregnancy to you. I know that I shouldn't have done that," I whispered.

"I asked you if she was pregnant and you said no! Why did you do that? Why couldn't you just tell me the truth and say that she was pregnant? It might not have been as much of a shock to my system!" he shouted, anger and fury in his voice.

I knew I had betrayed him, but I felt it was for his own good. I closed my eyes for a split second before opening them and staring at him. Nathaniel's eyes were hard with anger and I knew my silence wouldn't be helping this cause.

"Because I knew it would devastate you! I was trying to save you from that pain that it has inflicted on you!" I shouted back at him.

Nathaniel shook his head and walked over to the couch. I didn't follow him as I knew better. I stood in my place and followed him with my eyes.

"I wanted to have a baby before Brandon and Hudson did," he whispered, looking down at his hands.

"It isn't a game on who gets to have a baby first Nathaniel. It is a lifetime commitment that you can't back out of once you realise that you aren't ready when the baby is born, unless you do the gutless thing and walk out because you can't cope with that kind of commitment. Mum learnt that the hard way in the end," I said, sitting next to him on the couch.

"I know that it is a lifetime commitment and that is something that I am willing to make to get the one thing that I want in my life," he said, looking over at me.

"Nate, if I was ready for that step, I would demand that you take me to your room and try your hardest to conceive a child with me, but I'm not," I whispered. "I mean, I'm not even seventeen yet."

"I'm not going to force you into doing anything that you don't want

to do. There is just something inside of me that craves to become someone's hero when they are growing up. I want to be a person that a child looks up to for advice and support. If I ever had a daughter, I would want to be the one that would check for monsters in the middle of the night when she woke up and was scared and treat her like the princess that she is in my eyes."

"Maybe we should wait for when Hudson has her baby and then decide if that is something we want to do in the future," I said.

"You mean that you would give me a baby?"

"Nate, I want to be the mother of your children. It doesn't even bother me that they will be more vampire than human. I want you just to be happy."

"If we had a girl, she would have more human in her and if we had a boy, he will have more vampire in him."

"Well, I think I can handle that."

"Are you sure though? I mean, a Dhampir is much stronger than a human and could easily do something to you while in the womb by mistake."

"What would be worse? A couple of broken bones from a baby kicking too hard by mistake or a vampire taking your blood?" I asked.

"A vampire taking your blood. Bones heal in time, but a vampire might not stop with the blood sucking," Nathaniel replied.

"I would rather take the broken bones," I muttered.

"What does that mean?" he asked.

"Broken bones are easier to explain than bite marks and after all the time you have spent on this earth, I thought that you would have known this by now," I said, looking over at him.

"But I like drinking your blood," he said, pouting like a child who couldn't get something they wanted.

"Nate, I need my blood to survive and not to feed a vampire."

"I need blood to survive as well don't forget. I'm a vampire and not a human."

"Then I think you need to live off your storage of blood as I won't let you take mine all the time. I don't really fancy explaining to everyone I pass in the street why I have bite marks all over me. We don't want to

give it away that you are different.”

“Brianna, everyone already knows that I am different to them and they are trying to put their fingers on it, but you are the only one that I allowed to become close to me to figure out what is different about me.”

“I can’t have this coming out into the open that you are a vampire and Hudson sure as hell can’t have it coming out into the open that she is carrying a vampire’s child. People don’t think they are real but you people are.”

“Then we won’t let this come out into the open. If she goes into labour earlier than most pregnancies, we can always say she was further along than everyone thought to cover our tracks. The hospital could have gotten the dates mixed up or the baby could be strong enough to go home, even though there is a high chance the baby will come with Hudson is seven and a half months pregnant,” Nathaniel said.

I just looked at Nathaniel after he spoke. How can you cover for a human who is going to give birth to who would be the spawn of Lucifer in some people’s eyes? How do you cover from what could be a certain death from a baby vampire? All these questions and no answers to them were running through my mind. Hudson was my best friend and I didn’t want her getting hurt or worse; dying.

“What are you thinking about?” Nathaniel asked, pulling me out of my thoughts.

“I have all these questions and no answers to them. What happens if Hudson dies during the birth of the baby? What will happen to Brandon if that was the case? Would he stay strong for the baby that is half Hudson or will he abandon it so he can commit suicide to be with the love of his life? What is going to happen? Will their lives be the same with a Dhampir in their family?”

“Whoa baby, calm down. Nothing like that will happen. Hudson is a strong girl and will get through this pregnancy in one piece. And I know for a fact that if anything happened to her and the baby survived, Brandon will look after it because Hudson would have wanted him to do so.”

“But what happens if she and the baby don’t survive?” I asked, already knowing the answer to the question I just asked.

“We both know the answer to that one Brianna. I don’t need to tell you what will happen in a case like that,” Nathaniel replied, looking down at the floor before to the entrance way.

“Is someone outside?” I asked after five minutes of silence.

Nathaniel shook his head and looked back over to me, like I had broken him out of his thoughts. I stared at him, hoping he would talk to me. He didn’t. All Nathaniel did was move from where he was sitting and walked out of the room, leaving me alone and confused over what just happened. It was like he had completely shut down and I didn’t even know why it had happened.

Five minutes later, Amylia walked through the front door with her usual million dollar smile on her face until she saw me sitting alone on the couch with a blank and empty look on my face. She shot daggers to the hallway and walked over to me.

“What has Nathaniel done this time?” she asked, sitting down next to me and wrapping her arm around my shoulder. “And don’t leave out any of the details. I need an excuse to yell at him and this could be my perfect chance.”

“He hasn’t done anything. We were just talking and then all of a sudden, he shut down and walked out of the room without saying a single word to me or explaining what was wrong,” I replied, looking at her.

“Does it have anything to do with Hudson’s pregnancy that she is hiding from everyone?” Amylia asked, submitting a massive crash from Nathaniel’s room.

“I think we have our answer and how did you know about that? I thought they weren’t telling anyone yet?” I asked, looking at her.

“When you are a vampire, you can see the signs of pregnancy before the person even realises so I am shocked that Nathaniel and Brandon didn’t realise she was pregnant before Hudson did,” Amylia replied.

I looked at Amylia before getting off the couch and slowly made my way to Nathaniel’s bedroom, not knowing what he had broken.

I opened his bedroom door and saw a mess. Everything that was glass was broken on the floor in little shards and everything else thrown onto the floor, but I couldn’t see Nathaniel anywhere. His bathroom light caught my attention from under the door so I made my way over

there, hoping that he was in there.

“Nate?” I called once I got to the door and placed my hand on the handle.

“Go away Brianna. I just need to be alone right now,” he replied from the other side of the door.

“I’m not going anywhere. Something is bothering you and I think it will be better for you to talk about it than keeping it locked inside,” I argued back, knowing I wasn’t going to win this fight, but I was going to die trying.

“You don’t know how I am feeling Brianna so don’t even start trying,” he hissed from the other side of the door.

“What are you going to be like if they get married? Are you going to destroy something else or will you end up murdering someone in a fit of rage?” I asked, watching the door open and crossing my arms when Nathaniel looked at me through narrowed eyes. I was in the mood for a fight.

“You won’t win this battle Brianna so I wouldn’t even dare starting it,” he said, looking down at me.

“Are you even happy for them or are you just going to pretend that you are and stab them in the back once everything comes out into the open about this?” I asked, knowing I was fighting fire with fire.

“I am not that type to stab someone in the back!”

“Then why are you acting like this? And don’t you dare say that I am too immature to understand how you are feeling!” I retorted back.

“Can’t I keep some things to myself or do I need to tell you everything?”

“I’m trying to help you here Nathaniel. I am your girlfriend so I think I have a right to know what is going on with you. You were fine when I left this morning and when I came back, you were upset but that is understandable but now it is like you have all this hidden anger at something and this has forced it to come up to the surface. Does this have anything to do with Mary?” I asked, firing a shot out of the dark.

“You keep her out of this Brianna!” Nathaniel hissed, making me take a step back from my vampire.

“So your ex fiancée from the 40’s has something to do with this?” I

asked trying to keep the shreds of my confidence in tact before Nathaniel took them away from me.

“Brianna, don’t push it.”

“Or what Nathaniel? Will you drain the life from me so I can’t keep on going on about this in front of you?”

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Now that I knew his ex that would no doubt be dead by now or extremely old was involved in this somehow, I wanted to know the reason why. Relationships didn’t last on secrets, lies and deception and I didn’t want my relationship going down that path. I was getting the feeling that it was already starting to.

“Why do you insist on knowing this for?” he finally asked, opening his eyes, but his voice was still hard and full of anger.

“Because you are my boyfriend and I am worried about you,” I whispered, not moving from my spot.

“I will tell you when I am ready Brianna. Don’t press me or anything. You should know that I don’t respond to pressure by now.”

“And I don’t respond to being smothered Nathaniel Monroe. You handing me that money before when I said that I didn’t want it made me feel embarrassed and I only took it because I knew that you would have started a fight with me over it and I didn’t want to fight in front of Hudson and Brandon, but you need to learn that you can’t keep on handing out money like that. I got on fine before I met you and started going out with you so I think I can still cope with having hardly any money,” I said, hoping he would listen to me.

“There is no use stopping me from doing what I want to do when it comes to you and that includes handing out money.”

I raised my hands in the air and walked out of the room, giving up on this fight that I knew I wasn’t even going to win. Amylia looked up when I walked back in the room and opened her mouth, but I put my hand up, stopping her from talking. I didn’t want to hear it. Grabbing my bags, I walked out of his place and made my way back home.

Walking out of the property, I looked to my left and saw that Augusta was standing there, smirking at me. This day wasn’t going to get any better. It now appeared that it was going to get worse and I was sure

that Augusta was going to be the one that made it worse.

“Where is Nathaniel?” she asked, walking up to me.

“Still inside,” I replied, not giving anything away.

“I’m shocked to see that he isn’t glued by your side like he has been all the other times. Has something happened?”

“Nothing has happened Augusta so why don’t you go and bother someone else?”

Augusta looked at me and started laughing like I had said something that was extremely funny.

“Oh Brianna, when will you learn? I’m here to make your life a living hell so you will leave town and Nathaniel will be all mine,” she said, smirking at me.

“Good luck doing that then. I am here to stay for the long run and nothing you can say or do will ever change that. Get it through your head Augusta; Nathaniel will never date you in a million years so just give up on him,” I said.

“And how do you know that Brianna? We both know he showed interest in me when they first move to this area so it won’t take much for that interest to come back again once you do something bad enough.”

I narrowed my eyes at Augusta and slowly raised my hand to hit her, but decided not to. She wasn’t worth my time. I shook my head and walked away from her, leaving Augusta standing there in the street. Looking behind me, I saw that Nathaniel had come outside and was staring at my retreating form with Augusta standing in front of him, trying to catch his attention.

I stopped walking and stared at my vampire, the wind picking up and blowing my hair in my face. He didn’t move from his spot and I didn’t move from mine. It was like both of us were waiting for each other to make a move, but we weren’t. I stood still for five minutes, me looking at Nathaniel and him looking at me before I turned back around and walked away. I wasn’t in the mood for playing games with Nathaniel. I just wanted to go home.

And that is what I planned on doing.

19. Confessions

Two days later, I still hadn't seen or heard from Nathaniel.

It was like he had fallen off the face of the earth.

I didn't know if he was doing this because I left his place or I mentioning his ex-fiancée had hit a sore spot that he didn't want me to know about. I had no idea what is problem was but for some reason, I wanted to know everything that was bothering him. I was his girlfriend so I felt that I had a right to know what was bothering him. Snapping out of my thoughts and getting off my bed, I decided to go out the front and get some air that I hoped would help clear my mind.

"Brianna, have you seen the dinner set that we use a couple times a year?" mum asked as I entered the kitchen.

"No, I haven't seen that since we have moved here. Why is that mother dear?" I asked, leaning against the door frame, crossing my arms.

"I was just wondering as we will need it. We most likely left it in Melbourne by mistake," mum said and walked out of the room. I heard the front door open and close and started to wonder what she was doing or had planned for some strange reason. She had never acted this strange before.

"Need it for what?" I asked aloud and walked to the front door so I could get my fresh air that I was craving.

I stopped dead in my tracks when I saw who mum was talking to outside when I opened the front door before breaking into a sprint to my grandparents. My grandfather looked up and opened his arms for me so I could embrace him when he saw me approaching him. I felt like a giddy school girl who had just been asked out on a date by her high school crush.

“My darling Brianna how I’ve missed you so much,” My grandfather said as he hugged me.

“Oh Joseph, they have only been here for two months. Wait until after a year and then say it, like I am,” my grandmother said, making me glance over at her and smile.

Her straight to the point and not beating around the bush nature hadn’t vanished and I had missed that, but the other side of her I hadn’t missed and I was sure that would come out to play soon enough.

“Now Liz, just because I said that we couldn’t stop so you could shop doesn’t mean you can get huffy. We are here for Brianna’s birthday, not for you to spend our life savings on stuff that we don’t even need,” he replied, his eyes narrowing slightly.

“Oh Joseph. Marie let’s go inside and leave these two to spend some time together.”

Once mum and grandma went inside, I pulled away from my grandpa with a huge smile on my face. I was feeling extremely happy just by seeing him and I had no idea on how I would be feeling when it came time for him to go back home.

“I can’t believe that you came early. I thought you were coming later on in the week?” I asked.

“Well we thought we would come a week earlier so we could spend time with you and your mother,” grandpa replied. “Now, where is this Nathaniel your grandmother informed me about?”

My blood ran cold when my grandfather mentioned Nathaniel.

“I’m pretty sure that he is at home,” I said. “I will go around there later on today and see if he wants to come around so he can meet you.”

“Wonderful. I want to see if he is good enough for my granddaughter. Now, where is your juvenile cousin, Alexander?”

“Still in Colac, but I am sure once mum rings Aunty Rachel, they will

be straight here to see you and grandma.”

“Brianna,” I heard Nathaniel say behind me.

I wasn’t expecting to hear that voice.

“Nate, what are you doing here?” I asked, turning around so I could look at him.

I felt grandpa get closer to me as Nathaniel approached. Nathaniel looked over my shoulder before looking down at the ground.

“I came to see you, but I see you have company so I won’t stay and interrupt anything,” he said and started backing away from me.

“Nate, this is my grandfather Joseph,” I said, making him stop moving. “They have come up a week earlier so they can spend some time with us before my birthday. Stay for dinner so you can meet my grandmother.”

“Would I be allowed to?”

“Of course you will be allowed to,” grandpa said, making me look at him.

That was a first that he had given his approval for a guy to stay for dinner, but though, this wasn’t his house so he couldn’t say if he could or couldn’t this time. It was up to mum.

Nathaniel nodded and glanced at me before looking down at the ground, so he wouldn’t see my stare that was currently burning holes into his vampiric skin. Mum came to the front door, asking grandpa to come inside and help her start the barbeque, leaving Nathaniel and I alone. I crossed my arms and bit my lip, waiting for him to start speaking. There was no way in hell that I was going to start this conversation.

“Why haven’t you spoken to me in the last two days?” Nathaniel asked, making me look up at him.

“Because I had no idea if you would have ripped my head off or not after our last talk. I didn’t want to risk my life ending so abruptly,” I replied.

“That doesn’t mean anything. You could have at least called Beth to tell her to inform me that you were alive.”

“You mean that you couldn’t have used your vampiric senses to see if I was alive like you normally do?”

“Very funny Brianna,” he replied and crossed his arms.

"I didn't mean it as a joke Nathaniel. We will talk about this after dinner when my family are outside and won't hear what we are saying," I said.

"Why can't we just talk about it now Brianna?"

"Because I don't want to be upset in front of my grandparents. They don't even know you and if they see you have gotten me upset, they will not be happy with you and do you want to leave a bad impression on my grandfather," I said, raising an eyebrow.

"Why wouldn't I want to leave a bad impression on your grandfather?" he asked, confused.

"Because he is the one that has to approve of you. Sure, you got past mum, but my grandfather will be much harder on you on everything that involves me and my happiness," I stated.

"Then I will just have to make an excellent impression on him and your grandmother," he said and walked up the stairs to the front door.

I groaned in frustration and followed him inside, hoping that he wouldn't go too overboard on the affection in front of my grandparents. But that was even if I let him touch me until we had our talk later on this evening.

"So Nathaniel, tell us a bit about yourself," I heard my grandmother say when I opened the front door.

I was interested in hearing what he had to say to her, but a part of me was worried that he might charm my grandmother too much. My grandfather wouldn't like that to happen.

"Well what can I say? I am nineteen years old and madly in love with your granddaughter," Nathaniel said, looking straight at my grandmother.

"He is a charmer this one. I think Brianna picked well," mum said, smiling at Nathaniel.

If only they knew of his sudden mood changes where he was likely to kill someone, but that could have been the vampire in him coming out on show.

"Talk about sucking up Nathaniel," I said, walking into the room and making them look at me.

"And what makes you think I am sucking up Brianna?" he asked,

looking at me.

“Because you normally do,” I replied, smirking at him.

“Marie, would it be alright if I invited my family around for dinner tonight?” Nathaniel asked, looking at her.

“Of course it would be,” she replied. “It would be a good chance for both sides of the family to get together and get to know each other better.”

“Wonderful,” I muttered and walked off to my room, not giving them a chance to reply.

I closed my door and sat on my bed, hoping that no one would follow me up. And as usual, I was wrong. Five minutes later, mum knocked on my door and opened it, making me look over at her.

“Has something happened? You are never like that,” she said, cutting straight to the point and walking into my room.

“Everything is fine mum. Don’t worry about it,” I replied.

“Brianna, when are you due for your period?” she asked suddenly.

“Not until tomorrow,” I said, wondering where she was going with this.

“And you and Nathaniel haven’t done anything?” she asked, making my blood run cold

“Mum, my vampire boyfriend who can hear what we are saying is at the kitchen table with my grandparents!” I hissed.

“I don’t think Nathaniel would care of what we talk about Brianna. In fact, I think he would be happy that I’ve touched on this subject,” she said, making a point.

“Mum, I’m not pregnant. I’m still a virgin thank you very much, but there is a problem,” I admitted.

“What’s that?”

“Hudson is pregnant and it has come out into the open that my vampire has a craving to become a father.”

“But I thought it was rare for a vampire to create a child with a human?” mum asked, confused and rightly so.

“He lied as he thought that you might start hounding us for grandchildren like Beth is with Nathaniel once she found out about me.”

“So what is going on with Nathaniel? He seems fine to me.”

“We had a fight the other day and it seems his ex-fiancée is playing a part in this for some reason, but I don’t know why. I tried getting the answer out of him, but it didn’t happen. He is a stubborn vampire.”

“Is that the reason why he is using the extra charm? Just in case you have another fight and it won’t hurt your grandparent’s impression on him?”

“Knowing Nathaniel that would be one of the reasons.”

“Are you going to come back out or are you going to stay in your room until dinner?” mum asked, walking to the door.

“What time is Amylia and the Pryor’s getting here?” I asked.

“Twenty minutes from now,” mum replied.

“When Amylia gets here, send her in. I want to talk to her about something.”

Mum nodded and left, leaving me alone in my thoughts until Nathaniel was standing in my door way. I looked at him and raised my eyebrows, not saying anything.

“What do you want to talk to Amylia about that you can’t talk to me about?” he finally asked.

“Girl stuff that she will be able to understand,” I replied.

“How do you know I won’t understand?”

“You mean you would know how the female mind works?”

“If you have forgotten, I have been on this planet for a long time so I have learnt a thing or two over the years.”

“You do know what this is about right?” I asked.

“Of course I do. It is about me not telling you why Mary is involved in this,” he said, walking over and sitting on my bed.

“I just don’t understand why. You usually tell me everything else, so why is this so different to everything else that you have told me or that we have been through?” I asked, looking at him.

“Because it is difficult for me to talk about. I have even lied to my vampire family about it so they wouldn’t pity me on it.”

“Nate, you can tell me. I am your girlfriend so I think I have a right to know,” I said and grabbed his hand.

“I will tell you later tonight as I am staying over. I don’t want to say anything as I know that my vampire family will be able to hear every

single word I am staying and I don't want them to hear," he said.

"Why can't you just tell them as well? They won't pity you that much, will they?" I asked.

"Bethany will and I don't want that happening. I have been in this pain for a very long time, and I am shocked that they haven't forced it out of me by starving me. I will admit anything when it comes to food being withheld from me."

"Typical guy," I said, smiling at him.

"You have to promise me though when I do tell you, you can't tell anyone, not even Hudson. No one can know about this," he said, pleading with me.

"So you want me to take it to the grave?" I asked.

"Basically."

"I still think whatever it is, you should tell your own family. They might be able to help you through it."

"They won't be able to though. That is the problem. They think they can help, but they only make the problem much worse than it was before I even told them so I don't even bother anymore."

"Is that why you won't tell me? Are you afraid I might make it worse than it already is? Mary was a bitch Nathaniel and both you and I know that. She is an olden day Augusta."

Nathaniel opened his mouth but couldn't say anything as Amylia walked into the room.

"What are we talking about?" she asked, looking between the both of us.

"Nothing that concerns you," Nathaniel hissed and walked out of the room.

Amylia turned her head and looked at his retreating form before looking back at me. "What's with him?" She asked.

"I don't know," I replied. "Did mum send you in here?"

"I came in here myself. Marie is too busy talking to Bethany while Jack is having a lovely chat to your grandmother and father about medicine," she replied and sat on my bed.

"It seems they already get along," I said, smiling.

"Is everything okay? You seem upset over something," Amylia said,

placing a comforting, cold hand over mine.

“Nathaniel is hiding something,” I said, looking at her.

“You’ve figured that out too. He has become even more secretive since Hudson revealed that she is pregnant and we don’t know why,” she said.

“What would he be hiding though? It’s not like we would judge him on anything.”

“Nathaniel can be really secretive when he has to be Brianna. There are a lot of things that you still don’t know about Nathaniel and I just hope that he will reveal things to you before it is too late.”

“What do you mean by that?” I asked.

“Nathaniel can drive wedges between his relationships with some people by mistake and I am scared that he might to the same with you by mistake,” she revealed.

I slowly nodded, processing what she had said. Half an hour later, I still hadn’t said anything. My bedroom opened, making me look up and snap out of my thoughts. Mum was standing there, looking at both of us.

“The barbeque has started if you both want to make your way into the backyard and join in the party,” mum said, smiling at us and walking back down the hallway.

“I guess we should go outside and join the party and that way we can see what sort of mood Nathaniel is in,” Amylia said.

“Hopefully a good mood,” I muttered, getting up from my bed.

“I just hope no one drops any hints that we are different. We usually act like humans in front of others, but sometimes, we have a brain fade and give away a clue that something is different about us,” Amylia said, looking worried.

“Well, don’t worry. Once my grandparents get the wine into their system, they won’t notice anything different about you,” I said and walked down the hallway.

“Then I was glad I talked Jack into bringing a bottle of wine with us,” Amylia said behind me.

We got outside to see that everyone was having a good time. Everyone but Nathaniel that was. I walked over to him and kicked his leg,

making me look up at me in shock.

“Is everything okay?” I asked.

“Yeah everything is fine,” he replied.

“Then why are you so quiet?” I whispered, sitting next to him.

“I have been waiting for you to come out of your bedroom with Am-
ylia so I could spend some time with you,” he replied, grabbing my
hand.

“Well you are spending the night, so we can spend time then,” I
muttered, looking down at the ground.

“Brianna,” he said, making me look up at him. “I promise you that I
will tell you what is going on later tonight.”

“If you don’t want to, you don’t have to,” I said, playing with my fin-
gers.

“I’m scared that if I don’t tell you, it might drive a wedge between
us,” he said really quietly.

I glanced over at him before getting up from where I was sitting and
walking over to mum, seeing if she needed help with anything. I just
mostly wanted to get away as it felt that things were starting to get too
strong feeling wise for me.

“Brianna is Nathaniel alright?” mum asked as I was about to walk
away.

“He wants to tell me something later on,” I said.

“Why can’t you just take him to your room and get him to tell you
then?”

“Because he doesn’t want to tell me now; I’m not going to force him
into doing anything mum. He doesn’t respond when you do that. We
have all found that out the hard way.”

“Did something happen when he was human that is making him go
like this?”

“It’s complicated.”

“How complicated?” she asked.

“Extremely complicated,” I muttered.

She looked at me but didn’t ask any other questions. I walked back
over to Nathaniel, straight away noticing that he had a strange look on
his face and in his own world.

“Nate? Do you need anything?” I asked.

“I’m fine. I am just thinking,” he replied and opened his arms for me.

“What about?” I asked, sitting on his knee.

“What I am going to tell you later. I don’t know how you will take it.”

“What have you done? Committed murder?”

“Brianna, you know the answer to that question already. I am a vampire and killing is in my nature,” he whispered so my human family couldn’t hear.

I nodded, knowing that he was right. The back door opened, making me look over to it and seeing Aunty Rachel and Alex standing there.

“Brianna, Nathaniel,” Alex said, walking over to us.

“Alexander,” Nathaniel replied, being civil.

“What are you both doing?” he asked, looking between the two of us.

“Waiting for the food to be cooked and the salads to be made so we can eat. You got here quick,” I replied.

“You know how mum drives when she is in a hurry,” he replied, sitting next to me. “She plays Russian roulette on the roads.”

“That’s true,” I replied, thinking back to the times I have been in the car with her when she was in a hurry. How I walked away with my life, I will never know.

Alex looked over at Nathaniel, but didn’t say anything. I was hoping that he could sense that he wasn’t in a good mood and wouldn’t say anything that would make him snap. I didn’t want anything happening that could possibly involve blood loss. Two hours later, the Pryor’s and my aunt and cousin had left and mum and my grandparents had gone inside, leaving Nathaniel and I alone outside.

“Do you want to talk?” I asked after five minutes of silence.

“What about Brianna?” Nathaniel asked, looking over at me.

“You know what about Nathaniel,” I replied.

“Oh right.”

“Did you forget all about it?”

“I put it out of my mind and I guess it didn’t come back in.”

“Do you really want to tell me or did you just say it to make me happy?”

“I don’t want to tell you Brianna, but I have no choice. I don’t want a wedge coming between us.”

“Why do you think it will drive a wedge between us?”

“Because you and I both know it involves Mary and my human life.”

“If you want to tell me Nathaniel, you can. If you don’t, then you don’t have to. I can understand—”

“I’m a father,” Nathaniel said, cutting me off. “Or was a father, I should say.”

“What?” I asked, not believing what I was hearing.

“I haven’t told anyone this, but Mary was pregnant when we were meant to get married and I guess Brandon telling me that Hudson was pregnant stirred up emotions that I didn’t want to feel again as it brought back memories of the child that I have never met before.”

“Did you know that she was?” I asked, ignoring the feeling that was in my chest. I felt like I had been punched in my chest and the breath had been sucked out from my body.

Nathaniel had kept this secret from his family, including me and I don’t know how he didn’t crack under the pressure and tell someone about this.

“I had no clue. I only found out about it once the baby was born and it was in the local newspaper after my parent’s disappearance and my name was mentioned as the father and it looked like me in even in black and white.”

“Is that the reason why you want a baby so bad for? To make up for the life you missed out on seen growing up?”

“I would have missed out on it anyway,” Nathaniel said with a bitter tone in his voice.

“What do you mean?”

“It didn’t survive. Mary abused her body throughout the pregnancy as she didn’t care, but that was according to the write up I read in the newspaper. I personally think she only kept it thinking I was hiding somewhere and once I saw her pregnant, I would come running back to her and then everything would be back to normal in her eyes and that the arranged marriage would have gone ahead It didn’t work as I had no idea that she was even pregnant. The baby died almost a week after it

was born and Mary committed suicide, in the end believing I was dead and that she would be with me. She thought that I wouldn't be able to escape her in death, even though she had no idea that I'm a living and walking corpse."

"Why haven't you told your family about this?"

"Because I didn't want pity. I don't even know if it was a boy or girl as the paper didn't say. All they said was baby Norwood."

"Nate, have you been looking for this baby?"

"Of course I have been Brianna. I put it behind me but as I said, Hudson's impending arrival has stirred something inside of me that made me want to look for my deceased child and I have had no luck in doing so."

I couldn't feel anything. I was feeling numb. I didn't know if it was shock or my body was shutting down with Nathaniel's news. I was hoping it was from shock and nothing else.

"Brianna, say something please?"

"I don't know what to say Nathaniel. I think I will need time to process this."

"Of course. I completely understand that. I wasn't expecting you to be able to process this straight away but it would have been nice."

"Yeah, but I promise you that I won't tell anyone about this. That is up to you if you are going to tell them or not."

Nathaniel nodded and sighed, looking down at the grass. I knew that something else was bothering him, besides this. I placed my hand on his shoulder, making him look over to me with a bleak look on his face.

"What else is bothering you?" I asked.

"I really need to know this. Where do you see us in five years Brianna?" Nathaniel asked.

"I see us still together, living somewhere in the world, being happy and all our secrets being out into the open between the two of us," I replied.

"Where in the world do you want to live? I want to make your dreams come true and I have no idea on how to do that unless you tell me what you want," Nathaniel said, placing his hand on my leg.

"Anywhere you wanted to take me would be good enough for me. I

am a girl that likes simple things and nothing to fancy.”

“Nothing to fancy hey? Looks like that trip I was planning to Paris for early next year is out of the question,” Nathaniel said, making my ears perk up.

“Paris?” I asked.

“It was meant to be a surprise but I was planning to take you on a whirlwind trip around the city of Paris either next year or the year after.”

“You can still do that. I’d love to go on a trip like that. I have never been out of Australia before so it would be a good experience for me,” I said.

Even though I said that I wanted simple, there was no way that I was letting something like that go. I would be extremely stupid.

“Then name the year and the date and we will go,” Nathaniel said, getting all excited that I have agreed to go overseas with him.

“Late next year Nate. September or October sounds good enough for me,” I said, smiling at him.

“And don’t even think about saving for the trip also Brianna. I will be paying for everything, and that includes flights, the place we will be staying in and shopping. I want you to be spoiled on this trip and I will not be taking no as an answer.”

“Nathaniel,” I warned.

“Brianna,” he said back.

“Why do you refuse to let me pay for anything?” I asked.

“Because you are my girlfriend and I want you to have everything that you have ever dreamed of in your life.”

“Do you feel guilty?” I asked suddenly.

“Guilty about what?” Nathaniel asked, taken aback.

“About the fact I have hardly anything, especially money? You buy me all these expensive things Nathaniel and when I refuse to take them, it usually ends up in a fight where I usually relent and take them just to make you happy.”

“What do you want me to do Brianna? Stop buying you expensive things and handing out money for when you go shopping?”

“Yes!” I cried. “I still have that money you gave me when I went

shopping with Hudson. I refused to spend it as I didn't even want it."

"Then what are you going to do with it?" he asked.

"Give it back to you tonight," I replied.

"No you won't be Brianna. You will be keeping that money I gave you. Put it in your bank account for all I care, but don't you dare give that back to me."

"Nate, I only have twenty dollars in my bank account."

"Then you will have two hundred and twenty dollars in your bank account or maybe more if I get my way."

"Nathaniel Monroe," I warned.

The back door opened, making me look over my shoulder to see my grandmother standing there.

"Are you kids going to stay out here all night and get eaten alive by the mosquitoes?" she asked.

"We will come inside soon," I replied.

She nodded and went back inside. Nathaniel burst out laughing, making me look over at him, confused.

"Have you noticed there are no mosquitoes around us?" he finally asked.

I looked around, realizing that he was right. There was none of those blood sucking creatures around. I looked back over to Nathaniel, seeing that he had a smirk on his face.

"Why?" I asked.

"They stay away from you when I am around because they know what I am and for some reason, they are scared. We both live for the same thing, but it's like they know I can kill them with a gentle hit because of my strength, so they stay away," Nathaniel said, sounding smug with himself.

"So does that mean when I am on my own, they will be coming in the dozen because you aren't with me?" I asked.

"Maybe, but then they might not. You still have the vampire blood in your system so they will stay away from you until that leaves your system."

"And when will it leave my system?" I asked.

"With your next menstrual cycle," he replied.

“That’s tomorrow,” I whispered.

“Then I guess that means some fun is out of the question,” Nathaniel said, winking.

“Get your mind out of the gutter,” I replied, lightly slapping him on the arm.

“I’m a guy Brianna and I have urges that I am trying my hardest to ignore.”

I shook my head before getting up from where I was sitting and going inside. I slipped off my shoes and walked into the lounge room.

“Brianna, do you and Nathaniel mind sleeping in the lounge room tonight? I don’t really want your grandparents sleeping out here and I thought they could use your bed,” mum said, looking at me when I entered the room.

“No, that is fine. We can just transform the couch into the futon it is and just sleep on that for the night. I don’t mind spending the week out in the lounge room anyway. At least I have something to do if I can’t sleep,” I said and sat on the floor.

“What are we doing?” Nathaniel asked, walking into the room.

“We are crashing in the lounge room tonight,” I said, looking up at him.

“And sleep where?” Nathaniel asked, confused.

“The couch turns into a bed that you and Brianna can share,” mum said, smiling at him.

“Well, that is handy,” Nathaniel replied, sitting on the floor next to me and wrapping his arm around my waist.

“So Nathaniel, have you been treating my Brianna like how she deserves?” grandpa asked, making me look over at him.

“Of course I have been. I have been trying to spoil Brianna rotten, but she won’t accept it,” Nathaniel replied.

“That is our Brianna for you. She is as stubborn as her mother when she wants to be,” grandma replied.

“Uh stubborn Brianna is in the room if you have all forgotten,” I said, waving my hand.

“We haven’t forgotten baby,” Nathaniel whispered in my ear.

“Your cold breath tickles,” I muttered, biting my lip and glancing over

at Nathaniel.

“Anyway, we have an announcement to make,” grandma said, making me look over at her. “It’s coming up to our fortieth wedding anniversary next January and we plan on having a party for it over in Aspen.”

“Aspen, Colorado?” I asked.

“That’s the one.”

“Why Colorado?” mum asked.

“We wanted to do something different so we decided to head over there for a winter wonderland trip,” grandpa said.

“We still have time to save up for passports and tickets,” mum said, getting up from where she was sitting.

“Marie, we are happy to pay for the trip. You need to take a load off your shoulder and you don’t need to worry about saving over two thousand dollars for you and Brianna and then the place we will be staying,” grandma said.

“We can’t let you do that, grandma,” I said, talking before mum could. “I can get a job at the shop where Bethany works to help save for my ticket. I don’t buy hardly anything and when I do, it’s only things I need.”

“Darling, you will do no such thing. Concentrate on school and getting that step closer to your dream of becoming a writer,” grandpa said.

“I can work a few hours after schools and on weekends. It’s not going to hurt anything. I will still have time to study and everything. I can’t let you pay for mum and I to go to Aspen when it will be dipping into your life savings that you have worked so hard to save up,” I argued, knowing I had a valid point in this argument.

“Why didn’t you tell me you wanted to be a writer?” Nathaniel asked.

“I’ll tell you later,” I said, looking over at him.

“How much would that place pay someone who is seventeen?” mum asked, looking at Nathaniel.

“Well with it being a gift shop, it comes in peaks, but at its busiest time, Bethany was bringing in an extra fifty dollars a week as she was doing more. They pay you on what you do during the day. If you are packing shelves with new stock, you usually get about twenty dollars a

day, and if you are gift wrapping, you usually get fifteen dollars a day you are there,” Nathaniel said. “Bethany usually does a bit of everything so she gets extra, but I am sure that she will take Brianna under her wing. She is one of the managers.”

“I will go in there tomorrow sometime and see if I can get a job,” I said smiling.

“You don’t have to do that though. A couple of grand out of our life savings won’t hurt anything. We can put it back with spare change and everything we get. Have you forgotten that we have our money in an interest bank account on where it is making a lot of money on top of what we have?” grandma asked.

“I want to do this. Mum can save for her part of the trip and I can save for mine. I need to learn how to be reliable with money and this will be a good chance for me how to learn so and you need to learn also Nathaniel,” I said, narrowing my eyes at him.

“I know how to save money Brianna; I just don’t want to. I can’t help that my family has a lot of money behind them.”

“Who brings in the most?” grandpa asked.

“Jack,” Nathaniel replied. “Beth only works at the gift shop to get out of the house and to be around others besides us.”

“Don’t you call them mum and dad?” grandma asked.

I did a slicing motion across my neck at her for asking that question. I was sure that Nathaniel didn’t want to go into his family history with my grandparents and I could only hope he could mix some lies in with the truth to make it look convincing.

“I’m not their child. I was adopted by them when I was ten years old,” Nathaniel said.

“What about the other children?” she asked, not giving up.

“Amylia is Jack’s niece and Chase is Bethany’s nephew. James is just in the family because of his engagement to Amylia,” Nathaniel lied.

“I don’t recall them calling them that,” grandpa said.

“They all are older than me so I think we are growing out of calling or aunts and uncles that,” I said, talking for Nathaniel.

“Brianna does have a point,” mum said, coming into the lie. “They can’t stay little kids forever. They all grow up and pull away from us at

one stage. I was sixteen when I did that remember?"

"Brianna hasn't," grandma said. "And I'm not sure if she will either."

"Not yet I haven't. I'm not going to stay like this forever. No one can baby me like they are once I turn eighteen," I said, making her look over at me. "I'm not going to stay innocent forever grandma and I think you are gonna have to start realising that. I have a boyfriend and you and I both know what comes with relationships."

"Not if you wait until marriage," grandma said, raising her eyebrows. "I'm sure you plan on doing that like the girl you were raised to be."

I laughed and shook my head, staring her straight in the eyes. "I have no plans on doing that. I might be a virgin now, but I won't be whenever I get married. I plan on losing it when I am ready and that might be in just a few months."

"You are your mother's daughter," grandpa replied. "Set in your ways and as stubborn as a bull."

"And where does she get her stubborn side from?" I asked, smiling at my grandfather.

"Why my dear, she gets it from me and that is why you are what I call a stubborn Clarkson," he replied, smiling back at me.

"I'm getting a coffee. Marie, do you want one?" grandma asked, getting up from where she was sitting.

"Sure," mum replied, getting up as well. "I will show you where everything is."

I sighed when they walked out of the room and shook my head, trying to clear it of the thoughts that were trying to clog it full before looking down at the floor.

"Brianna, don't worry about your grandmother," grandpa said, making me glance up at him from the floor. "She is still on the time when she was your age when girls were brought up strict and I believe that is why she tried raising you when your mum was out working to support you her way and not the way your mum wanted you to be raised."

"So you mean that Elizabeth wanted Brianna to be like the girls of the nineteen fifties?" Nathaniel asked.

"Exactly. How do you know what the girls of the nineteen fifties were like?" grandpa asked.

“When we were younger, Jack taught us about the history of the world and he told us a bit of the nineteen fifties,” Nathaniel said, smiling at grandpa.

I had almost believed that lie myself, but I knew the truth. He was around in the nineteen fifties and would have seen how things have changed over the years.

“Why would she want me to be something that she wants though?” I asked.

“Because it didn’t work with your mum or aunt. They followed in the Clarkson footsteps on doing what they wanted and not in the LeBronte footsteps of having class and your grandmother didn’t like that much so she tried to raise you how she wanted you to turn out and now how you are now turning out.”

“How am I turning out?”

“You are turning into your mother Brianna and that is scaring her. I’m proud of the way you have turned out but your grandmother doesn’t like that. Oh and did you know we can both see the outline of what appears to be a love bite on your neck?”

“What?” I asked, placing my hand on my neck.

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of Brianna. We have seen worse over the years,” grandpa said.

“Grandma won’t like it though,” I said, wanting the floor to open up and swallow me up.

“She just has to get use to the fact that you are growing up and that times have changed from when we were your age.”

“How long does it take to make a coffee anyway?” Nathaniel asked.

“Liz is most likely giving Marie tips on how to control Brianna and not let you influence her into taking drastic steps, but my wife needs to realise that Marie is Brianna’s mother and not her. It’s up to Marie for another year to decide what Brianna can and can’t do. No one can stop her when she turns eighteen.”

“The whole time that we have been gone from Melbourne, has grandma said anything about how I was raised?” I asked.

“No, she hasn’t said anything darling. She has just been more worried about you going to the school you are going to. She had heard

some bad things about the school and was trying to talk your mother into home schooling you for the year to keep you away from the trouble, but you have Nathaniel to keep you safe and Alex.”

“The school is fine. I mean, there are people there I don’t want to be around, so I don’t hang around them,” I told him.

“Expect for Augusta,” Nathaniel said, making me hit him lightly on the arm so I wouldn’t hurt myself.

“Who is Augusta?” grandma asked, walking back into the room with mum.

“A girl at my school,” I replied, silently cursing Nathaniel for saying her name in the first place.

“Why do I get the feeling you don’t like her?” she asked.

“Because she is a total bitch who likes to get her way all the time,” I said, stating the obvious.

“Language Brianna. Who taught you words like that?” grandma asked.

I pointed at mum while she put her hand up. Grandma sat back in her seat while I tried not to laugh. Living with someone like mum, it was a miracle I turned out the way I did, but one of us had to be the sensible one and for some reason, that turned out to be me.

“She is a complete bitch and so is her mother,” mum said, putting her hand down.

“I don’t like my granddaughter being taught words like that. She is meant to be a young lady and not a feral,” grandma said.

“Are you saying something about the way I raised my daughter?” mum asked, her anger slowly starting to rise.

“Marie, I told you when Brianna was six months old on how to raise her and you went over my head and did your own thing. If you had listened to me, she would be the perfect girl right now!”

“She is my daughter mum. Not yours. I chose to raise Brianna how I wanted her to turn out and not how you wanted her to turn out! This isn’t your era anymore where girls have to have respect and remain a virgin until marriage and basically have this image to maintain or you will get looked down upon!”

“If you rose her how I told you to in the first place, she would be one

of a kind, but you didn't so she fits in with everyone else because of it! My granddaughter should be one of a kind Marie and hopefully if Brianna ever has a daughter, I will be able to use my influence on her!"

"Excuse me," I said, making them both look at me. "My mother raised me fine, and you really think I fit in with everyone? My only friends are a girl named Hudson and her boyfriend Brandon and Nathaniel's family. There are the only people that took the time to get to know me. And if I ever do have a daughter, I will be raising her and so will its father and no one else!"

"Brianna, you don't know what you are saying," grandma said.

"I know exactly what I am talking about! I will be the baby's mother and no one else will be! I'm not even pregnant yet and I don't plan on falling pregnant until I am at least twenty. I need some air," I said, getting up from where I was sitting.

"Brianna," grandma started, but I put my hand up.

"Don't talk to me and don't even think about following me outside. I want to be alone. I don't want to hear anymore that comes out of your mouth," I said, walking out the front door and slamming it behind me.

I sat down on the steps and pulled my knees up under my chin, letting the tears roll silently down my face.

I was alone for a few minutes before the front door opened. I looked over to see Nathaniel there, looking at me concerned. I wiped my eyes and tried to smile, but I knew for a fact that it came out as a grimace.

"I thought she wouldn't have started this again," I said, closing my eyes and sniffing before opening them again.

"What do you mean?" Nathaniel asked, walking over to where I was sitting and sat down next to me.

"Ever since I turned thirteen and started going through puberty, grandma has been on our backs on how I was going to turn out when I got to this age and she hasn't let up over the past few years and she isn't realising that she is ruining my life."

"I take it she is still stuck in her ways?" Nathaniel asked.

"That is the understatement of the century. I thought she would have cooled down on this since we have moved away but for some reason, it has gotten her even fierier. It's like something has happened that

has made her try to force her influence on me now since I am older. I just feel like that I'm not accepted by my own grandmother because I am a girl."

"Maybe she knows that in just over a year, no one will be able to be able to control you anymore so she is trying her hardest to make you turn into the girl she wants you to be or maybe the girl that she thinks that you should be?" Nathaniel suggested.

"But then she is ruining her relationship with mum. That was another reason why we moved here. Mum needed to get away from grandma and her being on mums back all the time about how I was turning out, but she has never been on Rachel's back about how Alex turned out and he is worse than me."

"What is your aunt like?"

"She is much worse than mum. Rachel is the type that will say it to your face if she doesn't like you. She either likes you or she doesn't like you and she isn't afraid to say it."

"What is it going to be like on your actual birthday?"

I didn't even want to think about that right now but I was going to have to answer the question for Nathaniel. He didn't know my family like I did and it wasn't fair on him if I at least didn't say something.

"With the way my grandmother has been acting, it will be hell. She will have a go at me for not wearing clothes that cover up everything and then she will have a go at mum for letting me wear clothes that make me look like a whore in her eyes and not covered up from the neck down, making sure that most of my skin is covered and not on show."

Nathaniel nodded and pulled me in for a hug, sensing that I needed comfort, which I did. I just needed to hear that everything was going to be okay, because right now, I didn't think it was going to be anything but okay.

20. Birthday

“Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!”

“I’m awake!” I said, shooting up in bed in a fright and looking around the room, trying to find the person who woke me up and comprehend my surroundings at the same time.

Amylia was standing there with a smirk on her face and walked over to the futon with something in a gift bag.

“What do you have there?” I asked.

“A present,” she replied.

“Amylia, you better not have brought me anything.”

“It is your birthday Brianna so you will have to expect presents, and you will have to expect them to be expensive ones too. This one is from all of us, besides Nathaniel. He has some to give you later on at school and in private.”

“He does know about my hatred of being spoilt doesn’t he?”

“Nathaniel does, but since when does he listen to anything anyone says? I have known him for a long time and he hardly listens. The only person he does listen to is Beth.”

“Then why can’t Beth talk him into not buying things for me?”

“Because Beth is on Nathaniel’s side of spoiling you and she actually encouraged him to buy you some of the presents that he didn’t want to buy you because of the low price. You and I both know that Nathaniel likes buying you expensive things.”

“You mean he actually brought me something at a price that I might like?” I asked, kicking the blanket off me.

“I can officially say yes,” Amylia replied and handed me the small gift bag.

I glared at her before taking the bag off her and tipping out the wrapped present on the futon.

“What the hell?” I asked

“Open it,” she said with a huge smile on her face.

“This better be good,” I muttered and opened it.

Whatever the present happened to be was in a small white box. I opened the box to see a small white photo frame in it. I looked up at Amylia and put it down next to me.

“Take the photo frame out,” she pressed.

“Alright,” I said, getting huffy.

I took the photo frame out of the box and turned it around, seeing a photo of Nathaniel and I in there from the Valentine’s Day dance. My mouth dropped open and I looked up at Amylia who was smiling.

“It took us all night to find the perfect photo to go in that frame, but we finally found it,” Amylia said.

“It’s perfect,” I said.

“Nathaniel’s present will be much better than ours. He has spent most of the week shopping for you in Colac, Melbourne and online.”

Grandma walked into the living room, but stopping when she saw Amylia standing there in her intimidating beauty and clothing that would be making her blood boil.

“Hello again,” Amylia said, smiling at her with a strange look in her eye.

“Who let you in?” grandma asked.

“I let myself in. Marie told us we can do so on a school day to make sure Brianna gets up on time and can come to school with us,” Amylia replied.

“So that explains why I had a Mexican jumping bean on my bed the other morning,” I said quietly.

“Brianna, I will give you your birthday present when everyone else wakes up, like it was meant to be like,” grandma said, eyeing the mess on the floor.

“We don’t do that here. I open things when I want to, not when people expect me to and in front of people,” I replied, earning a smirk of Amylia.

“Who taught you to act like that? Once I find out who it is, I will give them a piece of my mind,” grandma said.

“You will be too gutless to do that Liz,” grandpa said, walking into the room with a soft present in hand. “For you my darling,” he said, giving it to me.

“I didn’t want anything,” I replied, taking it off him.

“Oh my dear; wait until you see what I have planned for your eighteenth,” he replied.

Grandma just looked at grandpa with a hard stare in her eyes. It was like she didn’t like what he had planned for me. I looked down at the present and opened it, ignoring my grandmother’s protests on waiting until tonight for everyone to arrive went unheard.

I pulled out a long sleeved top and looked at my grandpa with a smile.

“I couldn’t remember if you were a size six or a size eight so I grabbed the eight.”

“I’m a size eight now. I have put on some weight since we left Melbourne,” I said. “Where is Nathaniel meeting us?” I asked Amylia.

“In the school car park,” Amylia replied.

“Why couldn’t he meet her here?” grandma asked. “That is what a gentleman would do with his girlfriend.”

“Because he has some things he has to do before school,” Amylia replied, narrowing her eyes. “This is 2011 Elizabeth, not 1951. Things

have changed a lot over the years. In my family, we meet the men at a place and then they take us everywhere we need to go with a blink of an eye.”

“What is going on?” mum asked, walking into the room.

“Nothing is going on Marie,” grandma said, walking out of the room.

“Nothing besides getting put in your place by a twenty year old,” Amylia said, crossing her arms.

“What do you mean?” mum asked, looking at her.

“Your mother was trying to be her usual controlling self and didn’t like it when Amylia put her in her place about Nathaniel,” grandpa replied.

“What is it going to be like tonight?” I asked, getting up and stretching my sore body.

“The same as all the other times that we have had family get together and she can’t get her way on something,” grandpa replied. “Anyway, you should go get ready for school as you have a bit of a drive to get to Colac.”

I nodded and walked out of the living room and headed up to my bedroom. Grandma was in the kitchen when I walked past, but she didn’t say anything and I was sure wasn’t going to say anything to her. I didn’t want her to bring her drama here but she did and I didn’t like that one bit.

I quickly got changed out of my sleepwear and dressed in what I wanted to wear to school before running my hairbrush through my hair and applied a light coating of lip-gloss before slipping on my shoes and walking out of the room, grabbing my school bag at the same time.

“That was quick,” grandpa said as I walked back into the living room.

“I have to be pretty fast when it comes to Amylia. She is usually in a hurry to get to place to place,” I said, smiling at her.

“At least I am not like Nathaniel. That kid is impatient when it comes to people waiting. I will tell you a few stories one day in the near future about the times he has been a nervous wreck when it comes to getting to places on time,” Amylia said, leaning against the wall. “But anyway, we should get going as we don’t want to be late and have Nathaniel pacing around like a mad man.”

“He will be doing that anyway until he sees your car pull up in the car park,” I said, quickly pulling my hair back so it wouldn’t annoy me throughout the day.

Amylia nodded and grabbed her car keys before walking outside. Mum and grandpa were looking at each other when I turned around to face them.

“Okay, what is going on?” I asked, making both of them look at me.

“What makes you think that something is going on?” mum asked.

“The looks you are giving each other for one,” I replied and crossed my arms.

“Do not worry about it Brianna. Now you better get going before Amylia gets impatient and drives to school like a mad woman,” mum said, ushering me out the front door.

Amylia was standing next to her car, trying not to laugh at my facial expression that I pulled when I got shoved out the front door by my own mother who had never done that before. I shook my head and walked down the steps to Amylia.

“What the hell is going on? I have never been shoved out my own front door like that before,” I said, stopping in front of the passenger door.

“Don’t look at me Brianna. I know nothing about why your mother and grandfather are acting like that,” she said, but I could tell she was hiding something.

I narrowed my eyes, but didn’t say anything. I knew she wouldn’t talk, no matter how much or how hard I pressed for information. I opened the passenger side door and slid into the car, taking in the coldness and sweet smell it had. I had figured out that it was some sort of vampire smell that they let off in small areas. It was like they used it to lure in their victims before going in for the kill.

The car ride to Colac was extremely quiet for some reason and I didn’t know why. I glanced over at Amylia and saw she had a concerned look on her face and her hands were gripping the steering wheel tightly. I swore her knuckles were turning even whiter than they originally were.

“Is everything alright?” I asked, making her glance over at me.

“I’m just thinking about your grandmother,” she replied and loos-

ened her grip on the wheel.

“What about her?” I asked.

“I just can’t get over how childish she can be sometimes. I hope you don’t mind me saying that about her Brianna.”

“Amylia, I couldn’t care less of how you speak about her. She is childish and she is the first to complain when something doesn’t go her way and goes off to sulk when grandpa puts her in her place like he did before. She is stuck in her generation and is trying to force how she grew up on me, but you already know that. I am only hoping she doesn’t do anything tonight to cause some sort of fight between her and mum. There is enough tension in my household with her being there,” I said, looking out the window.

“Well you know that if things get too tense with your grandmother there, you are always welcome at our place. I can tell you this now that Beth or Jack wouldn’t care how long you stayed as it would be making Nathaniel the happiest vampire I have seen in a very long time. Nice bite scar too you have on your neck by the way,” Amylia said, making me gasp.

“Oh my god!” I cried and placed my hand over my neck.

“Don’t worry about it. It will fade over time,” Amylia said, glancing down at her speed.

“But how do I explain it to everyone that asks?”

“Just say it’s a hickey. We can only tell it is a bite is because we have supervision while others don’t so it will look like a hickey to them.”

“Augusta is going to have a field day over this,” I said and shook my head.

“Don’t worry about that bitch. We can put her in her place if we have to.”

I sighed and looked down at my hands, not saying anything. Five minutes later, we were in Colac and sitting in peak hour traffic. I looked out my window to see Augusta walking with a girl I have never seen before, but they had the same fashion sense of hardly any clothing.

“I see Augusta has a new side kick,” Amylia said, making me look over at her.

“Do you know who it is?” I asked.

“That is a new girl starting at our school today and they paired her up with Augusta, thinking they would become friends or something. I feel so sorry for the new girl and I haven’t even met her yet,” Amylia said and took off.

Nathaniel was pacing in the car park when we pulled into a park and stopped when I opened my door. He made his way over using human speed and stopped in front of me.

“No present Nathaniel?” Amylia asked, getting out of the car and locking it.

“It’s still in my car. I thought I would give it to Brianna at lunch time so a certain couple of people wouldn’t know it is her birthday,” he replied.

“How sweet,” Amylia said and walked off to find James.

“Why did you get me something?” I asked once we were alone.

“Because you are my girlfriend and what kind of boyfriend would I be if I didn’t get you something for your birthday?” he asked and kissed me on the lips.

“One that wouldn’t be getting the silent treatment today,” I replied and crossed my arms.

“Brianna, you won’t do that to me. You love me.”

“Love is a strong work and so is hate Nathaniel Monroe. Now, tell me what is going on with this new girl.”

“All we know is that it was a spur of the moment move, but she has been paired up with Augusta, but they are walking in the school gates now so we can get a good look at her,” Nathaniel said, making me turn around to freeze in my spot.

“Oh my god,” I whispered.

“What?” Nathaniel asked.

“That’s Lucinda,” I replied.

“You’re kidding me right?”

“I’m not kidding anybody Nathaniel. That is Lucinda Smith and they have paired her up with the bitch of the school.”

“Go over to her.”

“I’m not going over there. Not with Augusta being there. She’ll skin me alive.”

“I’ll go over and introduce myself.”

“Wait no!” but it was too late. Nathaniel was walking over towards them. I watched them from where I was standing and clenched my teeth together when I saw Augusta touch my boyfriend. I noticed that Nathaniel turned his attention onto Lucinda and pointed over to me. He stepped aside so she could see what he was pointing at.

I was standing there awkwardly with a racing heart. Lucinda’s mouth dropped open once she saw me standing there and sprinted towards where I was standing. I smiled widely as I saw her running over to me and the look on Augusta’s face.

“Oh my god!” she cried and hugged me.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, hugging her back.

“I wanted a change.”

“You mean you wanted to meet Chase?” I asked, and pulled away from her to see her blushing.

Nathaniel walked over to us with a smirk on his face. I looked at him and raised my eyebrows, wanting to know what he was so happy about.

“What are you so happy about?” I asked.

“Well, I just stole Lucinda from Augusta for one and my girlfriend is happy because she has her friend back,” Nathaniel replied, grabbing my hand.

I looked over to Lucinda, seeing that she was looking around the school, no doubt for Chase. I suddenly got an idea and pulled my hand out of Nathaniel’s grasp.

“Do you want to go meet Chase?” I asked, catching Lucinda’s attention.

“I’ve only spoken to him on the phone so of course I want to meet him,” she replied, sounding excited.

“Nathaniel, lead the way,” I said, gesturing for him to start moving.

Nathaniel nodded and started walking with Lucinda and me following him. Nathaniel opened the door that led us to the main corridor and we followed him, spotting Chase at his locker.

“Stand behind me,” I whispered to Lucinda who nodded.

“Yo Chase,” Nathaniel said, making him look over towards his adoptive brother. “You want to meet someone?”

“Who?” Chase said, glaring at Nathaniel.

“The new girl. Brianna and I have befriended her and Brianna thought it would be a good idea for you meet her,” Nathaniel said, looking over his shoulder at me.

“You mean Brianna actually thought of something?” Chase asked.

“Hey!” I exclaimed and came into view, standing shoulder to shoulder with Nathaniel so we could hide Lucinda from Chase.

“Hello Brianna; happy birthday,” Chase said, smirking at me.

“Chase, I expect you to be in a better mood when I introduce you to this girl,” I said, crossing my arms.

“Why?” he asked.

I stepped aside, revealing Lucinda. “Chase, I believe you know Lucinda Smith, my friend you have been talking to on the phone,” I said, watching his mood change.

“Hello Chase,” Lucinda said, smiling at him.

“Lucy,” he whispered.

“I better go to the basketball courts as I have the game on Saturday,” Nathaniel said, looking at me.

“And I’m gonna find Hudson to see how she is going. Brandon said she wasn’t feeling well the other night,” I said, and took a couple of steps back.

“Good idea,” Chase said, looking at the both of us and narrowing his eyes at us.

“Don’t worry, we are leaving,” Nathaniel said, grabbed my hand and led me away from them.

“We weren’t like that, were we?” I asked as we walked away from Lucinda and Chase.

“No we weren’t and we won’t be. We didn’t really get along and we sometimes still don’t get along. Chase and Lucinda seem like they will be one of those couples that will show everyone that they are in love all the time.”

“Do you think they are?”

“By judging the phone calls I have heard when I’ve walked past Chase’s bedroom, I would say that they are. I just hope Lucinda doesn’t freak out when Chase tells her about us being vampires. I don’t want

that happening for his sake.”

“You better go to the basketball courts before the coach has your head,” I said once we got outside.

“Are you gonna come down and watch me practice?” he asked.

“Once I see how Hudson is feeling, I will come down and watch you,” I said and walked off in the direction of the toilets, feeling that would be the place Hudson would be.

I pushed open the girls’ toilets door and walked in, seeing that Hudson was splashing her face with cold water. She looked in the mirror and moved my eyes over to me.

“How are you feeling?” I asked, walking over to her.

“Well besides the fact I can’t keep anything down, I am feeling better than to be expected,” she replied and stood upright.

“Should you be here then if you can’t keep anything down?”

“I have a doctor’s appointment at twelve to see how I am going, so I will see if he can give me anything to help stop me throwing up every ten minutes.”

“How are you going to manage in class? I’m sure that this will give it away to everyone that you are pregnant.”

“It will give it away, but I’m just going to tell everyone that asks me that I have an upset stomach. I’ve talked to Mrs. Franklin and she is getting some crackers organized for me to eat in class to help settle my stomach.”

“I better go watch Nathaniel practice before he starts to worry about me,” I said.

“Tell him I wish-here we go again!” she said and ran into the toilet and locked the door.

I walked out of the toilets and made my way down to the basketball courts. I opened the gate and walked over to the seats and made myself comfortable while they were having a meeting. I turned my attention onto Jason who was shooting daggers at my boyfriend. He looked up and over to me before winking. I narrowed my eyes and looked at Nathaniel.

“Pryor! Brianna is here!” the coach yelled.

Nathaniel looked up and smiled at me. I smiled back and placed my

school bag on my lap and brung his closer to me so Jason couldn't get his grubby hands on it. Twenty minutes later, they had finished practice and Nathaniel walked over to where I was sitting.

"Well done," I said, handing him his school bag.

"Thanks. How is Hudson?"

"Being sick every ten minutes and can't keep anything down," I replied.

"Should she be at school then?" Nathaniel asked, sitting next to me.

"No she shouldn't be but she has a doctor's appointment so she is going to see if he can give her something to help. What is with the daggers that Jason was shooting you?" I asked.

"I was playing better than him and he didn't like it so he cracked it," he replied.

"Pryor, you think you can play so well, but you and I both know that you only do that to impress Brianna," Jason said as he walked over to us.

"Oh really? I have been playing sports my whole life and I was going to join up the basketball team even if Brianna didn't move here," Nathaniel replied.

"You didn't even break out in a sweat you freak. You are nothing but a freak and Brianna doesn't even deserve you so let her go and pick someone better. Someone like me," Jason said, smirking but not realising what he had just done.

Nathaniel slowly started to rise up from where he was sitting after Jason said that. I tried to stop Nathaniel but it didn't work. My vampire was angry and I didn't know what he was going to do. He got to full height, making Jason take a step back.

"Nate, don't," I said, my voice going completely unheard.

"You have thirty seconds to leave before I make your life a complete and utter nightmare Jason Hargreaves," Nathaniel said in a cold, deadly voice.

"By doing what Nathaniel? You don't have the guts to do anything to me," Jason fired back.

Nathaniel clenched his right fist and slowly started to raise it. I had to stop this before Nathaniel punched him. One punch by a vampire

would kill Jason. As much as I didn't like him, I didn't want Nathaniel do anything.

"Hey!" I said, getting between the two of them. "Stop acting like a pair of spoilt brats! Jason, deal with the fact Nathaniel is better than you at basketball and stop acting like this! And you Nathaniel, you need to learn how to control your freaking temper!" I yelled, looking between the two of them. "This day hasn't started off well and between the two of you trying to kill each other with every second you can get; it sure as hell isn't getting better!"

"We aren't trying to kill each other with every second we get," Jason said and tried to touch me.

"Keep your hands off me," I said in a low voice and walked away from the two of them.

As I was walking to my first class, I spotted Lucinda and Chase walking hand in hand towards the doors. At least something was going his way for a change. I just didn't know what would happen once Dakota got wind of Lucinda being here and hanging around Chase.

I walked into class to see Hudson sitting at her table, eating the crackers that Mrs. Franklin had gotten for her. She looked up and over at me when I walked in and smiled.

"Are you feeling better?" I asked.

"Yes I am now. These things are doing the trick until I have to bring them up. This baby is not liking the food I am eating."

"Maybe it wants blood as well dear," Mrs. Franklin said, walking into the room with a stack of papers. "It is half vampire as well."

"I don't think I will be able to stomach blood right now. The thought of drinking it has my stomach twisting into knots," Hudson replied.

The rest of the class started to file in so I moved to my spot. Nathaniel came into the classroom ten minutes later, but Mrs. Franklin didn't say anything. She was slowly getting use to Nathaniel being late for class. He caught my stare before sitting down next to me.

"Brianna, I'm sorry about before," Nathaniel whispered.

"We will talk about this at lunch," I muttered, looking straight ahead.

"Why can't we talk about it now?"

"Because we are in class Nate and I need to pass my subjects to get

my grandma off my back on thing at least,” I whispered, finally looking over at him.

Nathaniel looked at me but didn’t respond back. I sighed and shook my head lightly, turning back to face the front of the class and listening to Mrs. Franklin talk. I could feel his eyes turning holes into the side of my head, but I didn’t turn to look at him. It wasn’t like I was ignoring him on purpose. I just didn’t like the day it was today and what happened before between Nathaniel and Jason had gotten on my nerves.

By the time lunch rolled around, I had enough. I just wanted to go home, but then I remembered that my grandmother was there and would pounce on me as soon as I walked through the door. I followed Nathaniel to a table, not saying a single word. I sat down and rested my head on the table, closing my eyes.

“What’s wrong Brianna?” Amylia asked, sitting down with her lunch tray.

“I’ve had enough for one day. That’s what is wrong,” I replied, lifting my head up off the table and looked at her.

“Well the day isn’t over yet Brianna. We still have some more birthday presents left to give you,” Nathaniel said, making me slowly turn my head over towards him.

“Say one more thing about my birthday and I will refuse to talk to you for the rest of the day,” I hissed.

“But Brianna, it is your special day so you should be celebrating it,” James said, sitting down next to Amylia. Chase and Lucinda had also joined us without me even realising.

“What is there to even be celebrating James? Answer that question for me,” I said, narrowing my eyes at him.

“If I were all of you, I wouldn’t mention with words “birthday” and “Brianna” in the same sentence, especially not today,” Lucinda said, looking at me.

“And why is that?” Chase asked.

“Because today brings back to many memories that I would rather forget about even knowing,” I replied in a calm voice that even scared me.

“Then maybe celebrating would take your mind off what is going

on,” Amylia replied, but that was enough.

Pushing back on the table, the chair skidded across the floor, allowing me to get up and walk away from where they were all sitting. I grabbed the door handle and yanked open the door before letting it slam shut behind me as I walked along the stone path that was recently put in. I knew there would be a lot of talk in the lunch room with the slamming door and why I walked out suddenly, but right now, I couldn’t care less.

I was in no party mood and nothing was going to change that. In fact, I was even dreading the birthday dinner that was on for tonight and my own eighteenth birthday next year. I didn’t know what it was going to take for everyone to realise that I just wanted to forget about this day forever.

I sat underneath a tree and brung my knees up to my chest, sighing depressingly. Five minutes later, Lucinda walked over to where I was sitting and sat down next to me.

“People are asking questions about why you left like that,” Lucinda said, making me look over at her.

“Then maybe certain people shouldn’t talk about a subject that is extremely touchy for me,” I replied.

“Haven’t you told them why this day is difficult for you? We both know it was the day your father walked out on you and your mum.”

“They only know he walked. They don’t know what day it was. I’m not telling them that it was the fifteenth of March and I was two years old. The only thing I have said to Nathaniel that I was about eighteen months old when he walked.”

“Then maybe you should tell them the truth about why this day is really hard for you.”

“Why should I do that? They have lied to me about things and kept me in the dark so I think I can do the same thing to them. I was kept in the dark about Nathaniel leaving next February and moving to Melbourne for school. That was something that I should have been told about first by Nathaniel, but I was kept in the dark and almost died because of it.”

“We should get back into the lunch area before Nathaniel and Chase

start to worry about us,” Lucinda replied and got up off the ground.

“You can go. I am going to stay out here for a bit longer and think,” I said, looking down at the ground.

“Are you sure about that?” she asked.

“Positively sure,” I replied.

Lucinda nodded and walked away, leaving me alone in my thoughts. I sat out there until the bell rang and I slowly made my way to my next class, in which I remembered I had with James and Nathaniel. I stopped walking and wanted to think of an excuse to use so I could get out of going to class, but I knew they would pounce on me tonight.

Grumbling under my breath, I made my way to the music room and walked into the music room, seeing that Nathaniel and James were already in the room. They looked up and over at me when I entered and I was waiting for the questions to start towards me.

“Why did you leave before?” Nathaniel asked.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” I said, dropping my bag on the floor.

“And why not?” he asked.

“Because it has nothing to do with you Nathaniel so just drop it for once in your life,” I seethed.

“I’m not going to drop this Brianna. We are talking about your birthday here. Would it kill you for once in your life just to celebrate something for us?” he asked.

“I get enough of that from my grandmother so don’t you dare start using that guilt tripping card on me because it won’t work! I am seriously thinking about calling off this dinner tonight so I won’t have to put up with your grief!”

Nathaniel took a step back once he realised how angry I was getting at him. I looked over to James, who was looking at me in fear as he had never seen me go off at a vampire before. I put my hands up and walked over to the other side of room. I heard Nathaniel and James talking quietly, but I couldn’t make out what they were saying.

The last class went extremely slow, but the car ride back to Forrest was tense between Nathaniel and me. I stared out the window for most of the trip until I felt one of Nathaniel’s hands playing with my fingers. I glanced down before looking over at him. He had his eyes on the road,

but the outline of a smirk was playing on his lips.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“Nothing,” Nathaniel replied.

“If you think doing this will cheer me up, you have another thing coming Nathaniel,” I said and crossed my arms, making him stop what he was doing.

I was quiet most of the night, only speaking when someone asked me a question. Mum watched me with a concerned look on her face, but she knew why and could understand why I was acting like this and that was when my grandmother decided to make an appearance and turn this night from a horrible one to a nightmare.

“Brianna I have a present here for you that I want you to open,” grandma said, walking over to me with something big wrapped up.

“I’ll open it later,” I replied in a flat tone, looking out the window.

“You will open it right now Brianna Christina and you will like the present that I have put in the photo frame,” she said, making me turn my head and making my stare go from a normal one to a cold one from her tone of voice that she was giving me.

She was giving me a look to try and dare challenge her, but she didn’t know what kind of mood I was in.

“Who the hell do you think you are? My mother?” I fired back; making her take a step back and making everyone look over to where we were. “I only told mum that you could come with grandpa if you didn’t act like you are now, and what are you doing right now? You are acting like a brat Elizabeth and I’m sick of it so take your freaking present and get the hell away from me!” I yelled and ran to my room, slamming the door.

I was that angry and full of that much rage, I started throwing things around my room and didn’t stop until everything was on the floor or mangled in a twisted, ripped mess. I collapsed onto the floor and started crying silently. I was shocked and surprised that no one had followed me up here, but I had a feeling that mum would have stopped them until I cooled down on my own, but I had no idea how long that would take.

“Baby, are you okay?” I heard Nathaniel ask from outside my door.

“Go away!” I yelled, but my voice was full of tears so it came out like I was choking.

“Can I come in at least so we can talk?” he asked.

“I want to be alone right now,” I managed to get out in a clearer voice.

“I don’t want you to be alone though Brianna. Can you please let me in?”

I knew that Nathaniel wasn’t going to give up so I had no choice but to let him in. I dragged myself up from the heap I was on the floor and opened my bedroom door, looking at him through my teary eyes. Nathaniel took one look at me before pulling me for a hug. When I started crying again, he led me into my room but stopped once he saw the destruction that I had made in my fit of anger.

“What happened?” he asked, sounding shocked.

“I was just so angry and upset that I couldn’t stop myself,” I whispered quietly.

“You have completely ruined everything in your room.”

“Don’t point out the obvious Nathaniel! I know what I have done! You don’t need to make me feel even guiltier than I am now!”

“Your mum and grandfather are having a go at your grandmother as I speak so I thought I would come up here and check on you.”

“She shouldn’t be treating me like that. She isn’t my mother so she can’t keep on demanding that I do things her way and not my mother’s way.”

“I think they are leaving tonight anyway after what happened. I can tell you though that your grandfather is livid with your grandmother.”

I couldn’t find anything to say. I didn’t want my grandfather to go, but I wanted my grandmother gone and the only way that she would go is if my grandfather drove her back home. The only thing running through my mind was some birthday this turned out to be.

21. The Game

“Are you sure this is what I should be wearing to a basketball game?” I asked Amylia as I walked out of her massive built in wardrobe. “It looks like something I should be wearing to a rock concert not a basketball game.”

“Of course it is Brianna; you look beautiful and Nathaniel better stay on his game once he sees you,” she replied, sitting on her bed.

She had me dressed in black skinny jeans, white shirt, Converse sneakers and a leather jacket that stopped at my mid-section. Amylia had also gone out on a limit with eyeliner and mascara, making sure that I had smokey eyes to match what I was wearing and to make my green eyes pop more prominently.

“Are Chase and Lucy joining us?” I asked.

“Yes they are. Chase is meeting us at the school and reserving seats for all of us so that is one thing that we don’t have to worry about,” she replied and grabbed her lip gloss.

“Are you both ready?” James asked, sticking his head into the room and looking between the two of us.

“Of course we are,” Amylia replied and grabbed her jacket.

“About time,” Jack said when we entered the living room. “Nathaniel just messaged me wondering where we all were, even though we have over two hours before the game even starts.”

“Well text Nathaniel and tell him to stop worrying as we are on our way,” Amylia replied and walked through the door that led to the garage.

I looked at James who rolled his eyes and followed Amylia. Bethany linked arms with me and led me to her car, while Jack grabbed the keys. James and Amylia had gone by the time we got to Beth’s car.

“Who was driving?” I asked.

“James was driving, but Nathaniel is getting impatient so we have to hurry,” Jack replied.

“Patience will never be Nathaniel’s strong point,” Bethany sighed.

“Now, now dear, we raised him as best as we could after he was turned. He just can’t help that he got his mother’s temper and fathers lack of patience in his human life that he will never be able to get rid of. That is with him for all eternity,” Jack said and unlocked the car.

That was a little bit of information that I was keeping in my brain about Nathaniel’s birth parents. He never said much about them and I had always wondered why that was the case. Maybe it was the relationship he had with them that didn’t make him want to talk about them, or maybe it was something else that was tearing him apart on the inside. The main thing that hadn’t left my mind was his deceased child that he never got to hold when it was born.

“Brianna, you are looking beautiful as always,” Beth said, smiling at me.

“Thank you,” I replied with a smile. “I am just a bit worried about the attention I will bring on myself because of Amylia and her scheming ways to manipulate me into doing things her way.”

“That is nothing to be worried about. You should be proud that you can pull off the look Amylia dressed you in. She tried it on me about ten years back and I couldn’t pull it off no matter how hard she tried,” Beth replied, getting in the passenger seat.

“Yes I remember that look. I think we have the photos somewhere in my office that I should pull out for a photo night,” Jack replied, winking at me.

I smiled and got in the backseat, fastening my seatbelt. Jack got in the driver’s seat and started the car. Once he put it in drive, he took off

like a mad man. I didn't know how the cars could handle being driven so fast but then knowing the Pryor's, they would have rigged them so they could drive them at speeds that would no doubt cause major death and destruction if a human was behind the wheel. I immediately banished that thought from my mind.

"Nathaniel will be pacing the car park until he sees our car pull up," Jack said half way to Colac.

"Hopefully James and Amylia will be able to keep him cool, calm and collected until we arrive," Beth replied.

"What time does the actual game start?" I asked.

"Seven it starts," Jack said, glancing at me through the revision mirror. "We will get there about five thirty so Nathaniel will have an hour and a half to calm back down and focus his mind on the game."

"He won't be calm, Jack. I know my vampire son and if anything, he will be worse as he has to deal with Jason playing on his team and the two of the trying to impress Brianna. It's a battle between the two of them to see who can impress her the most."

The rest of the car ride was quiet and when we pulled up to the school grounds, it looked like James was physically holding Nathaniel back while Amylia was shooting someone dirty looks that would even make me cringe. I looked over to the other side of the car park, and saw that Jason's friends were holding him back. Something must have happened between the two of them again.

I got out of the car and walked over to Nathaniel, a concerned look on my face. He tensed when he saw someone walking over to him but then physically relaxed once he saw it was me approaching.

"What's going on?" I asked, looking between the three of them.

"Jason said some not nice words about you near Nathaniel as he knew that he would be able to hear and that made Nathaniel livid and almost caused bloodshed in the car park, even though I wouldn't mind seeing that brat be a blood drained corpse so we wouldn't have to deal with the brat ever again," Amylia replied, her eyes turning into the look of a vampire.

"Amylia!" I yelled, clicking my fingers in front of her, making her snap out of it and quickly looking around to make sure that no one had seen

anything. We didn't need outsiders knowing that they were technically dead but still alive as immortals.

"Oh sorry; it's been a while since I had those thoughts."

"Believe me, I would love to see him in the same position as well, but sometimes, all dreams can't come true. Now, what did he say about me?"

"He called you a gold digger and that you were only with Nathaniel because of the money and that you didn't love him or want him physically and that money was the main reason why you were only still with Nathaniel, but he didn't count on our vampiric hearing and catching every single word that was said," James said, glaring over at Jason.

"Drain the life out of him," I said, turning around so I could look at him.

"When?" Amylia asked a smile in her voice.

I didn't reply. I walked over to Jason and tapped him on the shoulder, making me turn around.

"What the hell-Brianna! Why don't you look lovely tonight," Jason said, touching my arm.

"How dare you call me a gold digger and that I am on with Nathaniel because of the money! I'm not Augusta! That two faced cow would only be with him for the money!" I yelled.

"I did not say such a thing! Who told you that?" he asked, but I could tell straight away that he was lying.

"James told me!" I said, feeling my anger boil.

"He was lying! I would never say anything like that to a girl that is as beautiful as you," Jason said, and tried to touch my face.

"Don't touch me Jason or I will make sure that you won't be one hundred percent when you play later," I hissed.

"Come one Brianna don't be like that. You want me and I want you so why don't you just admit that?" he tried again, getting in my personal space.

It was too late. I raised my hand and slapped him right across the face, as hard as I could. He placed his hand over his cheek and slowly turned his head so he could look at me, shocked.

"Stay the hell away from because I won't hesitate to get a restraining

order placed out on you or worse,” I said and walked away from him with my head held high.

“Did you just do what I think you did?” James asked when I stopped in front of them.

“And what was that?” I asked.

“Slapped him across the face?” Amylia said, pride in her voice.

“Of course I did. He lied straight to my face and then tried to seduce me, which didn’t work.”

“He did what?” Nathaniel asked, walking back over to where we were standing.

“Nate,” I breathed.

“He tried to seduce you?” he growled.

“And he was hopeless at doing so. Don’t go and make this worse. For me,” I pleaded, placing my hand on his arm.

Nathaniel looked between me and Jason before nodding and grabbing my hand, leading me inside where the game was being held. I soon realised that he was leading me into the locker rooms. I didn’t want to come in here. What if others were in here and saw me come in?

“Why are you taking me here?” I asked, stopping outside of the door.

“So we can talk while I am getting changed,” he replied, and tugged on my hand, but I didn’t move from my spot.

“I’m not going in there Nathaniel,” I said, standing my ground.

“Why not?”

“Because this is just for guys and if you look me up and down, you will see I am not a guy. I am a girl and Amylia made sure that it was on show in this outfit,” I said, moving my hands up and down my body.

“Yes that I can see, and if I didn’t have a game and wasn’t raised to treat a woman like a lady, I promise you, I would have my wicked way with you in the change rooms,” Nathaniel whispered, his eyes darkening as he looked me up and down.

“Take a cold shower and get changed. I am going to find my seat,” I said, taking my hand out of his and walking away, leaving my vampire standing there.

I made my way to the basketball court and found where my adopted

vampire family were sitting. I walked over to them and sat down next to Lucinda, who had a strange look on her face.

“Are you okay?” I asked, catching her attention.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I am just thinking,” she replied, but she sounded off.

I looked at her concerned but I didn’t press the issue. I knew she would talk to me when she wanted to. I glanced over at Chase and saw that he had a strange look on his face also. It was like something had happened between them and I had no idea what. Then it came to me. Chase was a vampire and there was a very high chance that he hadn’t told Lucinda about it yet.

“Wow, weird vibe. What’s going on?” Amylia asked, sitting down next to me and looking at Lucinda and Chase.

“Nothing is going on,” Chase replied.

“Oh really? The mood between you and Lucinda is telling me something else,” Amylia pressed.

“Amylia, leave it,” Chase warned, glaring at her.

“Fine, but I want answers Chase so you better have a good excuse why you are acting like you are now. It sort of reminds me of how you were acting when Brianna entered our lives. Jealous over the fact Nathaniel was happy and you couldn’t understand why someone so average and plain like Brianna was making him this happy,” Amylia said, making me look at Chase.

“Plain?” I asked, looking over at Chase, and feeling hurt. I was starting to class Chase as a brother figure like James and finding out something like that was making me hurt.

“At the time I thought you were. I didn’t realise how happy you were making Nathaniel,” Chase said, putting his hands up in defence.

I narrowed my eyes and shook my head at Chase. I didn’t know what to say about this little bit of information that Amylia brought out into the open.

“Don’t worry about it Brianna. You can get your revenge on Chase one day for what he said,” James said, smiling at me.

“Do I have to plead my case? I will explain why another time, but now, we are here to see Nathaniel play a game and to put Jason in his place,” Chase said, putting an end to this argument.

“Jason has already been put in his place,” Amylia said, smirking.

“What did you do?” Beth asked, sounding concerned.

“Not a lot. I just gave him a stern warning about staying away from all of us if he knew what was better for him. I think he shall listen to my words,” she replied, looking at her vampire mother.

“You better not have made this worse for Nathaniel, Amylia,” Chase spoke up.

“Everything will work out perfectly. Nothing like a couple of threats that had him scared to do the trick and make him listen,” Amylia said quietly, glaring down at Chase.

“What does she mean by that?” Lucinda asked me.

“It’s nothing worry about,” I replied, looking at her. “Jason is someone that can’t take a hint so we have to use drastic measures to get out point across.”

“Something isn’t adding up though,” she said.

“You will find out what we are talking about if you ever speak to Jason. Let’s just hope that it never happens for your sake.” I didn’t want to think of the consequences that Chase would inflict.

I looked down to see a pair of high heels appear. I looked up to see Augusta standing there with a cold look on her face and her arms crossed.

“Can I help you?” I asked.

“Why the hell are you here? You weren’t invited to this game. It was invites only and I don’t remember giving you one,” Augusta said, trying to be scaring and intimidating but it wasn’t working. After being around vampires and seeing what they could do, she had nothing on them. It was time to fight fire with fire.

“I believe I am here to watch my boyfriend play basketball,” I said, making her even angrier.

“You aren’t to sit with the Pryor’s either. I am, so move from your spot and go sit over with the other losers on the other side of the court. This side is only for the rich people and you aren’t one of them!” she hissed.

“Alright Augie, that is enough,” James said, making her look over at him with a flirty look in her eyes.

“Enough of what James?” she asked, trying to sound sultry but instead sounded like she had smoked too many cigarettes.

James got up from where he was sitting and stood in front of Augusta, making her take a step back from his height and the fact he had a scary look on his face. “Enough of the way you are treating Brianna. She is a part of this family while you aren’t so you have no right to come along and tell her what is right in your eyes so you can be around us every single second you get. We don’t even like you Augusta, so start to realise that for once in your life.”

“I am like you though! I have money and beauty while Brianna has no money and sure as hell has no beauty!” Augusta cried, stamping her foot.

“If I were you, I would stop talking and walk away from us this second. I don’t believe in violence against women, but right now, I wouldn’t hesitate to slap across your face,” James said, venom lacing his voice.

“James baby, you wouldn’t do that. We both know there is a spark between us,” Augusta said, making Amylia slowly get up when she placed her skinny hand on James’ chest. I grabbed Amylia’s arm and forced her to sit back down before this ended badly for both Augusta and the secret that the Pryor’s were hiding from everyone.

“I think you should leave,” I said.

“I don’t have to listen to you,” she spat, looking over at me.

“Nathaniel and the team are coming out,” Lucinda said, making Augusta turn around so she could look at them. “Wow, look at them all. They are look like they are ready to kill.”

“Jason is still shooting daggers into Nathaniel’s back,” I said, looking between the two of them.

“You go date Jason and I will date Nathaniel,” Augusta said, looking at me like she wanted to kill me. “Then all that will stop and I will get to be happy while you will get to be miserable. I know how Jason treats girls and you deserve to get treated like how he treats people.”

“Oh go jump back on your broom stick and fly back to where you came from and leave us alone,” I said, getting sick of her attitude.

Augusta’s mouth dropped open with shock while Amylia laughed at what I said. Beth looked over at me with a smile on her face, while Jack

tried not to laugh.

“I should slap you clean across your face for saying that Brianna,” Augusta said.

“I will like to see you try Augusta. I’m sure the Pryor’s wouldn’t hesitate to ruin your life and fire your mother from the chemist,” I said, knowing that I had won this argument with the queen bitch of the school.

Augusta narrowed her eyes before turning on her heel and walking away from us without uttering a single word. James shook his head and sat back down next to Amylia, but I wasn’t paying any attention to them. My eyes were glued to Jason, who was looking at Nathaniel with what appeared to be a hidden motive.

The opposing team came out, making Jason turn his attention from Nathaniel onto them. Five minutes later, the whistle blew, telling them that they had one minute left before the actual game started. Nathaniel glanced up to where I was sitting and I gave him the thumbs up, wishing him luck for his game.

He smiled before walking over to where his team was huddled. I didn’t even realise that Beth had vanished until she came back with her arms full of food that would have cost her a fortune and would have been enough to raise everyone’s blood sugar and fat levels.

“Brianna, would you like anything? I have enough for everyone,” Beth said, gesturing to the food she put down on the benches.

“Any hot chips?” I asked quietly, feeling weird for eating this sort of food in front of vampires and when I wasn’t use to eating it.

“There sure is,” Beth replied, handing them to me with a drink.

“This would have cost you a fortune,” Jack said, grabbing a nacho and popping it in his mouth.

“Fifty dollars all up,” Beth replied, putting her purse back in her handbag.

“Pass the hotdog,” James said, stealing a chip off me.

“Get it yourself James and stop taking my food,” I said, slapping his hand away so he couldn’t steal anymore food from me.

“Please Brianna? Can you get it for me? I’ll be your best friend,” James said, pouting.

“Sucking up won’t work on me James,” I said, smiling at him. “Try it on your fiancée when she comes back from the bathroom.”

“What is James trying out on me?” Amylia asked.

“Sucking up to you,” I replied, quickly looking at her before turning my attention back to the basketball court.

Five minutes later, the whole Pryor family were up on their feet, cheering for Nathaniel as he did something which I didn’t know what it even was. And it seemed that they were the loudest out of everyone else when Nathaniel’s team scored.

“Come on Brianna!” Amylia exclaimed, pulling me up onto my feet. “Start cheering for your boyfriend!”

“I’d rather not Amylia,” I said.

“Why not?” she asked.

“Because there is enough attention on us right now and I do not really like it as I know they are staring at me also.”

“You will get used to it after a while Brianna. Everyone always stares at us when we walk past because of our beauty.”

“I don’t have your beauty though and people still stare at me. They must be thinking why a freak like me would be hanging around people like you.”

“Go Nate go!” Chase said making me keep my eyes glued to the court.

“What’s going on?” I asked Beth, making her look at me.

“If Nathaniel gets this in, they win,” Beth said, smiling at me. “That reminds me, I need to save some of this food for Nathaniel as he will be one hungry vampire,” she said very quietly so Lucinda wouldn’t hear.

Nathaniel got the ball in, making the noise in the room become louder and his teammates, besides Jason gathered around him. I started to feel like I was suffocating and I knew that I had to get out the room.

“I’m gonna get some air,” I said to Beth and walked down the steps before she or anyone could say anything to stop me.

I found some benches and sat down on one of them, taking off the jacket Amylia demanded that I wore tonight and placed it on the seat next to me. The cold air helped clear the fog that started to invade my head when I was inside. I was alone for ten minutes before the door

opened and Nathaniel came outside. He looked around before spotting me and walked over to where I was sitting in his basketball uniform.

“Hey, I was looking all over for you,” he said.

“I just needed some air,” I replied.

“And you couldn’t have waited until the celebrations finished before you came out here?” he asked, grabbing my hand and started drawing patterns on my palm.

“If I stayed in there any longer, I would have fainted. I felt like I couldn’t breathe and like there was this fog that was entering my head, making me go all strange,” I explained.

“But it wasn’t hot in there though,” Nathaniel said, sounding concerned.

“I know and that is the crazy thing. I would have expected it if it was hot, but it wasn’t and I felt...strange.”

“It wasn’t something that you ate that might have made this happen?” he asked, a look of concentration coming into his face.

“I only had chips and a drink.”

“And anything else throughout the day?” he pressed.

“No and you can take that up with Amylia as she spent most of the day making sure I looked like I am right now, and I think she forgot that I needed food.”

“Why didn’t you say anything to her?”

“I didn’t want to ruin her fun but I am feeling better outside than I was inside.”

“You need food that is healthier for you than hot chips. Come on,” Nathaniel said, getting up and dragging him up with me.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“We are going to buy you some decent food for you to eat so you don’t collapse from the lack of nutrition that you haven’t been getting lately with Amylia stealing you from me without my approval,” he replied, leading me back inside the school. “Let me just get changed out of these clothes and then we can be on our way.”

“I don’t need you to spend any more money on me,” I said.

“Brianna, don’t argue with me,” Nathaniel warned.

“You are a stubborn vampire, aren’t you?” I asked.

“And you are a stubborn human,” he said back, smirking.

“Take me home Nathaniel,” I demanded.

“Why?” he asked, sounding confused at my sudden demand.

“I don’t want to be out any longer. I want to go home and crawl into my own bed,” I said.

“But I thought you were staying at my place?”

“Nate, I want to go home.”

“I don’t want you to go home tonight. I want you to stay with me.”

“Talk to mum about staying the night. All I want to do is sleep in my own bed tonight and no one else’s.”

“Fine you win Brianna. Wait by the car and I will be back in about ten minutes,” Nathaniel said, walking into the building.

I made my way to his car, looking behind me every now and then to make sure that no one was following me. I leaned against his car, waiting patiently for him to come back when I realised that I left the jacket on the seat.

“Great,” I muttered and walked back over to where I was sitting, feeling a bit scared as I was alone in the dark and in a car park and anyone could have been watching me.

I grabbed the jacket and made my way back over to Nathaniel’s car, only tripping twice and managed to save myself from falling face first on the ground. When I turned the corner, I saw Nathaniel at his car, looking worried and sniffing the air.

“Looking for someone?” I asked, catching his attention.

“Where were you? I was worried sick,” Nathaniel breathed, running over to me at vampire speed and hugging me tightly.

“I remembered that I left the jacket on the seat so I went back to get it. I thought you would have been longer and I would have had enough time to get back without even knowing I was gone,” I replied, feeling my lungs squeeze against my rib cage.

“Couldn’t you have waited until I came back so you wouldn’t have had me worried sick to my core?” he asked, pulling back from me.

“Nathaniel, I realised as soon as you went inside and I went to get it straight away so I wouldn’t forget it and leave it there. I knew that if I did, Amylia would have killed me with her bare hands for leaving some-

thing of hers behind," I said, looking over at him.

"She wouldn't do that Brianna. It was a jacket that Dakota gave Amylia before you came into my life, but she never really liked so it she didn't wear it. If you left it behind, it wouldn't have fazed her one bit and don't be surprised if Amylia says you can keep it."

"Can we go home?" I asked.

"Of course we can," he replied and unlocked his car.

Nathaniel chucked everything in the back seat before opening the passenger side door for me so I could get into the car. For once, I got my way with Nathaniel, but I could only hope that mum would let Nathaniel stay for the night to make me happy.

I didn't want Nathaniel to be disappointed. I had already done that to him once tonight and I didn't want my mother to do the same thing. I didn't know how he would react to that.

22. Bonding

“Brianna, can I talk to you?” Lucinda asked at the end of the school day.

“Sure. What’s up Lucinda?” I asked, placing my hand on the door handle and looking over at her with a smile on my face.

“I think it will be better to talk in private without prying ears and eyes with what I have to say,” she said and opened the door before I could.

“What’s going on Lucy?” I asked, following her outside.

She didn’t say anything to me. She just kept on walking and didn’t stop until we were in a place where it was quiet and where no one would be able to bother us or interfere with our talking. Lucinda stopped under a tree and turned around so she could look at me with a strange look in her eye.

“You want to know what is going on?” she asked.

“Well you did drag me out and I am meant to be meeting Nathaniel in thirty minutes for an appointment and you know what he can get like when I am late for something with him,” I replied, crossing my arms.

“Nathaniel can wait. This is more important than meeting him for an appointment that can be held,” Lucinda announced and sat down on the ground.

“Do you care to tell me what is going on or do I need to start playing a guessing game until I know what is happening?” I asked, sitting down in front of her.

“Chase told me some things last Saturday afternoon before the basketball game and I wish to discuss them with you as I think you will

know the answers to my questions that I have.”

“What things do you want to know?” I asked, but I already knew the answer to my own question.

“Him and his family being vampires for one and you knowing about it for one,” she answered.

“Oh god,” I replied, suddenly knowing where this conversation was going to end up. And that would be in an argument.

“Do you care to tell me what is going on or do you want to keep me in the dark like all the other times you did when I was around Chase and yourself? Did you think about pulling me aside and telling me what was going on?” she asked.

“Lucy, I don’t want to scare you with what I know because it isn’t a pretty picture,” I whispered, looking down at the dirt.

“Chase told me about the blood drinking and how you and Nathaniel have dabbled in it and that Chase wanted to try it with me.”

I nodded, knowing that I was about to get the third degree of Lucinda for keeping her in the dark about Chase, but I didn’t make any habits of going around telling my friends that Nathaniel and his family weren’t human and they were something that people didn’t think that were real.

“Blood drinking isn’t for everyone. I know that I don’t enjoy doing it, but it does give you some benefits and you will be bonded to your vampire for the rest of your life. The downside is the fact that they might not stop drinking from you and that it does leave a scar that fades so no one can see it after a while. I have had countless people come up to me on the street, asking what I had on my neck.”

“Why didn’t you tell me about Chase and his family being vampires?” she asked, changing the subject completely.

“Because I couldn’t tell you and you now can’t tell anyone what you know,” I told her, knowing I was going to explain why.

“What do you mean?” she asked, looking and sounding confused.

“Didn’t Chase tell you the reason why? You can’t tell a soul about him or anyone in the Pryor family being vampires Lucinda. It is a secret that you will have to take to the grave unless Chase changes you into a vampire and then you will have protect yourself and them from the secret

coming out into the open for other people to know and freak out about,” I announced, watching the expression on her face.

“What do you mean that I can’t tell anyone? I think my family has a right to know that I am getting involved in!” she yelled, making me quickly place my hand over her mouth and look around to make sure that no one heard her.

“Do you really want to risk telling them and they tell someone else, making Chase and his family be exposed to the public eye and putting all of us in danger?” I asked.

“No one can expose them for being vampires Brianna. No one would believe the person who told them.”

“Lucinda, you have to take this seriously! Your life is now in danger as you know what the Pryor’s are and don’t you know that everyone has enemies? The only difference would be that the Pryor’s enemies would be vampires and would most likely kill to get their revenge and you and I would be the main targets for a couple of reasons as we are human and we have blood running through our veins.”

“I don’t want to believe this.”

Lucinda got up suddenly and started walking away from where I was sitting. “Like it or not Lucy, you are gonna have to believe this. Chase is now going to act like a vampire in front of you now because you know and nothing you will say or do can stop that. It is in his nature and it has been for a very long time.”

“What do you mean? I can threaten him to make him act like a human and not like a vampire,” she said, smirking.

“Chase doesn’t take anyone’s crap Lucy and I’m sure that he won’t take yours either if you started on him. No matter how hard you tried to force him to act human, he won’t because of what he is and I think that is something that you are going to have to realise if you want to be with him. Chase is a vampire and nothing will ever change that,” I said, getting up from where I was sitting. “No matter how hard you tried to change something that could never be changed and I know that for a fact with Nathaniel. He can’t change the fact that is a vampire for the rest of his life and not a human, like he now craves to be but he can’t.”

Lucinda didn’t reply. She just walked away being her usual stubborn

self. I shook my head and left the school grounds, finally going to meet Nathaniel. I found him out the front of Jack's chemist, talking with Jack. By the look on their faces, it was pretty important. I slowed down my walking and waited for them to notice me. They were too busy in their conversation to notice my scent wrapping around them from the wind.

"What's happening?" I asked, walking up to them and catching their attention.

"We were just about to gather a search party to look for you since you are a bit late," Jack said smiling at me warmly.

"I would have been here a lot sooner if Lucinda didn't bail me up and start asking me questions," I said, catching both of their attentions.

"Lucinda? What did she want?" Nathaniel asked.

"She knows," I muttered, looking between the two of them.

"Knows what?" Jack asked.

I didn't say anything. I just pointed to the mark on my neck and made a biting sound with my teeth as major clues. For smart people, they didn't twig about what I was on about.

"Brianna, what are we playing? Charades?" Nathaniel asked.

"If we were, our team would be losing," I said, smirking. "No, I am trying to tell you what Lucinda knows and you haven't even figured it out."

"Why can't you just tell us by using your voice?"

"She knows what you all are," I said very quietly, knowing they could hear me.

Jack's eyes widened before he grabbed my arm and led me inside the chemist and into the staff room with Nathaniel on his heels. Jack shut the door and pushed me down into a chair.

"Okay Brianna, talk," Jack said.

"Why do I have to talk? Don't you think you should be talking to Chase about this? I mean, he was the one that told her, not me," I said.

"Chase won't tell us anything Brianna. You should know that by now," Nathaniel said, walking over to me.

"So, what are you going to do? Give me the third degree until I cave?" I asked, looking between the two of them.

"We just want to know what Lucinda told you," Jack said, sitting next

to me.

“She was more pissed off at the fact that I didn’t tell her that Chase was a vampire and she couldn’t understand the reason why she wasn’t allowed to tell anyone about you all being vampires, but I explained to her that she couldn’t risk it.”

“Was anything else said on her end?”

“She thinks she can threaten him to act human and not like a vampire.”

“Chase doesn’t take things like that well,” Nathaniel said, sounding concerned. “Brianna, I know that you and Chase aren’t best friends and very highly won’t be, but can you talk to him and try to get out of him what was said? It might work as you are a human and Lucy is your friend. “

“Send me in the deep end to face the sharks, why don’t you Nathaniel Monroe?”

“It might be the only way we can get him to open up,” Jack said, making me look over at him.

“I don’t want to do this, but I will,” I said. “But if he doesn’t say anything, don’t expect me to do it again.”

Two hours later, I was walking towards Chase’s bedroom, grumbling under my breath. I didn’t want to do this so I had no idea what possessed me to say yes. I stopped out the front of this door and raised my hand to knock but almost chickened out.

“Brianna, I know that you are outside my door,” Chase said from inside. “You can come in.”

Gaining some courage, I opened the door and walked inside his room, seeing him sitting on his bed, flicking through a magazine.

“What can I help you with Brianna?” he asked, looking up.

“I need to talk to you about something,” I replied.

“And what is this something?”

“About Lucinda.”

He froze when I mentioned her name. Suddenly, he got off the bed and raced over to his bedroom door, closing it before coming back over to me.

“You have spoken to her?”

“She bailed me up before and told me that she knew about what you are and that I knew. She wasn’t happy that I didn’t tell her about it and didn’t understand why she couldn’t tell anyone about what you are. She has it locked into her mind that she can threaten you into acting human and not like a vampire.”

“I didn’t know she was going to react when I told her the truth about me and my family. She had a right to know but she didn’t even believe me until I proved it to her.”

“You have to set her straight Chase. I’m sure that you don’t want this coming out into the open because she thought that it was harmless.”

“How am I going to do that Brianna? She told me before she left that I was a lying freak that needed to be locked up and that was the last thing I heard from her.”

“Show her that you aren’t going to hurt her and that you only don’t want her for her blood. I don’t think she fully understands the nature of getting involved with a vampire. I’m still trying to understand everything so it is going to take her awhile to understand what she is getting herself into.”

“Brianna, did someone set you up to talk to me? I know that you wouldn’t have done this willingly as we don’t really get along,” Chase said, pulling me over to his bed.

“Chase, did you ever think that maybe I just wanted to help?” I asked, playing dumb.

“Brianna,” Chase pressed.

“Alright, alright you win. Nathaniel and Jack put me up to it as they knew you wouldn’t talk to them so they put me up to the job as I am human and so is Lucinda,” I said.

“Where is my brother and father right now?” he asked. “I want to have a nice chat to the both of them.”

“I don’t know where they are, but we aren’t talking about them Chase. I am trying to help you and Lucinda out with this patch you are going through.”

“Brianna, you know Lucinda better than I do. Give me some tips on what I can do to help her understand about this. I didn’t want her to take the news perfectly that I am not alive and that I suck people’s

blood, but I didn't expect her to freak out like she did either."

"Try calling her on the phone and just explain everything to her. Tell her that you drinking her blood aren't something that you have to do. Just tell her the truth Chase and then give her some time to think about all the information you have given her."

"I will do that. Thank you Brianna. Even though we don't always see eye to eye on most things, you are the best thing that has happened to Nathaniel in a very long time and I'm sorry that I didn't approve of your relationship to begin with. Dakota had a big influence on me back then and she was influencing me not to approve of how happy you were making Nathaniel because you weren't a vampire. I didn't see how happy you were making him and how Dakota was ruining my relationship with Nathaniel because of it. I was caught in her web of lies that she had created to ruin your relationship with Nathaniel as she saw you as a threat because you were changing Nathaniel for the good."

"Chase, I forgive you, but I know that your relationship with Nathaniel is still tense and I hope that you can both work through it for your sake and for his. I don't like seeing this divide between the two of you."

He nodded and grabbed his mobile before walking out of his bedroom. I sighed before getting up and walking out of the room, closing his bedroom door behind me and making my way to Nathaniel's room.

When I entered Nathaniel's room, something didn't feel right. I walked straight over to his bedroom window and looked out of it, seeing nothing suspicious besides a crow that was sitting on the window edge. It turned its head and looked at me, making me take a step back in shock and in fear. The way it stared at me was like it wasn't a real crow but something else and its eyes. They weren't like a normal eye colour like you see in a normal crow. They were a deep blood red colour and as cold as ice.

It flew off into the distance, making the eerie feeling go with it. Why would a bird like a crow give off such a strange feeling in Nathaniel's room?

"Brianna, are you okay?" Nathaniel asked, making me slowly turn around to face him.

“Everything is fine,” I replied, still feeling slightly shaken by that bird that I saw.

“Are you sure? You look like you have seen a ghost or something,” he replied, walking over to me.

“It’s just; how often do you get crows around this house?” I asked.

“Such a strange question, but they tend to avoid the house as they know what we are and don’t want to risk their lives. Why do you ask?” Nathaniel asked me and pulling me down on the bed.

“No reason,” I said too quickly.

“Brianna, what is going on? You are acting strange and it is starting to freak me out. What has happened?”

“There was a crow near your window before, but it didn’t look right. For one, it had blood red eyes and looked like it was human but in a crow life form.”

Nathaniel now looked like he had seen the ghost from what I told him. He took a few deep breaths and shook his head before getting up off his bed, almost making me fall back from his vampire speed.

“You must have been imaging things Brianna,” Nathaniel said, but his voice was shaky. “There is nothing like that around here.”

“Are you not telling me something Nathaniel?” I asked. “Like something that involves this freaky looking bird?”

“Brianna, I know nothing about what you have told me so why would you ask me a crazy question like that?” he said, quickly making his way into the bathroom.

That was enough to tell me something wasn’t right with Nathaniel. He only went into the bathroom when something was wrong or when he didn’t want to tell me something and that was where he was headed now. I got up from his bed and started to walk very slowly but stopped.

“When why is your voice shaky and you are acting strange? You look like you’ve seen the ghost Nathaniel and not me,” I asked following him but had a door shut in my face.

“There is nothing going on Brianna. If there was, I would tell you, but there isn’t so I don’t need to tell you a single thing,” he said, turning a tap on.

I didn’t believe one word that came out of his mouth, but I didn’t

feel like another fight so I didn't press it anyone. I just turned on my heel and walked out of the room and went into the living room. Why didn't he just tell me what this bird was about? Has it been here before? Did Nathaniel know something about this crow that he didn't want me knowing? The third question defiantly had the answer of Nathaniel not wanting me to know what was going on in it, but I couldn't find an answer for the other two.

I just couldn't understand why Nathaniel didn't want me knowing anything. Did he really think I was going to interfere in what was happening or make things worse? I was deep in thought when he came into the living room and walked over to where I was sitting on the couch.

"Can I help you?" I asked, looking up at him.

"Why didn't you stay in my room?" Nathaniel asked, sitting down next to me.

"Maybe because you walked into the bathroom and slammed the door in my face before I could say any more?" I suggested.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked, not picking up on the mood I was currently in.

"Oh wouldn't you like to know," I muttered, not giving anything away.

Nathaniel placed his hand behind my head, moving it so I had no choice but to turn my head so I could look at him. He narrowed his eyes so I did the same, playing his game with him and not against him.

"Why are you acting like this Brianna?"

"Maybe because I know for a fact that you aren't telling me something Nathaniel Norwood and I think I have a right to know. Why the hell did you freak when I told you about that bird? That is something I should have done and not you. So explanation please?"

"I have nothing to explain to you Brianna, so can you just leave it at that?"

"Well, I'm sure that if I asked Hudson or Brandon why you freaked out with what I told you, they would tell me in a heartbeat what the hell is going on with you," I said, watching him cringe.

"They wouldn't dare," Nathaniel hissed.

"You want a bet Nathaniel? They have told me stuff about you before and I'm sure nothing will stop them again when it comes to me Na-

thaniel and now that Hudson's hormones are playing up, it will be even worse on your end once she finds out that you are keeping me in the dark once again with something that might just happen to involve me. There is no use saying in the future that is for my own protection when I could as well be dead from you keeping me in the dark," I pointed out.

"Well Hudson won't be finding out about this Brianna because I forbid you from telling her anything anymore that involves her giving you advice on anything. When something is happening or going on, you will come to me and no one else anymore Brianna. Is that understood?" Nathaniel asked, making me cower into the couch from his hard stare.

Something snapped inside of me, making me sit upright and look at Nathaniel the way he was looking at me. I narrowed my eyes and crossed my arms, feeling my temper rise to the boiling point that Nathaniel only got it to.

"I refuse to do that Nathaniel. Why should I tell you everything when something is wrong or happening when you don't tell me a single thing and I find out off someone else?" I asked.

"Because I have the right to know everything Brianna," Nathaniel said, infuriating me even more.

"While I don't have the right to know?" I screeched.

"You don't need to know anything about what is happening. You are only a human who can't defend herself when caught in danger so it is better not to tell you anything so you won't and can't get involved in what is going on in my life," Nathaniel spat, before placing his hand over his mouth, but it was too late.

I got up from where I was sitting and walked over to my jacket, putting it on and storming out of the room, with Nathaniel right on my heels, pleading for me to stay, but I didn't say anything. I just wanted to get out of this house before I said something that I would regret and I had a few choice words on the tip of my tongue directed to Nathaniel.

"Brianna baby, where are you going? I didn't mean to say that," Nathaniel said, following me.

"I'm going for a walk and don't you dare even think about following me," I said, yanking open the front door.

Nathaniel quickly put his foot out to stop the door from slamming and effectively stopping me from leaving at the same time. I looked at him and raised my eyebrows, wanting him to explain.

“You aren’t leaving until we talk this through Brianna.”

“Just try and stop me Nathaniel. I don’t want to be here a second longer and I sure as hell don’t want to say something that I will later regret so just let me go and do what I want to do without you breathing down my neck every second of the damn day.”

I watched Nathaniel as he moved his foot from the door way and let me leave. I made my way into the ranges and walked along a path until I was in some clearing. I sighed and walked over to a tree, leaning against it and looking down at the ground, seeing blood on the ground. I quickly looked at the tree and saw blood on the bark.

This must have been the tree I landed against when I took that tumble. I sat down underneath it and pulled up the fabric of my leggings, looking at the leg that took the brunt, seeing a faded scar along my leg that reminded me of that night where I could have died.

“Well, isn’t this a sight to see? I thought that no one would be out here,” a voice said, making me look up.

My blood ran cold when I saw who was standing at the start of the clearing, making me get up from where I was sitting and hold onto the tree. My blood was running cold and I felt my heart turn into stone towards the person who was currently standing across from me.

“Hello Brianna. My, haven’t you changed over the years? You still look like your mother and that is a scary thing. Don’t you have a hug for your father?”

My worst nightmare had just become a reality and there was nothing I could do to stop it from happening.

23. Confrontation

“What are you doing here? Haven’t you made my life hell as it is? Or do you want to make that little bit more?”

“Is that anyway to talk to your father Brianna?” he asked and started walking towards me in the forest.

“You aren’t my father! You haven’t been since you walked out of my life all those years ago!” I screamed.

Someone placed a hand on my shoulder, making me look over it. Nathaniel was standing there with a concerned look on his face. I lowered my eyes and didn’t say a single word to give Nathaniel even more reason for him to worry or lose his vampiric temper with me again. I didn’t want to start fighting with Nathaniel in front of my drop dead man of a father.

“Brianna please calm down. For me at least,” he whispered, but I didn’t take any notice of him.

“Who’s this teenage punk?” Saul asked, making me look at him.

“Someone you don’t need to know about,” I replied, not wanting to give anything away to him. “And he isn’t a teenage punk!”

“I beg to differ on this one Brianna. I do need to know who this boy

is that is hanging around my daughter and I don't care if he is or isn't a punk Brianna."

"If you must know, I am Nathaniel Norwood; Brianna's boyfriend and protector from people like you in this cruel, evil world," Nathaniel replied, his tone of voice extremely cold.

"Boyfriend?" Saul asked, sounding angry. "Brianna is too young to be having a boyfriend, especially one that isn't meant for her."

Saul looked at me with questions and anger lacing his eyes, but I felt that I didn't have to explain myself to him. He was never in my life and there was no way in hell that I was going to let him be in it now. I would be insane to do so.

"Excuse me?" Nathaniel asked, but I wasn't going to give either of them a chance to start a fight. It was now my turn.

"Why do you even care? You haven't been in my life for a very long time so you have no right to say anything about that part of my life!" I all but shouted at him, trying to keep my anger under control, but it was seeping through the surface.

"I might not have been in your life, but I am still your father Brianna and I have a right to know about this sort of stuff. And just for the record, I don't like him Brianna. You could have done much better than this boy who doesn't look human but looks like a plastic person that should be in a television commercial of some sorts."

"I don't care what you think because you have no right to say anything about my life. You have never been around to see the highs and the lows."

I was starting to shake with anger just from seeing my father in front of me. Nathaniel placed a hand on my shoulder, but it did nothing to help. I didn't want Saul here and no matter what sort of comfort Nathaniel gave me, it wasn't going to work while I knew he was still in this town or even around this area.

"How is your mother going?" Saul asked.

"She is much better since you are out of her life and mine," I replied, hoping to hit in where it hurts.

"I wouldn't mind catching up with your mother," Saul announced, making me clench my teeth. "It would be nice to see how she is doing

through my own eyes.”

“Well the way Marie talks about you, I think she will end up killing you with her bare hands and I’ll be happy to watch. It is safe to say that you aren’t welcome in her house or life anymore,” Nathaniel said, making me look over at him.

I was glad that Nathaniel said something like that as I didn’t want to think of something to say and my vampire boyfriend had bet me to the punch. Saul looked at him and narrowed his eyes but didn’t say anything. Saul took a step forward, making Nathaniel stand next to me and glare down at my father, making him stop walking.

“Can I ask why you are even here?” Nathaniel asked his voice hard.

“I came to see my daughter,” Saul replied.

“Well I don’t want to see you ever again,” I spat, looking down at his hands, seeing a silver band on his wedding ring finger. “You are married? To who?”

“Why yes I am. Her name is Emily and she works at the most expensive cake shop in Melbourne and can’t wait to meet her step daughter when I bring her back to Melbourne with me after today,” he replied, smirking.

“Oh, so your wife would have been the woman all over my boyfriend when I was helping my friend plan her wedding to Nathaniel’s brother?” I asked, giving it back to him, and so wanting to know what his response would be to my question. “Oh and I will never return to Melbourne with a complete moron like you. I’m happy here so why don’t you just go back to where you came from and ever return?”

“What do you mean my wife was flirting with your boyfriend? She isn’t that type,” Saul said, trying to make it look like I was lying.

“Oh you really think so?” Nathaniel asked, catching his attention. “She was shooting death stares at Brianna, was acting completely rude to my brother and his partner until she was told there was unlimited money involved with the wedding cake and then left them in the dust when I walked into the store. I think you need to have a talk to your wife about her attitude to customers because they should not be treated like that as they will eventually move business to another shop.”

“Oh yeah? And what do your parents do?” Saul asked, getting smart

but had no idea what power and strength Nathaniel had and what he was capable of within a split second of losing his temper.

“My father owns a chemist and my mother works at a gift store as one of the two managers and Brianna also works with her part time,” Nathaniel replied, raising an eyebrow at Saul, daring him to challenge him.

He didn’t reply to what Nathaniel told him. Realisation drawn onto Saul’s face when he looked Nathaniel up and down for the first time. He finally figured out that Nathaniel had a lot of money and a lot of money usually meant a lot of power that could ruin my deadbeat of a father and his bitch of a wife. They make a good couple.

My father looked at me, seeing the cold, hatred look I had on my face towards him. I wasn’t going to forgive him and I was hoping that he would see it on my face and give up.

“I think I should go,” Saul finally said.

“Good, and don’t return,” I said, turning on my heel and walking away.

“Brianna wait!” Nathaniel yelled, but I didn’t stop.

“And I still don’t want to talk to you either,” I said, making my way back along the path. “I’m completely livid with you right now Nathaniel.”

“Brianna please. I’m sorry for saying that. I know I shouldn’t have said anything,” he admitted, making me stop and turn around.

“No, you shouldn’t have said that Nathaniel, but I’m in no mood to forgive you and talk about this right now, so why don’t *you* just drop it? You tell me do that with you so I think you can once in your life,” I seethed, glaring at him.

“What has gotten into you Brianna?” Nathaniel asked, sounding shocked.

“You really need to ask me that kind of question Nathaniel? Did that man that was just standing in front of me not five minutes ago not tell you anything?” I asked, flabbergasted.

“But you weren’t in a good mood even before you ran into him in the Otway’s so something has made it worse and I think it is something else besides your father,” Nathaniel pressed.

“Nathaniel, I don’t want to talk about this so can you just leave it alone?” I asked, hoping he would just give up.

“No Brianna. We are going to talk about this as I want to know what is bothering you,” Nathaniel said, making my temper explode once again today.

“Oh so I have to tell you everything that is wrong while you keep me in the dark about what is going on with that freaky bird that is always appearing out of nowhere lately? Relationships don’t work that way Nathaniel! They never have and they never will be like that!” I exploded.

“Then what do you want to do Brianna? Break up until we know how to deal with each other’s emotions and secret hiding talents? Is that something you want to bloody do Brianna?” Nathaniel yelled.

“Maybe we should just do that Nathaniel!” I yelled back, making him go extremely quiet with my choice of wording.

“Do you want to break up with me?” he asked, very quietly that I had to strain my ears to hear him speak.

“Right now Nathaniel, I think that might be our only option with the way we are going,” I replied.

“How can that be our only option Brianna? We can work through all of these issues.”

“How Nathaniel? How? Every time we hide something from each other, we end up having a massive fight. Just like we did before I ran into my father and just like we are doing now. Again.”

“We just need to be more honest with each other baby. That is the only way we can work through this without ending what we have going for us.”

“I need some space. I’ll ring you tonight sometime to talk about what is going on and what I have decided,” I muttered and walked away, leaving him standing there in complete shock.

I finally got out of the ranges and took a deep breath. I didn’t want to break up with Nathaniel but if I had to end the relationship, I had to.

“Well, well, well, I wasn’t expecting to see you walking the streets without Nathaniel by your side,” Augusta said from behind me.

I closed my eyes and slowly turned around to look at the wicked witch of the two towns. She had a smirk on her face and her arms

crossed.

“What do you want Augie?” I asked, watching her cringe.

“Do not call me that,” she hissed.

“Then stop treating me like trash and then I will,” I retorted back.

“Where is Nathaniel, Brianna?” she asked, narrowing her eyes and looking at me coldly.

“Why do you want to know Augusta?” I asked, crossing my arms.

“Just so I can talk to him about some things that have no concern to you,” she replied, smirking.

“You mean my father?” I asked her, watching the smirk vanish from her face to be replaced with a look of horror.

“How did you find out about that?” she growled, almost making me take a step back away from her before she used some sort of violence but I held my ground for a change and didn’t do otherwise, like my brain was screaming at me to do.

“He found me and then announced that I was going back to Melbourne with him without any warning, but as you can see, that didn’t work out well for him or for you. Did you plan this so he would force me to go back with him so you can have Nathaniel to yourself? Did you truly think that I wouldn’t find out about this little plan nor did you really think you would be able to get away with it and hurt me even more like you have done over the past couple of months?” I hissed to her, seeing her visibly swallow in what I was hoping in fear.

“So what if I did plan it Brianna? What are you going to do about it? You have no proof that I have done anything and you never will,” she told me, starting to play her usual game of trying to make me upset.

“Tell me the truth Augusta or I promise you I will make your life a living hell like you are making mine right this second and all the other times I have been around you and you have done something to make me burst into tears,” I snarled in fury, making her take a step back away from me.

Right now, I was that angry that I could have hurt her physically and mentally, but I wasn’t that type. I refused to bring me down to her level and I dead set refused to start playing her games.

“Alright I did. You deserve to be dragged back to Melbourne, kicking

and screaming while Nathaniel and I can get our happily ever after! You aren't the one for him while I am and I won't stop this until you end up leaving town for good!" she yelled.

"Oh Augusta, I won't be leaving town, no matter how badly you want me gone and no matter how hard you try. I will be staying here for a very long time, so I think you better get used to that; neighbour," I taunted.

"Taunting me won't do anything for you Brianna so I wouldn't do that if I were you," Augusta said, trying to scare me.

"Deal with it Augusta. Nathaniel will never be yours, no matter how hard you try on that one too, and I sure as hell can play your game as well, so you just remember that because I promise you now, I will play it better than you ever could think I would," I said, glaring at her and walking away, leaving her shell-shocked form.

I finally got home and froze solid when I saw who was on the front porch. My mother and father were outside and I was sure hoping they would be having a fight and mum would be giving back all the pain, grief and torment that he put her through over the past fifteen years.

"What the hell are you doing here?" I asked walking towards where he was standing.

"I've come to visit your mother," Saul replied.

"And I told you to go and never return," mum said, angrily.

"Now Marie, you don't mean that. We can be a family like we were all those years go before things changed," Saul said to her, grabbing her hand.

"What about your wife?" I asked, making him freeze. "You know, the woman who was all over my boyfriend? Does she know that you are here, trying to win back your ex and daughter so we can play happy families like you want but we sure as hell don't want happening anytime soon?"

"Brianna, shut your mouth and don't speak another word," Saul spat, looking towards me with anger in his eyes.

"Don't you dare talk to my daughter that way," mum said, slapping him across the face hard. "Now get out of here and go back to your trampy wife and stay the hell out of our lives. We are doing fine without

you so we don't need you back."

"You don't know what you are saying Marie. You need me more than you think you do," Saul said, trying to kiss her.

"She knows exactly what she is saying; now go!" I yelled, pointing towards his car across the street. "Oh and before you do, cough up the money you owe us before I get the big people involved."

Saul slowly turned his head towards me, a look of shock written on his face. I raised an eyebrow and tapped my foot on the ground, waiting for another lie to come out of his mouth.

"I don't know what you are talking about," he finally said.

"Don't lie. You know exactly what I am talking about and I'm sure your wife knows about this as well," I said, not playing nice when there was money that my mum is owed involved. "You just don't want to hand anything over, like usual."

"Brianna, I don't owe any money to your mother."

"Liar," mum said, making him look at her. "You owe me money so don't you dare say that you don't when you clearly know that you do. Must I get my father involved? If you have forgotten, he was a lawyer back in his prime and I'm sure that he will be able to take this through the legal system, costing you more money than you owe me to pay your legal fees."

"You wouldn't dare do that Marie."

"You want a bet? I want that money you owe me and I will do anything to get that. Give it to child support and then be done with it. I don't want any more ties with you besides my daughter. That was the only good thing that came out of our relationship," mum said, knowing what she was saying to him would hurt.

"Why do you want that money so badly for?"

"Because you freaking owe that money and I'm sure you don't want another dint in your already long criminal record you got when you were younger," I said, smirking in satisfaction.

"That Nathaniel is not a good influence on you," Saul said, narrowing his eyes at me.

"Saul, this is who I am. I am brunt and straight to the point and I would have turned out like this even if you had more contact in my life.

This is who I am. Like it or lump it is all I have to say," I said.

"Why are you calling me by my first name and not by what you should be calling me? You should be calling me dad, not Saul."

"You deserve to be called Saul and I know that Augusta planned for your arrival to come here as I got it out of her. She was going to tell Nathaniel first as he might have hid it from me, but I got it out of her."

A car pulled out the front, making me look over to the road, seeing Beth and Jack get out of it. Beth raced up to mum placing a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"Marie, I got your phone call," she said.

"Who are you?" Saul spat.

"I happen to be Bethany Pryor. Who are you?" she asked Saul, being intimidating.

"Saul Morrison, Brianna's father," he replied, putting on the charm.

"I'm happily married thank you very much," she said quietly before looking at mum. "What do you need help with my dear?"

"Get him off my property Beth. I don't want him here any longer," mum said, glaring at my father and shaking.

"With pleasure," Beth replied and looked over at Jack.

"What is going on?" Jack asked, standing next to me and wrapping an arm around my shoulder, making me feel safe.

"Get your hands off my daughter!" Saul said and started to stalk towards Jack.

"I take it you are Saul? Well, listen here, you can attack me all you want, but you will come off second best. I am a good fighter and more of a father figure to Brianna than you ever has been. Her grandfather even agrees with me on that one," Jack said, in a cold voice.

"Oh and what do you do to make you a better father than me?" Saul asked, expecting to win this fight.

"I don't get up and leave my kids for one and I am there for them when they need me and I treat them how they need to be treated. With respect. I don't hate them because they look like their mother and not their father," Jack replied. "I class Brianna as my daughter because she is dating my son and Nathaniel informed me of what you are like and I truly believe him. Now, get off this property and never return before I

call the police or use force myself.”

“I’ll like you see you try and use force. You look weak and I’m pretty sure I would be able to fight you off if you started something.”

“Get off Marie’s property now,” Beth said, catching Saul’s attention and her eyes starting to glaze over. “And if you know what is good for you, you will never return either.”

“And what will you do if I keep on returning?” he asked.

“Let’s just say it won’t end well,” Beth warned.

I knew what she meant by that. It would end up in bloodshed and as much as I didn’t approve of innocent lives being lost due to vampires losing control, I wouldn’t stop them if they attacked Saul. For some strange reason, I would embrace it.

“Fine, I’ll go but I will be in touch Marie,” he said walking away from us and over to his car.

“I don’t ever want to see him again,” mum said, going inside and slamming the door behind her.

“I told him not to come here and Nathaniel did the same thing, and what does he do? He ends up coming and causing my mother more pain,” I said.

Beth pulled me in her embrace and whispered to me that everything was going to be okay, but for some reason, I didn’t believe her. Now that my father knew where we lived and had spoken to us, he was going to be around more often and that wasn’t going to end well between mum and the Pryor’s on his case. It was going to end in bloodshed and it wasn’t going to be pretty.

24. In the end

“Brianna, you can’t be serious,” Nathaniel said when I came out of his bathroom.

“What?” I asked, walking over to him.

“We are trying to make your mother cheer up, not make her even more depressed,” Nathaniel said, looking up from the laptop screen.

I knew that he was looking at the page I had up, doing my research.

“This won’t make her more depressed Nathaniel. Ever since my father showed up on her front door step, she hasn’t been herself and I personally think that she needs a night out without the constant stress and worry that this horrible man has put her under,” I replied, sitting on his bed.

“I still think that your mother won’t go for this Brianna. She isn’t the type that would go to this upper class event with Beth and Jack and she might just feel a bit left out as she has nothing in common with the rich people that go to these types of events. I don’t want Marie to feel worse than she already is,” Nathaniel said, grabbing my hand and squeezing it.

I found it sweet that he was thinking about my mother like that. I knew that there was something I could do to make this seem better.

“Then get Jack to find a single vampire or human friend around my mother’s age and set her up with that person so she will have company for the night!” I exclaimed.

“Brianna, why are you doing this for? And don’t say that it’s because of what happened because I know that isn’t the real reason. I want the

truth," Nathaniel said, looking at me.

I was waiting for him to ask me that question; it was only a matter of time. "Fine, I'll tell you. I want her to have what I've got."

"And what's that?"

"I want her to have happiness and for not to be alone and depressed and the only way I think that can be achieved is if I start playing match maker with or without your help."

"So, you just want her to be happy?"

"Yes! That is all I want for my mother Nate. Is that too much to ask for?"

Nathaniel slowly nodded his head at what I was saying and suddenly grabbed his laptop, typing something in pretty quickly. I watched him, but he didn't make eye contact with me. He was too busy doing whatever he was doing on his laptop. Nathaniel's bedroom door opened, making me look over to it. Chase was leaning against the door frame with a smirk on his face. I raised my eyebrows and looked back at Nathaniel.

"What are we doing here?" Chase asked, walking over to the bed and sitting down on the edge.

"Well, Nathaniel is busy doing something on his laptop while I am watching him in total boredom," I replied, smiling at Chase.

"You want to play match maker for your mother so I am just looking up some options that we might be able to use if Jack's vampire friend has finally found his mate," Nathaniel said, not looking up from the screen.

"What vampire friend?" I asked, catching my attention.

"I've never met him before as he is too busy travelling the world to kill some free time but he is coming back to Australia for this event so he might be someone that Marie can go with and they keep each other company for the night," Nathaniel replied.

"The last I've heard was that he was in Europe somewhere but he is hard to keep track of, like most vampires are," Chase replied.

"Can I have a name at least?" I asked.

"David but I don't know his last name," Chase said.

I nodded and didn't say anything. I glanced over at Chase and saw

that he had a strange look on his face and I suddenly wanted to know what was bothering him and I didn't care if I had to force it out of him.

"Brianna, what are you looking at?" Chase asked, making eye contact with me.

"You have a strange look on your face," I replied. "Is there anything that you want to talk about or are you just away with the fairies today?" I asked.

Nathaniel burst out laughing and looked up at me, a glint in his eye. Chase smirked and shook his head no, but I thought I could see a hint of a smile forming on his features. I lay back on Nathaniel's pillow, staring at the ceiling while I waited for Nathaniel to finish playing perfect match for my mother.

"Alright, I am finished with what I am doing," he said after ten minutes of more quiet. "Now to pay some attention to my girlfriend before she walks out of here in boredom."

I moved my head and looked at him, almost asleep from his comfortable bed and nodded my head in agreement. Nathaniel closed the lid on his laptop and crawled over to where I was lying, placing his hand on my stomach.

"Look at the cute vampire and human couple," Chase said, making gagging noises. "It makes me sick just being around it."

"Yeah right Chase, like you don't do this with Lucinda. I have walked past your room countless times while she has been here and you have been looking at her like a love sick puppy and you don't hear me saying anything about it," Nathaniel said, looking at his vampire brother, daring Chase to challenge him.

"I can't help the fact that I am happy with Lucinda," Chase replied.

"Yes and I can't help the fact I am happy with Brianna so enough with the gagging noises this time around."

"You are both in the same boat," I muttered. "Both dating humans and both being love sick puppies and sulking when we have to leave or something comes up that you can't attend."

"I do not sulk," Nathaniel said, crossing his arms.

"Oh really now? What about the time I went home because mum needed something and when I told you, you stormed off like a child with

your arms crossed and bottom lip jutted out in a pout like a child who couldn't get what he wanted? If I remember you were like that for a good section of the day."

Nathaniel didn't say anything. He just got off his bed and walked out of the room with his arms crossed like usual. I was looking at him and waiting for the bottom lip to come out, but it didn't happen. Either that or he waited until he was in the hallway so we wouldn't be able to see it.

"My brother can be a sook sometimes," Chase said, making me look over at him.

"Anyone can be," I replied, sitting upright.

"I just can't get over how happy Lucinda makes me and she is human. That is the one part I can't understand and that is why a human is making me so happy," Chase said, sounding lost and confused.

"Maybe it's the warmth or our beating hearts that make it a happier occasion for you? Or maybe you are slowly falling for my human friend?" I suggested.

"I just don't know. Humans are our prey and it is rare for a vampire to date one and now two vampires are dating two humans in one family and a human is expecting a vampire's child," Chase said, looking down at the floor.

"Something must be right in the air or something like that. I can't give you an answer Chase as I don't know either."

"But in the end, it doesn't matter. I'm happy and Nathaniel is happy. That is the most important thing in my family's eyes. It doesn't matter that you and Lucinda are human, but what does matter is that you both have the power to make Nathaniel and I happy and have the power to break the two of us into something that brings us pain just by thinking about it."

"I know that I have power to hurt or make Nathaniel happy in a heartbeat, but I don't think Lucinda knows about it just yet. She is still trying to wrap her head around the fact that you are a vampire and everything else we have thrown on her in the last few days since she has come around and accepted what you are."

"Who is going to tell her that she has that power to break me?"

Chase asked, sounding hopeful.

No way in hell was I going to tell Lucinda about this one. Chase was her partner so it was his job and not mine to handle. This was one point I was going to get across.

"You are going to tell her that Chase. That one is your job, not mine. I'm just the one she goes to for answers as well as you," I muttered, looking at him.

"Damn. I was hoping I could get out of doing that."

"Chase, if you have forgotten, I am Nathaniel's slave, and not yours. It's hard enough being a slave for one person than for two people."

"Who's my slave?" Nathaniel asked, walking back into the room and looking at the two of us curiously.

"I am your slave Nathaniel," I muttered, looking at him. "Do with me what you will."

"Oh how wonderful. Alright slave, I think you can stay the night to-night. What do you say about that?" Nathaniel asked, climbing back onto his bed and pulling me into his lap.

"Only if it is okay with the boss first. You know how mum is lately. There is a high chance that she might say no," I replied.

"Marie should be fine with it and that way, it will give us more of a chance to go through suitable matches for your mother," he said.

"I take it you are playing match maker for Marie?" Chase asked.

"What gave it away?" I asked.

"I overheard you and Nathaniel talking about it before I came in here and I wanted to know what was going on so I stuck around, hoping to get more answers without having to eavesdrop in the hallway or something," he said.

"I just want my mother to be happy. After everything that has happened, I think that is something she deserves. Wouldn't you have wanted the same if you were in my shoes?" I asked the both of them.

"I never got along with my parents to care if they wanted a bit of happiness or not," Nathaniel said, looking at Chase.

"And I don't feel like going into my family history to answer that question either," Chase added.

"Wonderful," I muttered, feeling like I had just hit a brick wall thanks

to these two.

“But we can understand where you are coming from. You want your mum to have what we have all got and that is happiness,” Chase said.

I nodded in agreement at what Chase was saying and if that meant I had to play match maker, then I was gonna do that. She needed something to help her get over the pain my father had put her through and I was only hoping that they could find this vampire friend that Jack has. As much as I didn't want her getting involved with vampires, something was giving me a good feeling about this one. The one thing I had learnt being in this relationship is that vampires are extremely loyal to their mates and I was hoping that this would happen to my mother. I didn't want to see her getting hurt anymore.

“What are you thinking about?” Nathaniel asked.

“Nothing to important,” I replied, smiling at him.

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Totally sure,” I said.

“Anyway, I am going to leave you love bird's alones and ring Lucinda to see how she is going. She wasn't feeling well yesterday and I want to make sure that is okay enough to be on her own or if I need to go to be with her,” Chase said walking out of his room.

“See Chase; you really do have a heart,” Nathaniel said.

“It must have been frozen all these years but being with Dakota would do that to a person,” he replied and left.

That left Nathaniel and I alone in a silence that I didn't know how to break it. Nathaniel just stared at me, making me think I had something on my face. I placed my hand there and pulled it back, seeing that nothing was there.

“What are you looking at?” I finally asked, getting sick of his stare.

“I'm looking at you,” he replied.

“Why? I am nothing important for you to be staring at like that,” I said, feeling self-conscious of his gaze.

“I am staring at you because I can't get over how beautiful you are. You are like an angel that was sent down to me and I will forever be grateful towards your mother for deciding that you move here and not somewhere else. Someone else would have gotten to know the real Bri-

anna and I wouldn't have wanted that to happen as I get to see the fragile and vulnerable side. I have been waiting a very long time for you to come to me and now that I have you, I will never let you go, even if you wanted me to, I wouldn't be able to. I love you so much, my fragile, human love," Nathaniel said, wiping the tears that had leaked from my eyes.

"That is the sweetest thing anyone has ever said to me," I whispered, trying to calm myself down.

"I'm just telling you the truth, my love," he replied and leaned into kiss me.

I pressed my lips to his, kissing him harder than I ever did before and I was expecting Nathaniel to pull away from the emotion and intensity I was putting into the kiss and scold me like he normally does. He didn't though. Nathaniel replied to the kiss eagerly than normal, putting more passion and intensity than I was.

"Brianna," he whispered as he pulled away, letting me catch my breath. "Tell me to stop what I am doing so this doesn't go any further than it already has."

What surprised me were the words that came out of my mouth next. "I don't want you to stop. I want you to keep going Nathaniel."

He growled lightly before going back to what he had started before moving down to my neck, lightly sucking and nipping at it while placing his hands on my rib cage. I could feel the coolness of his hands through the fabric on my clothing and started to imagine what it would feel like skin on skin.

"Are you sure you want this? You can still say no Brianna and I promise you, I will stop," Nathaniel whispered, his fingers playing with the end of the top. "I won't force you into anything that you aren't comfortable doing."

"I'm sure Nathaniel," I replied. "I'm ready."

In the end, it never mattered what happened in your life as it turned out; love conquers all. I could only hope that this would be the beginning of a long and very happy relationship between Nathaniel and me.

But things never worked out the way I wanted them to and something inside of me was telling me that wasn't going to be any different.

Mentally, I was trying to prepare for whatever life was going to throw at our relationship next, but physically, I didn't know if I could take it. I might have been a strong girl, but I didn't know how strong I actually was.

Only time would be able to tell me that.