I spent the next half hour seated next to Sorin on his evergreen couch. Rhys was in a merlot chair, off to the side of the room and typing away on a laptop as each vampire spoke. The planned routine for each grievance was the same – Naseem would bring in the next vampire or two, introduce them to us and give a brief explanation as to why they wanted to see Sorin. Then Naseem stood by the closed office door while we heard the story from the vampire, asked them questions and gathered information. Next, Naseem led them out while we talked amongst ourselves and reached a verdict. Lastly, the bodyguard would bring them back to hear our answer.

The first round was a female who wanted to move into the city. She was from Florida and hated all the sunshine. She did some research, discovered how few sunny days Pittsburgh has and wanted to move. But, before she could settle, she had to present to Sorin for approval and to swear allegiance. Sorin approved the move and took her through the oath. As I listened to the words, I flashed back to the night I met him.

“Will you pledge to me your loyalty? Will you follow our laws, my judgement and submit to my authority?”

The girl in front of me agreed without hesitation to those words but I vividly remember my own reservations. If I remembered correctly, I had wanted to tell him to fuck off while also wanting to offer up my body at the same time. It was amazing how quickly everything can change and how different my life had become in six months.

She happily strolled out of the room to go plan her new life in the steel city.

The second issue had been vampire neighbors, a man and woman. The man was convinced that his neighbor had eaten his cat. The woman insisted that, while yes - she hated the cat - she would never consume another vampire’s animal. The man had become so sure that the pet was his neighbor’s meal that he’d made her existence pure Hell. The man was asking Sorin to make the woman pay him reparations of $1,000. The woman was asking for a restraining order against her neighbor.

Sorin listened quietly. When they were done, he stayed quiet. When he turned to me, I knew he was thinking something I may not like. While looking at me, he spoke to the room. “Please leave and I will bring you in when I am ready.”

I heard Naseem take the two out, while keeping my eyes on Sorin. “What are you thinking?”

He spoke carefully. “I think it is time for our people to start to learn some of the things you can do.” He held up his hand to stop my protests. “Not all of it but they know you have some kind of power. We all have magic. Let us use this opportunity to show off one. It will end this feud while also starting the word among the city that the new Lady can see into minds. It will allow them time to begin respecting and slightly fear you.”

“Fear me?”

“To rule thousands of powerful creatures, you must be respected and feared. This is what holds them accountable and keeps them in line. If they do not obey our laws, everything falls apart. Knowing that you can see into their minds and that I can feel lies, will make it very hard for them to get away with disobedience.”

I drew in a breath and let it out. If I was being honest with myself, Sorin was right 99% of the time. I really should argue with him less.

“Okay,” I relented. “How dramatic would you like this?”

“Contrary to popular belief, the less dramatic the more impact it has.”

I nodded at him and felt his power fill the room. He called his vampires back into the room with just a thought. Even I could feel the pull from his call. The two neighbors returned with looks of hope in their eyes. They stopped, side by side, in front of us.

I stood, walking slowly up to them. Their looks transitioned from hope to confusion. Sorin’s voice rang out from behind me. “My companion will look into your minds. The truth will be known soon.”

Looking into the woman’s eyes, I faced disbelief. I had the suspicion that she didn’t think I could do it. “Think of the last time you saw the cat,” I said and continued to stare into those eyes.

When I go into someone’s mind, it’s not always a visual first. Memories and thought come to me the same way they come to you. Sometimes it’s a smell first or a sound. Sometimes it’s a visual without any sound at all. That night, in front of the woman, I heard the cat first. I could understand why she didn’t like the animal. His “yowling” was awful on the eardrums. It sounded like his voice box has been damaged at some point. As the sound filled my ears, the vision joined it. I saw the cat through her eyes, on the back deck of her house. She had been sitting outside, enjoying the night and reading when the pathetic looking animal walked up.

“Hello, stinky,” she said to the thin, black and white tabby. I could sense her feelings about the cat. She was slightly annoyed but didn’t really hate the cat. She pulled over a small bowl with dry cat food and I shared with her the wave of nausea from the smell of the animal’s dinner. Despite the fact that the odor of the kibble made her sick, she kept it around for the hungry kitty. Smiling, she watched the cat run up to eat. “Does he ever feed you?” The cat gratefully started to chow down. She ran her hand down the animal’s matted fur and returned to her book.

I pulled back from her vision, turning to Sorin. “It wasn’t her,” I said. “She actually felt fondness towards the cat.”

The woman sighed and I turned my attention to the man. “Never mind, I heard what I needed. It wasn’t her. We can go now. I am retracting my complaint.”

“Too late, Boris.” Sorin spoke from behind me and his voice filled the room with heat. I was guessing he had sensed something off the male vamp. He wouldn’t have been mad for no reason.

“Think of the last time you saw the cat,” I said, locking my blue gaze into his brown one. I felt his resistance and my ears filles with humming. He was humming in his mind to try and fight off any memories. “Just tell me the cat’s name.” He continued to fill his thoughts with humming and refused to answer the question.

From beside us, the girl vampire spoke. “Tiger.”

With the mention of the cat’s name, the man was no longer able to lock the thoughts out. The cat filled his mind. It laid on a dirty couch, its tail flopping up and down with a thump. Boris was at a table with bills stacked up next to him. A few of those bills said FINAL NOTICE. He really didn’t want to go back to work and was brainstorming ways to make some money quickly. He knew the cat had to go since he couldn’t afford the food. There was no reason he couldn’t make money off of the loss of the cat, too. He didn’t hate the thing but sacrifices would need to be made. As I saw him stand, approach the kitty and wrap his hands around the tiny, furry neck, I pulled out of his head.

“Bastard,” I whispered and his face filled with fear. I saw his muscles tense but Naseem had his arms around the man before he could move to attack or flee. I turned to Sorin. “He snapped the cat’s neck to blame on her. He thought he’d made some easy money to pay off some bills and no one would ever know.”

“You prick,” the woman screamed. “I would have taken him. Why?”

“It was my cat. I can do whatever I want with it,” he growled.

I sat next to Sorin and he laid his hand on my knee. He was scarily still, watching the man fight against the bodyguard’s grip. “Stop,” he spoke and his power filled the room again. This time, the bulk of it was directed at Boris and I saw the impact like a punch to his gut. He stopped fighting and sagged. Naseem let go, as the man slid down to his knees on the floor.

“Look at me,” Sorin said. The man looked up to see his ruler and faced his sentence. Sorin stood. “Anyone who can snap the neck of a defenseless animal for the purpose of greed is someone I worry about around my people. You will leave this city. I will show you mercy, give you two weeks to pack and find another city that will take you. In those two weeks, you will stay away from your neighbor. You will not speak to her, cross your land into hers or seek retribution, do you understand?”

The man found his strength and stood. He was a few inches shorter than Sorin’s 6’2” but didn’t let that slow him down. I wasn’t good at pinpointing age yet but I’d wager my paycheck with about 450 years younger than his Lord, yet he appeared to be ready to make the stupid mistake of resisting Sorin. “I want the second judgement,” he groaned.

I didn’t know what that meant but when all eyes turned to me, I had a pretty good idea.

“You are the second judgement,” Sorin said to me.

I wasn’t exactly prepared or coached for this but I had a solid idea of the weight on my shoulders. As the “back up” judge in these proceedings, the man was asking if I agreed. I was pretty sure that vampire law required a second opinion to agree and a witness to write it down before it was the “end-all-be-all.” I gathered up all the knowledge and experience I’d had as a nurse among the public for over a decade and put on my game face.

I walked slowly into the direction of the shaking Boris and made a point to hold my head high, never breaking contact with his gaze. “You took in a living thing, a helpless thing and cared for it. You made it trust you and rely on you for sustenance and life. Then, when it benefited you, you made the decision to take its life for a thousand lousy dollars. You played God with a helpless creature. Then tried to pin your crime on another of your kind. What’s to stop you from doing that with a human or vampire in our territory? I want you out of our city.”

His face filled with rage. I saw the struggle in his eyes. He wanted to lash out on me but knew he’d face Sorin, Rhys and Naseem in the process. He also feared me, didn’t know exactly what powers I possessed and worried I knew more. I didn’t know anymore and was scared of what I would find in his mind. I had spoken the truth; I just wanted him out of my city.