29.

To be more specific, Sorin was looking at crime scene photos from the various murders he was asking me to look into. He had case files on each victim, completely with HD photos of the bodies in various states of decomposition and in various poses. I felt the blood I drank downstairs trying to climb out of my stomach. I took deep breaths to stop it from jumping up my throat and out of my body. It wasn’t the goriness of the picture; I am a nurse; I have seen worse. It was the realization that I was supposed to be one of those photographs. If it weren’t for Rhys, Sorin would be scrutinizing what was left of my corpse.

I stood and walked towards the fire, watching the flames leap off the log and come back to rest. Sorin was beside me in less time than it takes to blink, his hand on the small of my back. I stepped closer to the fire, further away from him.

“I will put the photos away. I should not have left them out.”

“It isn’t that. I can handle that,” I responded, turning back to face him. “I could have been one of those women. I was supposed to be one of those women.”

“But you are not.” He said it like I was meant to see the logic in it and let it go. He stood still and didn’t move to me. That gave him one point in his favor. He stared at me with a look that told me he was listening. *But, to what?* His head cocked, ever so slightly, to one side, like he heard something no one else could hear. He straightened and locked eyes with me again.

“You think you don’t deserve to live.”

“Well,” I said, embarrassed, again tonight, that he knew what I was feeling. “I am not, technically, living.” *Maybe a joke will break the tension. I don’t need to be psychoanalyzed just now. Way to kick someone when they are down. I take your point back.*

“You know what I meant.” This time he did step into me. He was so close that, if he took a deep breath, our chests would touch. With the heels on, he was still a little taller but, felt so much bigger, so much stronger, than me. “You feel like you are not worthy of this, of being a vampire, of living, of my attention. You feel like a mistake has been made.”

What do you say to that? How do you counteract a statement that is so true that you didn’t even completely understand it until you heard it? There was no point in lying. I just stood there, meeting his gaze.

“Perhaps, someday, you will see yourself as Rhys does… as I do.” For a second, he looked so sincere that it hurt me a little. Just as quickly, the look was gone and the serious master had returned. *If only I could feel what he was feeling. Doesn’t seem fair that he knows my deepest thoughts and I don’t even know if he likes me or pities me.*

He led me back towards the couch. “Come, Kate. I will review what I know and you may take the files with you. I know that you are eager to be away from me.”

We sat, side by side, on the soft sofa. A small indent told me that he had sat here a lot of the years, maybe even decades. I was careful to be sure our thighs did not touch. His power had been pulled back, to what place I wasn’t sure, and my composure had returned. He quickly gathered the pictures and laid them, face down, on the floor at his feet. What remained was roughly a hundred pages of typed words, scattered in no discernable pattern.

“Each girl was killed within ten miles of your hospital. You were all young and beautiful. Other than that, I cannot find any more commonalities. You all have different looks, different jobs, different backgrounds. Some of you are from here and some are transplants from different states. There is no common friends, families, hobbies or areas of residence, that I can find.”

He looked away from the papers and at me. I don’t know what my face showed but I know I was sick to my stomach again.

“You feel upset. Why?”

“Because,” it started as a whisper and I couldn’t find the strength to make it any louder. “Because you keep referring to the victims in a group that includes me.”

“I apologize. You are one of the women that was marked by the killer, and I must consider you when looking for patterns but, it is callous of me to refer to you in that manner.” He said the words but they didn’t sound too sincere. They sounded more like lines he had rehearsed.

I gathered myself and felt a wall of resolution being built up inside me. When you are a nurse, bad things happen. You have to do CPR while a family member wails in agony. You have to apply pressure to stop the bleeding. You have to turn off life-sustaining machines to end suffering. You learn to build up a wall and, sort of, shut everything down inside, to get the job done. Later, you cry in the breakroom or kick the bathroom wall. It is a coping mechanism; a survival technique. It works and it kept you sane. So, why not use it now? If it worked for telling a woman she was now a widow, why wouldn’t it work for talking about my own death?

It was clear to me that Sorin did not care about me or my feelings. I was just here because I had the inside scoop on what our murderer was looking for and how he killed.

“I’m fine. Keep going.”

He didn’t. He just looked at me. I waited to hear what he would say next but he didn’t say anything. Instead, he leaned forward and pressed his lips onto mine. I started to resist when his hand rose up to meet my cheek and continued until his fingers were in my hair.

The sound of thunder ripped through the room. The threatening storm was here and outside, the wind beat at the window. The wall I had just built came crashing down and what flooded out was not sadness or fear, it was lust. My head swirled with thoughts.

*Stop! He is still the guy that tricked you last night and ordered you to hunt a serial killer or werewolf or god knows what else!*

*Don’t stop! It feels so good. He feels so good. Don’t stop.*

A heat rose up through my esophagus and spilled out into his mouth. I thought it was his power but realized quickly that it was coming from me. The electricity I had felt earlier was back. It danced over his tongue and onto mine. As we kissed, tongues and lips moving faster than I thought they could, his power and mine rolled together between us. I knew without being told that his power was made of sensuality and strength; mine was a mix of desire, laughter and a hint of anger. It felt dangerous, our two energies finding each other but, it also felt amazing. It felt like finding something that you didn’t know you had lost. My hands found his chest; each palm flat on a swell of each pec. The urgency in the kiss grew and became a hunger. I knew that, if I didn’t stop now, I was not going to stop.

*But, do I want to?*

I broke our kiss and leaned back, moving my hands from his chest to the couch on either side of me. I felt the heat that had crawled from my mouth reaching out for his, wanting to be reunited with his electricity. I fought the shaking in my muscles and steadied myself. Lightening lit up the office briefly and he was too beautiful in that moment to ignore.

“We have to stop. I have to stop.”

“Why,” he asked. He was breathless. I had made him breathless.

*You didn’t make him lose his breath, Kate. He is just horny. He would be acting the same if any other girl had offered him sex and then taken it back. You’re lucky if he doesn’t send you away just for being a tease.*

“Because I am losing control.”

I licked my lips and could still taste him. I cautiously raised my eyes to meet his. His eyes were shimmering and bright. His pupil was so small, it was almost gone, lost in the grey. His irises swam like storm clouds before that first thunder crack. The light behind those clouds made the grey both stunning and utterly inhuman.

“Do you truly wish to stop?” He asked a simple question. It only needed a *yes* or a *no.* I could definitely muster up one simple word. Thunder tore through the silence. I opened my mouth and the one word spilled out…

“No.”