

No Good Deed...

A Night in the “Life” of Porsha Banks

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Dedicated to
Everyone that deserves their own short story...

Like all dreamers, I mistook disenchantment for truth.

—JEAN PAUL SARTRE

NO GOOD DEED...

I never thought I would experience an existential crisis this early in my life. Hell, making it to my thirtysomethings didn't even constitute a proper age to go through a freaking midlife crisis, let alone existential one. Yet, I also didn't believe I would be beaten and left for dead by a mystical beast only to become one myself. That was definitely left out of my list of life goals.

With that said, there still was no way of knowing if this was the start of a "new life" or just a dramatic turn of my existing one. Shit... maybe there wasn't even a difference between the two. All I knew for certain was I, Porsha Banks, was now a vampire.

The thirst that was never far away heightened as my new existence played through my thoughts, *again*.

"Beverly Hills, where the rich come to reproduce, fester, and die of brain rot," Aylin interjected as she effortlessly drove a "borrowed" sports car in and out of the lanes, passing every vehicle that didn't suit the speed she insisted on. "Between your fancy clothes and vague

location selection, you must have made up your mind on our destination, right?”

“Greystone Mansion,” I numbly answered.

I watched to see her reaction. Her boredom was all I could pick up. I turned my sight back to the window, letting out a breath. Good, she still had no idea.

“What the hell Porsha?”

I stopped mid-expiration. She must have figured out why I wanted to come here. Maybe not. God, I hope not.

“What?” I said, refusing to look away from the window.

“Um, I don’t know how to get to this mansion of yours. You set up the GPS to get us to Beverley Hills, no further. Hence my earlier line of questioning.”

“Oh yeah, sorry about that. I guess my mind isn’t firing on all four cylinders.”

I opened my mouth to activate the GPS when Aylin interrupted. “Wait, I can do it. Just say the program’s name and give the destination, right?”

“Right.”

I went back to my thoughts as Aylin played with the car’s tech.

“Greystone, here we come,” Aylin said to no one in particular.

There was a brief silence between us.

“I can tell you’re worried about tonight’s hunt. I understand, this is the first time you alone organized one of our little expeditions. But don’t be, your instincts and my know-how will be more than you need to be successful,” she encouraged.

I nodded.

“I’m a little surprised. I thought you had more of a craving for rough and dirty than jaded and overprivileged. You definitely learn a vamp better once you let them chose the hunting grounds. But seriously, couldn’t we have found the same crowd in Malibu?”

Luckily, she let my silence be her answer.

If she knew whom I planned to seek out, she would have most likely reacted differently. I suppressed the thought. Maybe I was still more human than I gave myself credit for.

Until now, I’ve been hidden away in Stan’s forgotten Malibu home. There were only a handful of times that I could remember we’d even slept there. It seemed he had stopped caring about the property completely once the renovations were finished. Instead, Stan used the property more as a showpiece to impress his foreign business associates, wannabe starlet whores, and their dimwitted friends.

I couldn’t remember how Aylin and I had gotten there or how she knew of its existence in the first place. Honestly, I recalled being too weak and starved to care about the “how”. All that mattered then were the “meals” that Aylin brought to me while I waited to be hand-fed like a baby bird. At first, I was so pathetically frail she had to bring my meals to the attic where we hid away during the day in body bags lined with soil.

My attention was snatched away from my memories as Aylin turned up the volume of a song playing over the radio. I stole a glance in her direction. Her fingers drummed the stirring wheel as her head nodded with the beat. She looked happy. I hoped her good mood would

keep after tonight's outing. It didn't take long after meeting her to realize Aylin has a way of doing things. She also had little patience for those that saw things differently than her. That was made clear my first lucid assisted-feed.

I remembered I tried to reject it. Aylin didn't take the rejection well. That day was now seared into my list of firsts. Right along with my first kiss and first love. Too bad this memory would never become a joyous one.

Everything about that kill was stored in memory. Even the information of his driver's license was easily recalled, be it from vampire OCD nature or guilt. I was pretty sure it was the latter since this was the only license I'd ever bothered to check.

Even now the card's information played as vividly in my mind as if I was still holding it in my hand. Alabama class D license, I.D. number 5519719, born December, 14th 1992, James Johnson, male, 6 feet 4 inches, 230 pounds. His license's picture was the undeveloped version of the young man he had become. The memory of his confident, pearly-white smile contrasting beautifully with his flawless chocolate skin before Aylin and I left him a lifeless ashen husk. And all because he was a kind person. If he had never decided to help Aylin with her "broken down" car he would still be alive today.

Again, I remember trying to turn him away with a thank you and a goodbye, but Aylin would have none of my doubts. It was his friendly smile and willingness to leave after completing his good deed that made me doubt in the first place. I knew he only wanted to ensure Aylin's safety. His compassion wafted off of him, mak-

ing me embarrassed of my new nature. However, it did nothing to ease my hunger. There was one moment he almost heeded my hidden warning. I saw it in his eyes as he weighed his options before giving in to Aylin's promise of homemade brownies from our fictional chef.

I shouldn't have let him in, but I was so very hungry. My guilt spiked as his gaze swept over the empty kitchen counters. I tried again to fight my nature. I placed a lie over Aylin's lie, telling him I ate the last of the brownies and that he should leave. He shared a nervous chuckle before his eyes settled over Aylin's smug expression. By the spike of his heart rate and the unsheathing of Aylin's fangs, James and I knew it was too late.

Aylin was on top of him before he had the chance to react. She crushed James' tibia and turned on Stan's sound system in what would've looked like one elongated motion to James if he wasn't already occupied with excruciating pain. I couldn't look away from his terror-stricken face as the deafening music covered his screams. I recalled Aylin taking her place near his body with an expectant gaze cast in my direction. I knew what she wanted from me. She wanted me to finish the kill. It was time for me to truly accept what I was.

My fangs instinctively unsheathed while the burn intensified, tightening my throat. I had to use every bit of willpower I had not to go to him. It felt like Aylin and I stood in our stalemate for an eternity. I remember switching my focus between James and his suffering and Aylin. In that moment I admired his strength. I watched as James' vibrant color seeped from his skin, leaving a dusty pallor over him. James had to know he was dying.

Still, he never looked to either of us and pleaded for his life. Instead, he put the little energy he had left into attempting to crawl away from this nightmare.

Aylin rolled her eyes at the whole affair. It only took her taking a couple of steps to block his ill-fated escape attempt. I learned an important piece of who Aylin was in that moment when her gaze hardened over me. She believed his suffering was my fault. I couldn't see that then as I see it now. My selfish need to avoid being responsible for a decent person's death made him prisoner to a slow, painful death instead.

It could have been my prolonged cowardliness, James' unnecessary suffering, or her boredom that made her finish what I couldn't. I just remember I was happy it didn't have to be me.

She raised him by his arm before tearing out his throat. If I was being honest, her actions were just enough of an excuse to convince myself I had nothing to do with his demise. My hunger wouldn't allow me to restrain myself any longer. I recalled swiftly closing the distance between us and drowning myself in his free-flowing nectar. I still feel guilty about how truly delicious I found him.

After James, I didn't leave the attic for two days. Aylin didn't bother trying to talk to me during my self-inflicted hunger strike either. The first sunrise she silently took her place in the attic, leaving once night fell. The second sunrise her body bag laid empty. If I was being honest with myself, it was the fear that she had abandoned me that made me come out of the attic as soon as I did.

That and my gut-wrenching hunger.

When I resurfaced, the first place I went to was the area where I had left James' body. The house was as Stan had left it. There wasn't one shred of evidence that he had died there. Even Aylin wasn't there. I looked outside in vain to find James' car was no longer there either. I remember the despair that crept into my every thought as I aimlessly walked around the house. One thought, in particular, kept plaguing me. *What would I do now?*

Before my dire straits could solidify, I recall hearing the door open. My other senses made Aylin's presence known before I heard her playful laugh shared with the others she had brought home. She walked in, meeting me in the den. Our gaze met, feeling each other out as the two women she brought home stumbled in after her. They were nothing like James. They looked around, taking inventory of their surroundings while giving each other knowing glances in their fake designer clothes.

It wasn't until they passed Aylin and looked over at me that I realized I was still in the dress stained by James' blood. Their fake smiles disappeared. I caught Aylin's attention, sharing my own smug smile before she mirrored it. All was forgiven and I knew it was time to prove my worth.

I leapt on the first of the women and Aylin toppled the other. I remembered we drank deeply of them as if that kill linked us further. Though it wasn't as satisfying as James', their blood did sate my hunger. I was also thankful it didn't cause any of the crippling guilt. In my bloodlust, I didn't hear their pimp enter the house. Luckily, Aylin did, relieving him of the gun he planned

to rob us with just before she relieved him of his head as well. We ate to the point of gluttony, sealing our partnership.

After that night we shared in all the duties of being a vampire, which led us here, sharing a car in Beverly Hills.

I stole another look at Aylin as she slowed the car out of necessity. The appearance of matured irritation didn't fit her forever-youthful features. It also didn't help she was wearing a school-girl outfit she had lifted from a neighboring house.

"I told you to find a formal dress," I said, trying not to laugh.

She smirked as she looked down at her attire. "Yeah, well these rich little shits' formal wear resembles what a twenty-two-year-old coke-head on a party binge would wear. Can you believe I went into five different houses and couldn't find anything that wouldn't expose my areolas or crotch, if not both? I guess that's what happens when you let the entertainment magazines parent your kids."

"I thought you hated being seen as a teenager."

"I do, but I don't want to be seen as a whore instead."

She was visibly agitated by my line of questioning. I didn't need that. Especially if I followed through with my plan.

"Well, it's a statement," I offered.

Aylin eyes narrowed in my direction.

I continued. "I find your selection an ironic joke. How they dress for prim success in their academics while whoring themselves in public outings."

Her irritation was cut by a subtle smile. “Exactly. Well, your selection is fitting, you sexy minx.”

It was my turn to look down at my fashion decisions, or should I say one of Stan’s slut’s fashion decisions. I had to admit, the black plunging Mikado party dress fit me to perfection. The accessories and mirror-metallic stilettos were mine; I must’ve forgotten them during one of my few visits to the house. I couldn’t help wondering if any of Stan’s skanks wore my things as I now wore theirs.

“Thank you. I found the dress in a garment bag in the attic.”

“You look ready to hunt; other than your fancy, pinned ringlet, updo. I’ll bet money that your hairstyle doesn’t make through the night. Anyway, do you remember the rules?”

I nodded.

Aylin taught me a lot in a short amount of time. The cleanup and disposal of bodies and cars, who to hunt and who to ignore, the signs of another vampire’s hunting grounds, and the laws that we were supposed to follow. There were a lot of laws, and truthfully, I hadn’t remembered them all, but I had the most vital ones seared into my memory. Aylin wasn’t a huge fan of conformity herself, but she practiced her mantra that the vampire code was meant to be bent but never broken. If I went through with my plan tonight, I would be breaking a vital rule or two. But I had to see him. Then I could move on.

At least that was what I told myself.

Aylin drove without much else to say. That suited me just fine. I more or less observed the scenery changes while we continued towards our destination.

The surplus of business buildings and storefronts eventually morphed into the pristine streets of the upper-crust residential areas. I lazily watched as we passed by the evenly planted palm trees on either side of my peripheral vision. I was born and raised in Beverly Hills and I think this was the first time I noticed how majestic the palm trees were. They give the impression of being tall enough to touch the very blackness of the night sky.

Other manicured vegetation that cleverly hid mansions and the people who lived in them started to reach loftier heights. Only the properties gilded gates and mansions' roofs were visible to the passersby.

Aylin brought the car to a sudden stop. There was a limo in front of us. If it wasn't for the brake lights it would have appeared that the driver had decided to park in the middle of the street. That was a sign we were close to our destination. Was I ready?

"Don't go through the mansion's front gate," I warned.

Aylin shrugged, lifting both hands off the wheel as she stared straight ahead. "Right now, we're not moving anywhere." Her gaze turned towards me. "Wait. Why can't we go to the mansion? That's where we're going, right?"

As I mentally collected the reason I had practiced earlier, Aylin's gaze quickly turned into an expression of suspicion. A limo driving in the opposite lane helped jog

my memory while the limo in front of us started to move forward. Aylin made no effort to progress.

I pointed after it. "All the partygoers came in limos for a reason. The people attending the gala are most likely having their drivers park the limos in the Greystone Mansion's general parking, down the road to the left. But if you're not worried about the stolen car and its keys being taken from us by a valet attendant with no way of making a clean getaway if all goes to hell, then I'm not either."

I waited to see if I had given enough to quell her unease. Another presumably empty limo passed us before the Rolls Royce behind us honked its horn. Aylin turned her attention back to the road and inched her way closer. She still hadn't said anything as we continued to wait our turn in the progression of vehicles. I calmly waited, or as calmly as I could. A tell-tale of lying was giving too much information. Well, I wasn't *lying*. Unless she viewed omitting a fair share of the details of tonight as lying.

I knew she would.

My maker broke into my thoughts, "Just who is throwing this fancy shindig anyway?"

The line of cars moved again, a little faster than before. I had a feeling it depended on how I answered her questions if she would go along with tonight's festivities or if she would keep driving.

"I found the invitation in one of the cars we had to get rid of. And I thought a secluded mansion with a selective amount of people could be a good place to hone my predatory skills."

Aylin frowned.

Damn, she wasn't buying my story. I actually found the invitation in Stan's house. It was probably left by one of Stan's groupies, like everything else there.

"In the stolen Bugatti?"

"What?" I questioned hesitantly.

"The sports car you emptied and I went to get rid of?"

While Aylin was lost in her memory, I took that moment to make sure I could agree with her convincingly.

I smiled and nodded, "Yep, that's the one."

Her eyes looked over me. I couldn't read her expression.

"Did I tell you that the cops almost caught me in that car?"

I felt my nerves settle some.

I feigned a look of concern, "No, you didn't. What happened?"

Our car progressed with the moving traffic.

"Nothing much. I was cruising down Pacific Coast Highway and I see flashing lights right before hearing the sirens."

"That sounds like more than nothing."

She shrugged before straightening in her seat. The gates of Greystone Mansion were in front of us to the left. Only a couple of vehicles before I knew if we would be attending the party.

"About fucking time. Anyway, as we both know, I couldn't let the cops stop me. So I sped up."

My mouth dropped open. She smiled earnestly at my reaction.

“You’re lying! Malibu and Beverly Hills police call their helicopter units even if they get an inkling of a feeling it could turn into a high-speed chase.”

We moved up in line. One car to go.

“Well good thing I jumped out of the car once I reached 110 miles per hour,” she bragged.

I had no words for what she had just said. This time she burst out in laughter.

“Did anyone get hurt?”

The limo in front of us accelerated slowly and started to turn into the mansion’s elongated driveway. I watched limo as we drove past the entry and it made its way through the massive iron gates. My eyes fell on Aylin. I caught the last part of her rolling her eyes as she stopped at the stop sign.

“I don’t know if anyone got hurt and I don’t care,” she said as she made the left towards the parking area.

I felt myself relax in my chair. We were still going! I would be able to see him. Maybe even...

It wasn’t time to get lost in my thoughts again.

“I was just saying...”

“Yeah, I know.” She let out a breath. “I’m pretty sure the car went off the road towards the empty beach.”

I decided to let the conversation die there. We both knew if the beach was empty or teeming with people all she cared about was that she didn’t get caught.

As I had figured, the parking lot was filled with limos and other exotic cars. I was halfway expecting a guard at the parking entrance, but there were only workers in orange reflective vests busy with directing traffic. The two workers we drove past didn’t flinch in seeing a teen and

her glam older *something* in a sports car instead of a driver or valet. I guess they didn't get paid enough to care, or the car showcased that I belonged. Either way, it worked to my benefit.

Aylin looked at me once she turned off the engine. "Are you ready?"

"As ready as I'll ever be," I answered honestly.

A smug smile crept across her face, "You worry too much."

I took that as my cue to leave the car.

I knew I didn't have to check my makeup or hair. Even if there was an off chance that a hair was out of place, I would still be seen as beautiful in the eyes of my prey.

"Hey Cinderella, you almost forgot your coat," Aylin said, appearing at my side from nowhere. I looked around the surrounding area cautiously. "Relax, none of the chauffeurs or valets are paying us any attention and it looks as if all the other help has been called to the castle hours ago. We must've shown up fashionably late with the other cool kids."

I had forgotten that I had asked Aylin to steal a coat for me to wear. That was the one thing I couldn't find hidden away somewhere in Stan's house. Granted, coats are rarely *needed* in California. Even when the weather wasn't perfect, the showing of skin was always preferred over comfort. Even still, an expensive coat that would spend most of its time in a coat check showed off one's deep pockets.

Stopping for a moment, I held Aylin's selection up in front of me. I barely stifled a laugh and gave her a questioning look.

She winked at me. "I knew you'd like it."

My gaze went back to the short black hooded wool cape. The make was beautiful but...

"Isn't this a touch on the dramatic side?" I questioned, never taking my eyes off the coat.

Aylin shrugged. "Maybe, maybe not. I don't know, I thought it would look cool."

Knowing Aylin, she had an ironic view of me as Little "Red" Riding Hood doing the hunting instead of being the hunted.

I thought of Stan. Maybe a role-reversal was what I needed.

Aylin helped me into the heavy cloth. It fell comfortably to my waist as I kept the hooded section lying on my shoulders. I wasn't sure why, but the coat seemed to instill me with confidence and security.

I shared a quick smirk with my maker. Aylin mirrored me. In that moment, a feeling of comradery surged between us. I took in a cleansing breath. This moment felt good.

It wasn't too late. I could tell Aylin whom I planned to confront. She would tell me how stupid I was and we would jump back into the car and leave. It could all be so simple.

But I couldn't let it be.

"Let's get to it," I said with an air of feigned confidence.

"Lead the way," she playfully replied.

It only took a few steps to leave the black asphalt behind and walk onto one of Greystone Mansion's various terraced gardens. The mansion and gardens cover over eighteen acres of beautifully crafted statues, fountains, flowers, and greenery. This land once belonged to an influential family in the late 1920's, the Dohenys. Now that I thought about it, it was funny I even remembered that. Maybe I remembered because their family struck a chord of familiarity to my own. Make a ton of money, fuck up the family with the accumulated wealth, and hide as many family scandals as humanly possible. The American dream. At least that was my parents' version of the American dream.

However, I really had my nanny to thank for my knowledge of the Dohenys and their property. Because of her, I spent many sunny days milling through these very gardens. I really liked that nanny, which was saying a lot. I saw her as imaginative and passionate. That nanny was also a bit of an obsessive person, but she could make anything entertaining. Well, that was until my dad noticed her redeeming qualities. Before long, she was a shell of her former self. Then one day she was just gone.

What *was* her name...?

"Hey, the propped signs point to go down this way," Aylin tried redirecting me.

I had walked down some stairs, through a courtyard, and down another set of stairs before I realized I was absently following the sound of trickling water. I looked to my right. On either side of a slated path were dense rows of towering Cypress trees that beckoned to me. I followed the path.

“Okay, I’m sure the party isn’t this way,” she whined.

“We’ll get there soon enough.”

I kept to the path. The sounds of partygoers’ small talk and laughter to my left and babbling water falling down the wall to my right.

My ears perked up when I swore I heard someone, or something, whisper in front of me, but I saw no one.

“Did you hear that?” I asked Aylin without taking my eyes off the darkness.

“*Yeah*, the party we should already be at that’s happening *over there*.”

“No. It came from...”

She’s here, poor little rich girl. Stay away from heights you cannot climb, poor little rich girl.

I turned behind me, “That! I did you hear that?!”

The confused expression Aylin shared told me all I needed to know. I turned back to the darkness, seeing everything, but nothing all at once.

“Are you talking about the sound of water from the fountains?”

“No, I’m not talking about the water.”

I listened intently to see if the voice would come back, but it didn’t.

That was strange. I could remember what it had said, but I couldn’t recall if it had been a female or male voice. I needed to get back on task. I shook my head and took off my shoes before taking off into the darkness. Aylin followed my lead with no questions asked.

I made a sharp left between two closely spaced Cypress. I closed my eyes and leapt for a destination that may or may not exist out of my memory.

Two words spilled out of my mouth while gravity pulled me downward. “Don’t fall,” I whispered.

The light rap of my feet, then Aylin’s, touching the loose gravel of a less refined path put a smile on my face. One huge step closer to the party. I had always wanted to jump from there when I was a kid, but my nanny would tell me to resist the call of the void and... She was the one that would warn against jumping heights you hadn’t yet learned to climb. Her name was on the tip of my tongue before it slinked back into oblivion. A feeling of unease started to build. Why was I remembering so much about her anyway? She was no one to me. Not anymore.

I didn’t wait for my doubt to register, instead, I ran towards the next crossing, leapt, and climbed.

Every one of our movements was performed without a hitch. Once again we stood on slate, but instead of the path, we were now on the mansion’s slanted roof.

“What’s next?” Aylin excitedly questioned.

I quickly took a peak down towards the festivities. People roamed free inside the inner courtyard. Some servers, mostly guests. From up here I felt a greater disconnect from humanity than I already had. I knew people were now considered food. But from up here, I observed their social dances without any of them the wiser. Being up here made me feel like a god.

Aylin shared a knowing glance. “What’s on the menu?”

“I’m not sure yet.” I turned, effortlessly scaling the incline and made my way to the back of the house. People were on this side of the mansion as well. Most of

them stayed scattered, broken into small groups around the outside bar that hugged the stone railing of the vast balcony. Greystone's iconic reflecting pool sat alone on the side of the mansion with parts of it in and out of the shadows.

I listened as the mansion creaked and moaned, trying to settle from the people inside and around her. There were some that believed a home had its own soul. At this moment I would find it hard to argue against that. Raw energy seemed to be swirling around me, or maybe it was my own vitality as I readied myself for the hunt. One thing was for certain, I'd never felt like this before. What if the mansion could feel us? I wondered how it felt being open to all, no longer having an owner to call its own. What if the energy I felt was the mansion's longing as well as its protest.

Poor little rich girl.

That voice again!

I glanced over at Aylin. She stood at an impossible slant with ease, taking in all the gothic beauty that surrounded us. I didn't bother asking if she heard someone. Whoever or whatever it was, Aylin couldn't hear them.

I had climbed the withering heights and now it was time to jump into the fray.

Eyes wide open I took the plunge, landing without a sound that any human could notice. Aylin was at my side before I could put my second shoe back on.

A cacophony of different scents set my other senses on high alert. My throat tightened with the guarantee of a fresh kill. I lifted my hood over my head as if it could mask my hunger.

The dim lighting filled with clusters of entrees called to me.

“Why do I feel different?” I whispered.

“It’s your show. You’re the queen of the pride tonight.”

A shiver went through me. Where was he?

I wandered into my hunting grounds. Now that I had joined my prey, the atmosphere crackled even more so than before. It served as a delicious distraction to every last one of my heightened senses. Aylin wasn’t immune either. She separated from me, following the music that floated out of every open entry.

My gaze fell over the mansion as if it demanded my attention. The steeply pitched roofs laid flawlessly over the elevated greyish limestone walls as the grand mullioned windows give the bystander a glimpse of what a lordly interior should strive to be.

“Isn’t it magnificent?” a woman’s voice broke into my thoughts.

I turned to see a strikingly beautiful, petite brunette standing in front of me with her brutishly handsome companion behind her. Both of them continued to openly appraise me. I was here for someone else, but my instincts kicked in. I mirrored their actions with a playful smile.

Hmmm, pheromone spike. But not from both; only one of these two considers themselves a hunter.

“What do you believe to be magnificent, the mansion or me?”

They both flinched, but the wife rebounded quickly. “Both, but I’ve already seen the inside of the mansion

before,” she finished with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

Her husband only smiled a charming smile.

Ah, I see you.

“I’m thirsty. I could use a drink of something that would warm my insides,” I tested.

The husband lightly bit his lip, “I’m all over it.”

I bet you are, tiger. He started walking towards the bar while his wife held his place.

“So, do you have a name?” she inquired.

Without a word I turned and walked away.

Here kitty-kitty.

Without looking back, I entered the house through one of the floor-to-ceiling Palladian windows. There weren’t as many people inside this part of the house. I hardly had time to take in all the stylish fabrics and furnishings before I noticed the polished checkered marble floor and the slight reflection of who was following me.

Oh my, I could sense kitty getting even more excited.

I stopped. Kitty stayed quiet behind me.

The card room. I thought that was where I was standing. It looked different than I remembered, but the architecture of the interior never let the countless style choices override its character entirely. Memories of the endless tours no-name-nanny and I had taken started to flood in.

I was never one to care much about architecture, but it was hard not to be impressed with the mansion’s grandiosity. I also found it cool that I had access to an area that most people didn’t get to see up close and personal since the mansion was closed to the general public. The city of

Beverly Hills was the compound's keeper and has been since the sixties. They only opened the mansion doors to film crews, V.I.P's, and special engagements. Being the daughter of one of Beverly Hills "it" people let me check all three sections of the checklist.

My nanny was just lucky enough to ride on my family's gilded coattails.

The image of how peaceful she was when we had our days here played in my mind. Her flowy, flower-printed sundresses and floppy straw hats that contrasted beautifully with her unbelievably pure, silky blonde hair she would let cascade down her back. The nanny was a different person here than she was at home. Here she did away with her signature single braid, billowing starched polos matched with dull oversized khakis.

Even before whatever happened with my father and her, she made sure never to meet my parents gaze. With hindsight always being 20/20, I now know it was to safeguard herself from my mother's scathing questioning and my father's prolonged stares. It wasn't until our first outing here that I realized how her ice-blue eyes beamed when she would smile.

However, her quiet expression of awe would be saved for when we would walk into the property's gated portecochère, which was fancy French speak for a covered porch, where vehicles could drop off their passengers at the front door. To be fair, even the most jaded visitors would be awestruck. Once we crossed into the imposing structure's gates we were greeted by an oasis of mixes of leafy foliage and fashionable furnishings organized over and around marble floors. Perfectly placed, lofty pillars

appeared to frame the thick, oak-trimmed, arched, glass doorways.

The first time I walked through the front doors I felt as if I had traveled into another time. I remember feeling small; as if the landing could swallow me whole. My eyes tried to take everything in without becoming overwhelmed by the oak and marble that was everywhere. The banisters, balustrades, and rafters were all uniquely hand carved. There was a set of stairs on the side of the vast landing that led to the second story, but I remember my attention kept being drawn down the glossy-black grand staircase, past the grand hallway that led to the east and west wings, and into the room that was partially shielded by three ornately carved wooden arches that did little to hide the blinding brightness of the sun.

The very room I stood in now.

I could almost make out my childlike figure standing at the top of the grand staircase before my recollection ended. If I had wanted, I could dig up countless memories of the beautifully unique fifty-five room mansion, but this wasn't the time.

The oak arches that led to the grand hallway represented the options I had in front of me. I could take the left arch towards guest rooms and the grand ballroom of the west wing. I could take the right arch towards the library, kitchen, and servants' quarters of the east wing. Or I could forget about kitty and start searching for *him* by going straight up the grand stairway and out the front door to join the sea of people in the inner courtyard.

Kitty was becoming fidgety.

I stepped into the middle archway. I also had the choice of letting my tail follow me to the second floor. A velvet rope at the base of the stairs served as a visitor deterrent.

That sounded like the perfect place to find some privacy.

I took the couple of steps needed to enter the main hallway just as my senses cut through the tastefully loud music and raised voices caught my attention.

“Stan, I’ve already sent my people home. I can’t work like this!”

“What the hell is your problem now?”

It was *his* voice! It was happening. I was going to see him. One. Last. Time.

Stay away from heights you cannot climb...

I ignored the disembodied voice and the footsteps that again followed me once I diverted to the east wing.

“This house is haunted! I can’t cook with all this bad juju surrounding me.”

“Oh, god. Give me a break Julien! I don’t have time for this. Where’s Jessica?”

“Why would I...”

I entered the kitchen and lowered my hood to show my face. Stan’s back was to me. He didn’t turn until he saw the shock that registered over Julien’s expression.

Stan started in before he had the chance to see me, “Jesus, Jess. If you’re coked out of your gourd again, I’m going to... Wait, who are you?”

I tried to smile, but my face wouldn’t allow me. Julien’s fear spiked; he could feel something wasn’t right; wasn’t right with me. Aylin called his type an intuitivist.

“I’m sorry Stan, but I have to go.”

Stan turned to face his cook. Julien’s gaze never left mine. I could sense that he wanted to warn Stan further, but thought better of it and left the kitchen without another word. Stan’s gaze fell on me once more before he focused behind me.

I had almost forgotten about kitty.

Stan frowned. “Frank? What the fuck are you doing here?! I told you you were banned from any of my private parties after what you did to that last girl. I swear to god if you were following this woman...”

Stan finally took a good look at me. “Porsha?”

“Hello, Stan.”

I heard the door close. It looked as if Frank got away to hunt another day. I felt a tinge of guilt and a pang of hunger. Aylin’s voice played in my head. *Don’t cry over spilled blood*. She was right. I came here for a reason and that reason was in this very room. I needed closure. He needed to see that I had changed and I was no longer the Porsha that drank herself into a stupor and cried herself to sleep because he didn’t love me.

Poor little rich girl.

Unconsciously, I gritted my teeth. Maybe the voice was in my head, like Danielle’s presence she would feel.

That was the first time I had allowed myself to think about her. Stan was different. I had become accustomed to his antics. They were even expected. But losing Dani... The rogue thought stirred muddled feelings that I knew I wasn’t ready to feel. Anger brewed as I fought against the compulsion to unsheathe my fangs. Instead, I focused my full attention on my soon to be ex-husband.

Stan broke the silence. “What in the ever-loving fuck are you doing here?!”

His voice feigned anger, but his darkened iris exuded lust. I removed the coat I wore and dropped it over a rounded serving platter filled with readied hors-d'oeuvres.

He closed his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger the way he always did when he thought I was being overly dramatic. But not before he took in his fill of what my dress didn't cover. Was he trying to get a rise out of me? That used to piss me off and start an automatic fight between us, but tonight was different. I felt no anger. Well, no more than I usually felt. Instead, a surge of curiosity kept my gaze glued on him.

I had always been a bit taller than him in heels, but this was the first time I noticed the thinning of his sun-kissed hair. The color didn't look natural. Was that always the case? That wasn't the only thing I noticed. Stan took pride in his physical fitness and that hadn't changed. Maybe it was the harsh lighting and stark yellow kitchen cabinets that caused his skin to appear washed out. Oh god, was he wearing concealer under his eyes? When did he start doing that? Stan removed his hand and open his slightly blood-shot eyes as he flashed a sarcastic smile.

“I can't do this with you right now. This party could make or break my latest project.”

I heard heeled footsteps followed by others coming towards us. I timed my words perfectly, “But you have time for Jessica? I see nothing has changed.”

Anger took hold of his features. “Wait a fuck—”

The kitchen’s door opened. A slutty looking blonde twenty-something in a nothing little dress and glitter red-bottom heels walked in like she owned the place. Three others dressed in server outfits walked into the room close behind her.

It was my turn to flash my pearly whites. “Hi Jess.”

Stan recovered gracefully, acting like his wife hadn’t just greeted one of his playthings. Jessica wasn’t as smooth. Her eyes moved up and down my body as I watched her insecurities strengthen the longer she stared. Her workers/BFF’s read the tension in the room and grabbed the trays that Julien and his chefs had prepared before making a hurried escape.

Her posture slumped slightly. “Hello Mrs. Banks. You look...you look good.”

I took a step towards her. She took a step back while Stan grimly watched.

My smile widened. “I’m sorry. Do I know you from somewhere? I mean, I heard your name in passing...”

I watched as her gaze turned into a penetrating glare.

Stan jumped into action. “No. This is not a thing that’s going to happen.”

He grabbed my coat as I stood observing how this moment would play out. Jess believed she had won as she tried and failed to hide her smirk. He was careful not to make direct eye contact with either of us. Little did she know I had no intentions of leaving even if Stan wanted me to.

“Here, take this.” Stan handed Jessica the last tray of food while throwing the coat on a cleared counter.

There was pleading look in her eyes. Stan put a reassuring hand on the small of her back, turning towards me.

“Excuse us for a minute.”

I nodded once in their direction. I didn’t say anything more to Jess. There was no need to put salt in a wound that she would salt herself.

I listened as they left the main kitchen through another door.

“Are you fucking kidding me Stan?” Jessica strongly whispered.

“I know. I had no idea she was coming or what she wants. That’s what I need to figure out and get her the hell out of here.”

“You never told me...”

There was a pause. “I told you that I had no idea that she would be here.”

“No! You never told me she was gorgeous. The picture you showed me looks nothing like her! Then you let her talk to me like I was no one. And I saw how you reacted...”

Stan stopped her. “I don’t have time for this Guppy. Come on, be reasonable,” he pleaded.

“Oh, now I’m your guppy again,” she stated indignantly.

“You never stopped being my guppy.” Another pause let me know she was buying what he was selling. “That’s why I got you out of shark-infested waters. Look, this is the last of the food because while Julien is a genius in the kitchen, he’s a nut anywhere else. This crowd should be fine if the bars keep flowing though.”

“Then don’t go back in there. Let’s just go back to the party and she’ll leave eventually.”

“I can’t do that... Jess. Guppy. Shit, fuck it.”

Stan made his way back into the main kitchen.

“Guppy?” I questioned.

His brows furrowed in embarrassment and confusion, “You heard us?”

I shrugged, “Thin walls.”

Stan stared at the door that Jessica had left out of. It was obvious he wondered if she was listening in like I had. He had nothing to worry about, she had left. Most likely about to take shots off of some hot someone to soothe her damaged ego. Hopefully she didn’t run into Frank.

“Before we were interrupted, I was going to say that you were the one that left me,” Stan stated genuinely.

I rolled my eyes, “For good reason. You even find it hard to keep it in your pants for your mistress. Getting all hot for your estranged wife that’s leaving you for cheating. That’s rich.”

I didn’t give him a chance to answer, closing the distance between us. “That’s what she noticed when she first walked in.”

His breathing slowly became more deliberate as my hand lightly grazed his bulging manhood.

“She also noticed the half-mast pole in your pants.” Our eyes met and his breath caught.

He swallowed hard. “Did you notice?” he inquired in a deep raspy voice.

“Yes, I noticed.”

He bit down on the inside of his lip while he stared at mine.

What was I doing? I didn't want him, but I couldn't deny the buildup of warmth and moisture this moment created within me.

Stan leaned in. His heated breath warmed my cool, alabaster skin. I would've been covered in goosebumps if I was still able. If I was still human.

This shouldn't feel right. Yes, I wanted to see him. Show him what he could never have again. Maybe even scare him a little. But I needed him to *see me...* outside of the courts and away from the safety of my lawyers. He needed to know he hadn't broken me. Only then would I regain what he had taken from me. Instead, my body was dead-set on betraying me and giving in to him. But it had been so long since he'd looked at me with such passion. If I was being honest, Stan's passion died not long after we married. As time passed, he even found it difficult to convincingly fake his devotion. Though it didn't stop him from trying.

But now the desire in his stare was real and all mine.

I impulsively pressed my lips firmly against his. Given permission, he gently pried my lips apart with his hot, moist tongue. I reciprocated his efforts as my fangs extended. Lost in the moment, he didn't seem to notice me grazing his fleshy pink muscle across my deadly additions. A hint of his sweet blood laced every deepened kiss. Each of his soft moans that spilled into my mouth, encouraged me further.

I warned you, did I not? Stay away from heights you cannot climb. You are destined to fail. Destined to fall.

He never loved you and he never will. You think he would want you if he thought you were still you, poor little rich girl? I warned you, but it is too late. Now I will show you.

I felt the energy shift around me. The atmosphere began to feel oppressive while dark thoughts started to circle in my mind, creating doubts and sorrow deeper than I had ever felt.

These feelings didn't seem as if they belonged to me alone, but that didn't make any sense.

With noted effort, I stepped away from him a touch faster than humanly possible. His lust-heavy lids startled open as he tried to make sense of what he thought he had seen.

My fangs retracted. "This was a mistake. I need to find Aylin."

He frowned. "Aylin? Who's Aylin? Damn, my tongue hurts. Wait, you can't leave."

I walked out of the kitchen and into the butler's pantry, mindful of my speed. Stan was right behind me. I should've done something to stop him, but my attention was redirected elsewhere. I caught a glimpse of someone quickly leading into a darkened room out of the corner of my eye. A little *too* quick. My step hitched and Stan almost ran into me.

"Aylin?"

"No one's there," Stan deliberately stated.

I ignored him as I stared into the darkened room. Someone *was* there. It moved as fast as Aylin and I. It had to be her, but why would she run from me? Even if it was her, why did I see flower printed fabric that

streamed behind her? Just like the fabric of a flowy sundress.

An overwhelming urge compelled me to enter the room. Stan continued to trail me.

“Damn it’s dark in here,” he whispered.

There was a hint of fear in Stan’s voice as I listened to him feeling the wall for a light switch. I wasn’t concerned with lack of light. I didn’t need it to see. The moon’s reflective glare streamed through the bay windows, illuminating the baby blue walls and stark white crown molding of the empty room. My concern was that the room felt as if the heat was being pulled straight out it.

Stop. Turn around and leave. Don’t listen to the bad thing, it’s not too late.

That voice was different from the one I heard earlier. This one sounded like a little girl.

“Did you hear that?” I asked in vain.

Stan didn’t answer me. If he wasn’t noisily searching the walls, I would’ve thought he had disappeared too.

I turned in the direction I believed the voice had come from just as the room filled with bright lights.

“Found it. And there was light,” Stan said proudly.

I didn’t bother asking again if he heard what I had. Instead, I stared at another closed door that most likely led to the grand hallway. I was sure that was where the voice had come from. That was the door that could lead me out of this place. I wanted to leave, right? So if I wanted to leave, why did I feel like I was being pulled in the other direction?

Artificial light flickered through the windows of the furthest part of the room.

“What’s over there?” I thought out loud.

“That’s the solarium. It looks like this place has some electrical issues. Maybe I hit the too many switches or something.”

“You see the flickering lights too?!”

He walked up to me. “Yeah... Oh no, not you too? Look, this is an old house, with old house issues. There’s nothing to be scared of. Julien...”

It looked as if he had found his bravery when he had found the light switch. But what did he know? Stan had no idea when he was in danger or he wouldn’t be lustfully staring at a predator that could drain his life away in one bite.

I met his gaze. His want for me was blatantly obvious. God, he was stupid. And I was stupid enough to have loved him once. Minutes ago I was halfway convinced I loved him still.

A flash of anger manifested out of thin air. Nasty hate-filled thoughts mingled with lovelorn memories.

I tried to stay away from you. I spurned your affections the best way I knew how. You pursued me! Made me feel special. Wanted. You could’ve left me alone. You made me this way! Why did you use me? Why didn’t you love me?!

I startled.

The other monstrous voice was back, but not like before. Now it had found a place in my mind!

Why didn’t you love me? Why didn’t you love me? Why didn’t you love me? Why didn’t you love me?

The same words echoed loudly inside my head. They melted together until the unfamiliar voice slowly morphed into an unintelligible cluster of non-words. Like a record played backwards over and over again.

YOU SHOULD HAVE LOVED ME!

My breath hitched. Then there was silence. The last statement was as blaringly clear as who had voiced it. It had lost all its anonymity.

Nanny Clarissa. That was her name, Clarissa.

That couldn't be. A shiver ran up my spine. Again, I felt an unseen force leading towards the flickering lights of the solarium. I should've ran for the closest exit, but the fog in my head wouldn't let me. All I could do was feel. Feel the unsubstantiated rage that built inside of me and the ravenous hunger it caused.

Fight it.

The little girl! It was no more than a whisper. I didn't know why, but I was glad to hear her voice. I was also thankful that it came from the room instead of my head.

"...he was a has-been. And that's how he chose to show *me* his gratitude."

Was Stan talking this whole time?

"You've barely been listening to me. Did you want to take a look inside?"

I frowned. "A look inside where?"

Stan raised an eyebrow, "The solarium." He grabbed my hand and led me towards the area. "You haven't stopped looking over there since we've been standing here."

"Don't go in there. Fight it Porsha!"

Stan stopped and looked around the room. "What was that?"

I tried to hide my astonishment, "You heard the little girl?"

He appeared bewildered. "I thought I heard *someone* whispering." Stan dismissively shook his head and smirked. "Wow, between you and Julien, I'll be believing in haunted houses and alien abductions before the night is done. Come on."

The lights flickered more violently with every step towards the solarium's glass door.

I watched the other windows, looking for something, anything. That was when I saw it.

There she was. The long blonde hair, piercing blue eyes, and flowy colorful sundress. Her transparent figure blinked in and out of existence with every strong flicker of light. That couldn't be Nanny Clarissa! No. This had to be a rogue manifestation of an unraveling mind. That thought was unsettling, but not as much as believing this could be real. Yet, my intuition told me otherwise.

Did this mean she was dead? And even if she was, why would she be here?

Stan reached for the door's handle. I could stop this. Just walk away and forget all about tonight. My gaze connected with the phantom's stony glare.

God, there was no going back.

Stan swung open the door. Clarissa's stare became increasingly sinister as Stan walked into her domain. The air rushed out of me into the room Clarissa occupied as if she had caused a vacuum. Aylin told me I didn't need air to survive. I even tested it by keeping myself submerged

in the bath for an impossibly long time. I resurfaced without a tinge of discomfort, but now my lungs burned and I fought the urge to claw at my throat.

Let me show you.

Clarissa wasn't giving me a choice. I stepped over the threshold. My breath was back and the flickering stopped while the light in the room we left died, leaving an inky blackness behind us. I looked for her, but she was gone.

Or so I thought.

"Oh God no!"

Too late, I felt a wave of pure energy pulverize my body.

"Porsha? Why are you looking like that?! Shit, what did you take?! Fuck. Here sit down."

Stan led me deeper into the room. I couldn't talk. I didn't even know if I was able to sit. The energy that entered me was all-encompassing.

"You better not die on me. I can just see the headlines: 'Estranged husband poisons wife with party favors before huge divorce settlement'. Okay, I'll be back. I'm going to bring you some water."

The energy moved faster within me. My head snapped involuntarily towards his retreating form. "No don't go!"

He stopped in his tracks and came back towards me. I didn't want him to do that; or did I?

He exuded concern and relief in his expression. "I thought you were seizing or in a catatonic state, or something. Are you sure you're okay?"

I looked over my shoulder, realizing for the first time I was actually sitting in a wicker patio chair. I breathed a

sigh of relief. She wasn't there. My attention went back to Stan before he could become suspicious.

I weakly nodded.

"It must have been the few cocktails I had. I think I'm okay now," I lied.

Mild shock registered over his face. "A few cocktails? How your mouth opened and eyes glazed over? I mean, it almost looked like... I don't know. It looked like it would take more than a few fucking drinks to cause *that*."

He became quiet as if he was reliving the moment.

"I'm okay. Really."

I gently grabbed his hand as I tried to hide a shiver that ran through me.

"Maybe you were right. You need to rest. I'll help you find your friend. What was her name?"

"It's too late for that," I whispered.

"What did you say?"

Why did I say that?

"Aylin. Her name is Aylin. Maybe we could stay here for a little while longer. I don't want to start moving too fast." I regarded my surroundings and tried to find anything to redirect the conversation. "This room is breathtaking. I love the stone walls and how the trees surround all the windows."

He needed to stay here, that I was sure of. I gazed up to see if my plan was working. I've seen that expression before, but not on Stan. It was the very expression James had before he met his end with me and Aylin.

Reaching up, I made a show of letting down my hair. "Alright, let's go." I bent forward more than necessary to

stand. Stan's eyes were glued to the flesh that my plunging V-neck and I teasingly displayed.

I gestured for him to show me the way even though I had no intentions of leaving.

But didn't I want to leave?

"You do look like you feel better."

I nodded. He continued to watch me while I slipped off my shoes and kicked them out of the way. Stan seemed to forget his previous hesitation. Smiling at him first, I moved towards the window. It didn't take long for him to join me, pressing against my backside.

I actually did feel better. The weird sensations were gone. Even my hunger seemed more manageable. The ghost sightings were strange, but I was new at being a vampire. I was sure Aylin hadn't had enough time to teach me everything.

"I would've never expected this from you," he said with an air of curiosity.

"People change."

"That's true. You definitely have."

If only he knew how true his statement was.

"I don't know. I actually thought it more likely that you would want to kill me than seduce me. I mean, you had some doubts in the kitchen, but your explorations into the new you are a turn-on," he whispered in my ear, playing with my hair.

"As you can see, I don't want you dead." I smiled back at him.

He didn't need to know I had *thought* about killing him.

A ring of truth shot through me. Of course I would *think* I wanted him dead. He had hurt me on many occasions and moved on so easily. I was sure there were plenty of women that felt the way I did. It felt good for the confusion to be gone.

I felt the room's air caress the flesh of my back as he slowly unzipped my dress. "You're amazing," he said more to himself than me.

Unlike him, my earlier lust didn't return. Not even when his soft lips and strong hands explored sensitive portions of my body. The dress fell to the floor, leaving me exposed.

Stan's deep lustful sigh signaled he approved of my lack of undergarments. I turned towards him to give him a full viewing. He backed away slightly taking me all in. My eyes scanned down his body until they rested on the bulge that stood tensely against the fabric of his slacks. The tip of my tongue grazed over my top lip before I met his gaze.

"I forgot how beautiful you are. It feels like I'm seeing you for the first time," he confessed.

"Have you missed me?"

"Yes," he growled before attempting to close the space between us.

My hand shot out in front of me stopping his progress. He tried to hide his desperation with his usual charismatic nature.

A playful smile spread across my face. "First show me how much you've missed me."

Again, he tried to come in close, and again I stopped him.

Marked anger flashed over his face. Unlike him, I hid my own. The rage was building in the both of us. It needed a release. I knew what Stan wanted and why he was angry. I wasn't as sure Stan could understand where my mind was. His dominant hand unzipped and fetched what his pants could barely contain.

Stan's expression was soaked in anticipation while he fondled his manhood in front of me. "Does this show how much I've missed you?"

Typical man. They take and take until you have no more to give and then they leave you... leave you so sad and broken... so enraged! He deserved to feel my rage. He was lucky enough to have felt my love, he now deserved my rage. It was only fair!

Leave him...

Leave him broken...

Leave him broken in pieces...

"It's a start. Lay down on the floor."

You know these feelings aren't your own. Don't let Clarissa's hatred taint you. Fight it.

The little girl's voice caused a resentment I couldn't make heads or tails of. Stan was a welcomed distraction. He had taken it upon himself to remove every article of clothing and now I watched curiously while he stretched out in front of me on the floor.

Give him what he wants and then take what you need.

My hips swayed back and forth seductively as I worked my rage into a powerful aphrodisiac. Without warning, the lights in the room went black. We were now left to our own devices in complete darkness.

“Come lay with me,” his voice husky, drenched in lust.

I felt my face contort in disgust. He didn’t appear to notice.

“First tell me that you love me,” I tested.

He hesitated, “I... fuck it. I love you.” Stan reached blindly into the darkness.

Lying pig.

I dropped to his level, straddling him. “Tell me again,” I demanded.

Confusion flashed across his face for a moment before he caught on. “I love you.”

“Do you really?”

His breath caught when our sexes grazed.

“Yes. Come on baby, let me in,” he whispered.

I allowed him to penetrate my heated softness. Each motion seemed to take him deeper into bliss. Not me. I wasn’t sure what I felt, but it was definitely an itch I had to scratch.

I fought the urge to vomit while Stan’s hands explored all over me. The selfish prick!

I had to ask.

“If you love me, why do you have sex with others?”

I doubled my efforts, causing an elongated moan to escape Stan’s mouth.

“Because I was so... Oh shit, don’t stop. So fucking stupid. Please don’t stop,” he growled.

“Was? That’s past tense. So you *were* stupid. Is it safe to say you’re no longer stupid?”

Stan was finding it hard to string words together as I continued to work him over. That infuriated me! I deserved answers! It was the least he could give me.

“Answer me!” I yelled through my movements.

Stan’s eyes bucked open to find me staring intently at him. He still didn’t appear to have the words between his moans and gasps. I had never seen a man aroused and frightened all at once. I would be lying if I didn’t admit to the tinges of pleasure that it gave me.

I slowed my movements.

“Answer me.”

“Yes.”

“ ‘Yes’, you’re no longer stupid?”

With closed eyes, he nodded profusely. Stan’s fingers dug into my hips, urging me to further his exploration within me.

Every thrust allowed one word. “Yes... come... home... marry... me... stay... with... me... Porsha!”

My view clouded over. Not for the same reason Stan’s was. I couldn’t see. I couldn’t hear.

It all came back. At least I thought it did. I could see, hear, and feel, but I wasn’t in control of any of me.

“Why did you call me that?”

He tried to restart my movements, but whoever had control over me didn’t want to bring Stan to a finish.

“What is this Porsha?” he gasped.

“Don’t call me that! You should have picked *me*. Not her!”

He didn’t look amused. I wasn’t either. Well, not entirely. This had to be the nanny. That was the only thing that made sense. Now I could tell the difference between

her pain and anger and my own. I understood her pain, her rage, even if she had so much more than I ever did. That must be how we merged in the first place.

I couldn't be sure of that, but some other things had become clear. The "her" I, or she, spoke of was Mom, and Clarissa's lover was my father. Clarissa died here. My dad killed her. No that wasn't right. She killed herself? Shit, how did I know all this? My voice with her intentions broke into my thoughts. I caught the fleeing figure of a little girl. Her perceived innocence made me aware of my nakedness.

"You should have chosen me!" She made me scream.

My breath hitched. I felt it before it happened. The wrath, anger, rage... I had always believed they were one in the same, but now I knew that to be false. I wanted to cry when Clarissa started back towards the goal Stan wanted to reach. He was too drunk on his apparent happy ending to realize what fate was to befall him. His eyes closed in anticipation. Mine closed as Clarissa decided it was time.

Mid-thrust, my fangs unwillingly emerged. I already knew that wouldn't be Clarissa's primary weapon of choice. She made me lean forward, planting both of my hands on Stan's heaving chest. My hips moved with the rhythm Clarissa had chosen.

Again, her words fell out of my mouth. "I told you poor little rich girl, stay away from heights you cannot climb."

Stan seemed in a daze. His eyelids fluttered as if he was drugged. I bent in closer. Clarissa wanted him to see me, fangs and all.

“You’re a serpent with a golden tongue fit for lies. You can’t hurt me any longer.”

I wasn’t sure if she saw Stan as he was or if she saw him as who had hurt her. There was a good chance both options didn’t matter to her.

Stan’s eyes lazily opened to the sight of my large, sharpened fangs. His eyes reacted in horror, but none of the rest of him had the chance to. Before the air could be released from his lungs both of my taloned hands thrust upward into his diaphragm. My mouth met his, stealing any cries of agony in a violent kiss. The heat of his blood and insides burnt my hands, face, and mouth. I kept drinking him while my hands forced through his soft tissues. Clarissa drank freely, ignoring his choked gurgles. I felt sated, but guilty. An image of a praying mantis plagued me. That’s what I was. A cold calculating predator that could kill anyone. No, I didn’t do this. She did! Oh God please no!

Clarissa lifted my torso upright. Blood and bits of gore dribbled down my neck onto my chest. Stan’s heartbeat was slowing, in moments it would stop. I felt the struggling organ thump weakly against my fingers as it fought to keep its owner alive. There was too much blood to know if he could even feel what was happening now.

God, please help me. I don’t want to see this. I don’t want to be a part of this! I felt Clarissa’s energy disengage from mine, but only for a split second. I was able to stop my sexual motions before she took control again.

Stop trying to fight me. He doesn’t need it since he decided to never use it. And I want it since I never had it.

I felt slightly better that Clarissa's voice was back in my head instead of talking through me. But I had no idea what she was talking about. She didn't go back to her deviant motions as she proceeded to pull my full hands out of Stan. A gross realization hit me like a ton of bricks. She was talking about Stan's heart! Clarissa planned on taking his heart.

Nonsensical words started to fill the space in which she held me captive. I would have tried to take control, but I knew I didn't have enough strength left to be successful. I needed help. Or I would have to watch myself eat my husband's heart.

I felt icy hands on the back of my shoulder. A heart-wrenching scream pierced the air before everything went white.

Where was I? I knew I was no longer in the mansion, but that shouldn't be possible. In any direction I swiveled my head all I could see was blinding white. There didn't seem to be anything in the place I ended up. Fear crept into my very soul. Was this the punishment given for letting a ghost take over your body and eat your husband? They should've given makers the "why" we were forbidden from certain acts. Still, this was less traumatic than where I was moments ago. I just really hoped I wasn't stuck here forever.

"You're not."

I looked to my left to find a little girl. She couldn't have been any older than seven. She just stood in front of me with her hands crossed in front of her, with a pensive gaze cast over me. She almost blended in with our stark surroundings. Everything she wore was white, but the

style of dress and accessories let me in that she wasn't of our time. Her skin looked as translucent as mine while her brown doe eyes continued to stare at me.

"Are you a ghost? What's your name?"

She shrugged.

"Am I dead?"

"Maybe, but you will be going back."

She wasn't a wealth of information, was she?

"No, I'm not. I told you to leave. You didn't listen."

My thoughts went back to Stan. Guilt and hurt pulled at my heart.

"Is he..."

"Yes. You should've left when I told you to."

The guilt quickly turned to anger. I pointed to the white background as if it was something. "That thing also told me to leave and look what happened."

"Yes, I saw. You didn't leave. It knew you wouldn't."

It... Why didn't she call her Clarissa?

Because Clarissa wasn't the only one you faced tonight. There was something darker, older... ancient. And it sensed your power. It will come for you again and use you as it used Clarissa."

I remembered how Clarissa's voice didn't sound human before our "joining". If this little ghost girl was telling the truth, something else was with Clarissa. Maybe giving her power.

"No, it feeds off of power. Clarissa is stuck in that house, doomed to relive her hurt. You and the... other gave her a host to lash out. Stan paid with his life."

I looked away from the little girl's solemn expression. The thought of what Clarissa was doing to my husband disgusted me.

"Do you know what happened to her? What made her this way?"

The girl shook her head. I knew that wasn't the questions I should be worried about anyway.

"Thank you for saving me from her."

The girl started skipping in a small circle. "I didn't save you from her. It's the other you needed help to get away from. You don't have to worry about it tonight. You will return to your body and Aylin will be there."

I nodded with relief. If she was telling me the truth that would mean I wasn't stuck here.

"I told you that already," she rolled her eyes.

"Do you live here? What is this place?"

The little girl nodded her head while she continued to skip around. "I like it here better than the house. Clarissa can't come here because she's too sad. You'll see this place again later. But that's all I can tell you." She stopped and held her hand to her mouth, giggling.

The girl looked up at a thing I couldn't see.

"It's time for you to go."

Fear started to build inside of me again. "Wait. Are you sure that thing with Clarissa is gone?"

She nodded impatiently. "It's time for you to go," she pushed at the small of my back.

"Okay. I'll make sure we will never come back here. Thank you again."

The little girl stopped pushing me. “You will come back here,” she said looking around at the bright nothingness, “and *it* will find you very soon.”

Out of nowhere, I lost my balance as if something pulled the floor out from under me. I watched in horror as the girl stayed where she was and I fell downward.

Then there was nothing but darkness.

“Porsha! Wake up, now!” Aylin’s voice blared through my head.

My eyes fluttered open to the dim light of the moonlit room. I knew where I should’ve been, but I wasn’t sure if I was there.

“I swear I will leave you here to deal with the mess you’ve made if you don’t get your ass up!”

I startled up, realizing that Aylin had been cradling me in her lap. My eyes locked on her blurry image. I was back and Aylin was with me in the mansion just like the little girl said. My body had never left though. No. My spirit had left and ended up in... I wasn’t sure where I had ended up. It wasn’t until Aylin grabbed my face that I recognized I had started looking around the room.

“What did you do Porsha?! This isn’t how we feed. If I hadn’t found you first and blocked off the doors, who knows who would’ve found you...”

“It wasn’t me,” I weakly said.

I tried hard to focus on Aylin’s face to make out her expression. Even though her features were still hazy I could still see that she didn’t buy my explanation.

“That’s what you have for me? It wasn’t you. So it wasn’t you that I found slashing and gutting what’s left of this man? I saw you! You looked me right in my eyes

before passing out in the organs you had torn out of him.” She waited a moment for me to reply.

“It wasn’t me. The little girl, Clarissa, and the ancient. White room...” I trailed off.

“The little ancient girl? You’re not making any sense. You know what, we don’t have time for this right now. Do you know who this pile of waste used to be?”

I sat up, finding it difficult to support my own weight with my wobbly arms. My fingers pressed down into the remains Aylin had mentioned. The room was in better focus now. I looked around again and stopped on the man’s scraps that no longer held any resemblance to Stan. I quickly turned away even though I knew that image was now seared into memory.

“Stan,” I whispered.

I didn’t need to see Aylin to know what she was thinking. Her gasp of realization was enough. She stood up. I didn’t dare look her in the face. I found it safer to stare at her blood-soaked plaid skirt instead. She started pacing back and forth in a short line. Her moving figure finally came into crisp definition with the rest of the room.

“I knew it! I didn’t want to admit it, but I knew it. Those people were talking about Stan this and that, but I didn’t put two and two together until that ass-hat Frank found me in the ballroom.”

“I met Frank,” my voice wavered.

“Yeah, I know. I left you hunting him and his creep of a wife. The last I saw, you led him away from everyone. I thought you would lead him outside into the acres of unattended forestry like I did to his wife. But no. You

switched targets and slaughterhoused your husband. A well-known producer. And it's worth mentioning again, *your husband!* In a mansion filled with humans!"

I tried to lift myself off the floor only to fall back into the muck. "We have to find Frank. He knows that I'm Stan's wife."

"No shit. He was fuming about Stan's lack of manners when I found him. Who knows who else he had talked to before we ran into each other?!"

An expression of disdain crossed over her face. More guilt started pouring in around me. This was my fault and I knew it. There was no way of knowing just how this would have gone wrong, but we weren't supposed to be here in the first place. I didn't want to put more into my last thought.

"You have to believe me. I didn't kill Stan. I just wanted to see him."

Aylin's hand rose to stop my explanation as she plopped down in a chair that soon held bits of Stan that fell from her clothes. My gaze went through the area as I tried not to pay too much attention in one spot for long. Aylin couldn't do much to make the scene worse. The carnage and blood were everywhere.

"I don't know if I can fix this. I'll have to make the call. Shit, we're screwed."

Not wanting to meet my maker's gaze, I scanned my own body instead. There wasn't a single inch of me that wasn't painted red with Stan's blood. I could just imagine what Aylin had walked into. I wasn't able to stomach the act myself. If it hadn't been for the little girl...

“Did you see or hear a little girl? Did she lead you to me?”

Aylin let out a small sigh. “I told you, Frank led me to you. He said you were with Stan and I knew we had a problem. I would have been here sooner if I didn’t have to clean up after your mess.”

I frowned in confusion.

She pointed to the floor. “I’m obviously not talking about *this* mess. I couldn’t have him looking for his wife since I’d killed her. So I had to finish what you started. By the time I dumped his body and made my way back here, you were in this fucked-up situation.”

I really did put us in a shitty situation.

“I know I broke our rules.”

Aylin rolled her eyes the way she always had, but I had never seen the fear she showed now.

“That’s the understatement of the year. We could lose our lives for this. I just need to think.”

I stood up, embarrassed by more than my nakedness. “It was Clarissa. She took over my body and...”

“Just stop Porsha! I can’t deal with your delusions. I have enough on my plate.”

It felt real. The voices and sightings all seemed real. A stray thought started to fester in my mind. What if Aylin was right? I could’ve made up the little girl, Clarissa, and the ancient one that I never actually saw. People had died in this mansion in unspeakable ways. Just maybe I had pulled on the memory of the stories I had heard about the place. That would explain why I put Clarissa into my delusions. She was the one that brought me here for the tours. Did I imagine all of it and...

That would mean that I killed Stan because I wanted to kill him. The thought of his heart in my hands and what I was going to do to it, what I did to it, played through my mind.

I forced down a dry heave.

“You should leave me here. I deserve whatever happens to me.”

“God, can you also stop with the dramatics? Yes, you fucked up big time, but who can really blame you? Your husband was a cunt of a bastard that deserved, well not this... Still, he was a fuckwit that thought the world was his oyster and he could take what he wanted from it.” She looked over what was left of him. “He thought wrong.”

“If you did leave, what would happen to me?”

She crossed her legs, sitting back in the chair. “If the humans didn’t find you first and arrest you, parading you in front of the cameras, our kind will find you and kill you extremely slowly. Then they would find me and do the same.” Her expression turned sour before looking at me. “Porsha, we are in this together no matter what. I’m your maker and you are my ward.”

I swore I saw a hint of love in her eyes, but it could also be worry of her untimely death. Maybe all makers felt a closeness or a link to their fledglings. Even so, I knew this wasn’t the time to ask if that was true.

“We can burn this part of the mansion down,” I stated.

I looked around the room halfway expecting the ghost I made up to attack me for wanting to destroy their home. Nothing happened.

Of course nothing happened.

An amused expression flashed across her face before it left a somber one. "No, that would catch everyone's attention. Too bad, this place would burn faster than a Roman candle. That would've been entertaining." Aylin sighed, "No, we have to call them and hope for the best."

I walked over to the now soaked dress I had slipped out of earlier. It was easier for me to put my full attention on putting on the dress than the dread Aylin's last statement caused deep inside of me.

"Who are 'they'?" I asked, not knowing if I really wanted the answer.

Aylin jumped out of the seat and resumed her pacing. "The ones that gave me the order to make you," she said more to herself than to me.

My heart felt heavy in my chest. Until now I wasn't aware of her orders. I thought that my becoming had been... I didn't know what it had been, but "ordered" wasn't one of my thought-out possibilities. I had no idea what expression was on my face when Aylin stopped in her tracks, staring at me.

"Yes, I was ordered to make you. And before that, I was ordered to watch you and your K9 friend. If it wasn't for those very orders you would've died."

It was my turn to roll my eyes. I turned away from her. In a split second she was by my side forcefully turning me back to face her.

"I'm not talking about turning you. Before that, I saved you from Danielle's husband. The night you fell asleep in your backyard he had come to kill you and I saved you."

The memory of the growls and swift wind and knowing that something dangerous was with me replayed in my head. Nathan was one of them too?! Did Danielle know? I tried but failed at keeping out the image of the monstrous beast that wanted to kill me and I remembered how she had tried to save me in the underground prison. No, she couldn't have. Or maybe... Shit, I have no clue what I should believe anymore.

"There's a lot that I need to tell you, but first we need to get out of this alive," Aylin pleaded with her eyes.

I'd never seen her like this. That shouldn't have been as shocking as it was. In all honesty, I didn't know her. Yet, she was all I had left. I couldn't go home. My old life was dead. Even more so than before with what I did to Stan.

"If we call these... your... our people, what will happen?"

She let go of my arms. "They will either help us or kill us."

I didn't feel a surge of confidence from her answer.

"It's our best option."

I nodded once, turning back to the window. The dialing of her phone seemed to echo in the room, or maybe that was in my head.

"It's me. I need to talk to Vasari. It's an emergency, we need a cleaning crew, like, yesterday." There was a pause. I refused to listen to the voice on the other end out of fear of what they could say. "Yeah, I know what type of situation constitutes the use of a cleaning crew. And I know that those types of favors are often denied. Look,

just put him on the phone! Please.” The pause was longer than the one before it. “No, I need *him* not some...”

Aylin’s unexpected hush caused a silent panic in me. I slowly turned to see Aylin expression was more frightening than her silence. She looked as if death had walked into the room. I guess it was over for us. We would die tonight.

I watched as her words struggled to make a sound before she forced it out of herself. “Yes, it’s me. I mean your Highness. Sorry, Mother. Oh okay, um, Lilith.”

I was thoroughly confused. Was Aylin’s mother a vampire too? That didn’t feel right. I must’ve been missing something. I didn’t dare interject, choosing to listen instead.

“Yes, Porsha is with me. Yes, I’ve turned her... I’ll ask.” Aylin’s shocked face looked at me. “Do you know where Danielle would go other than home?”

I didn’t get the question. Why would they need to look for Danni? And why would they think I would know where she could be? From Aylin’s pleading expression, I couldn’t help thinking that my answer might be the difference between living through this and not. I racked my brain for some idea of where to find Danni. I couldn’t think of anyone in Temecula or anywhere else that she would run to. Shit, she could be anywhere!

Aylin’s features were starting to show signs of desperation as she waited for me to answer. I thought harder. I had to have something.

Defeat crept into her posture as she let out the breath she had been holding. “Um, Mother Lilith I don’t think she...”

It hit me like a bolt of lightning, “Arizona! Yuma, Arizona.”

Aylin repeated my words into the phone with as if she had gotten a renewal on life. “Mother...I mean, Lilith wants to know who lives there that Danielle would trust.”

“Her father,” I answered confidently.

“Okay. Where in Yuma?”

The confidence I had just mustered deflated. I shrugged. The panic was starting to return. Aylin noticed and signaled with a raised hand for me to calm myself.

“Porsha doesn’t have the exact whereabouts. But... Oh, okay. Yes, we will definitely do that. What about... Greystone Mansion in Beverly Hills.”

There was another bout of silence.

“Um, Porsha killed her husband.”

The guilt kept building on top of me.

“Yes, the famous producer...” A smile of relief stretched over Aylin’s face. “Thank you. We’re on it.” She hung up, putting the cell into the school jacket.

Hesitantly, I opened my mouth to talk. “I guess we’re not dying tonight?”

Aylin scanned the room. “Yeah, we can thank your wolfie friend when you talk to her. I hope Danielle is where you think she is. But we have other things to finish before the cleaning crew arrives.”

“Who’s Lilith?”

She snapped her head in my direction, her glare cutting me deep. “The mother of the vampire species.” She paused to let the full realization hit me.

“And she needs us to find your friend, Danielle.”

My mind was blown. The brief reprieve I felt from our dire situation no longer comforted me.

“How old would that make her?”

“I’m not sure any vampire knows for sure.” She shook the frightening thought out of her head.

“Okay, let’s save the history lesson for another time, shall we?” We need to find a way to clear the houseguests out so the crew can come in. Any ideas?”

I couldn’t think past what just occurred. Stan’s death that I caused. The strange saving grace that Lilith, the mother of all vampires, bestowed upon us. Then there was Danielle. Even in my new life she played a part. I knew I played a role in everything that happened tonight, but it was emotionally confusing to constantly feel Danielle always ending up holding my life in her hands. No, it was downright infuriating!

“Earth to Porsha!”

“What does Danielle have to do with us? And why do we need to find her?”

Aylin’s hands went to her temples. “You know what, I didn’t think to question Lilith. This may sound weird to you, but I only care that we have the chance to get out of the mess you caused.”

I frowned.

“Fucking hell, why do we make fledglings? Porsha, if we get caught here before the cleaning crew, the game is over. Lilith said she will be in contact with us. I’m sure she will let us know what she wants from Danielle *and* us. But for now can we *please* figure out a way to get everyone out of here without causing a media frenzy?!”

“Gas leak.”

Aylin's eyes narrowed as she stormed past me. "Gas leak? I said non-sensational and you give me a gas leak?! You do know that your feelings about killing your husband can't be forgotten by setting the house ablaze, right?"

She looked out the window. "So this is how I die."

I turned to face her backside. "There wouldn't be any fire, or gas for that matter."

Aylin swiftly looked over her shoulder, sharing her confusion.

"First we take out the lights and then scream throughout the mansion that there's a major gas leak in the kitchen. People will be falling over themselves to leave."

Aylin's expression turned pensive. "That should work. Yeah, let's do it. You find the breakers and I'll start scaring the shit out of everyone."

"Maybe I should..."

Aylin moved towards the door, stopping to rub one of her arms in Stan's quickly coagulating gore. "I have less blood on me than you."

My brows furrowed. "And that's why you..."

"I have a plan. You just get those lights turned off," she cut in.

I followed her into the other room as her pace quickened towards the door that led to the grand hallway.

"Open the door and find a way to jam it again if possible," Aylin ordered.

She put her head down, letting her hair cover her face and started to hold her arm like it was a broken wing.

Now I think I had an idea what she was up to. No one would question where the blood on her clothes and

person had come from if she made it look as if she had gotten injured. I had to give it to Aylin, damsel in distress did come naturally to her.

I did what she directed of me as she ran into the fray. I could hear her frantic words and the partygoers' gasps of concern. Hopefully no one would record her with their phones. That thought made me swiftly move towards the utility room, making my way through another door that lead to the kitchen. Thanks to the tours I had been on, I knew exactly what I was looking for. Less than a minute later my part was complete and the mansion was thrown into inky darkness.

The worried screams of people escaping caught my attention on my way back towards the hallway. I found Aylin there waiting for me. We hid easily in the shadows. From the panic I heard, it seemed our plan was successful, I found it prudent to ask anyway.

"Everyone out of the house?"

"Give or take. It will be empty soon enough. You had to see it! They scattered like roaches."

"What about anyone that might've recorded you?"

She smiled. "I kept my head down. We should be fine. I think."

"Where did everyone go?" A familiar voice broke into our conversation. "I can't believe the fucker left me here."

"Jessica! She saw me with Stan," I whispered.

From the sound of Jessica's voice, she was close to the front door and her freedom. Aylin jumped into action.

"Go back to the room I found you in."

I hesitated, but Aylin had already walked into the grand hallway's heart by the grand staircase.

"Please help me. I think I'm dying," Aylin weakly recited.

"Oh Shit! What happened to you?!"

I was stuck as I watched Aylin's performance and listened to Jessica's heels reverberate throughout the quieted mansion towards her demise. All of a sudden, the sound stopped before reaching Aylin.

"Um, *shit!*" Jessica whispered under her breath.

She must've gotten close enough to realize Aylin's bloody attire. "Did somebody do that to you?"

Aylin murmured unintelligibly as her body slightly swayed.

"Uh, let me get you somebody that can help."

Aylin dropped to the ground like a bag of potatoes.

"Shit, shit, shit, shit!"

I caught the sound of her heels starting back down the stairs towards Aylin. My feet were finally able to move. I soundlessly made my way back where we had left Stan's remains. I wasn't there for a full minute when Aylin kicked the door open. It was barely holding on to its hinges. Jessica's eyes appeared as if they would bug right out of her skull as Aylin held her in a chokehold. Aylin's free hand was firmly pressed over Jessica's mouth.

I felt her fear double when her sight fell over me in the darkness. She whimpered uncontrollably into Aylin's hand.

I knew we had to kill her.

The door squeaked slightly. My instincts revved as I hissed, ready to attack. Two men in nondescript suits stood on either side of Aylin.

“Porsha, relax. This is part of the cleanup crew.”

My fangs and posture stayed on edge. “That was too fast,” I hissed.

The tall, slender man to Aylin’s left took a step towards me before turning back to face Aylin.

“Who is this...” he inhaled sharply, “...human?”

“Stan’s girlfriend, Jessica,” I interjected.

The bald, heavier-set man’s stare bore into me. “Not like it matters now, but did she see you before your friend brought her in here?”

I nodded. “She saw me with Stan.”

“You mean to say, with the deceased,” the slender one stated coldly.

A fresh batch of muffled scream poured into Aylin’s hand as Jessica fought to free herself in vain. The slender one nodded once in the other man’s direction.

“Where’s the kitchen?” the bald one inquired.

I pointed, “Through that door.”

“You two were supposed to discreetly exit the grounds before our arrival. However, since I see that the situation is already differing from our initial report, you may prove useful. It would be appreciated if you could give me a more accurate account of the evening’s events,” Slender requested flatly.

Aylin took the lead. “Stan, or what’s left of him, is in the parlor in the room next to us.”

“Solarium,” I corrected.

“*Whatever*. Also, the door behind us needs fixing. That’s about it, other than Jess here.”

“There’s no one else at the party that can link you two to Stan?” he asked.

Aylin shook her head.

“Julien, he’s a chef Stan hired for the party. He left before... Stan was alive when he left. There was also a couple that Aylin killed.”

Aylin narrowed her eyes in my direction, “This is the first time I heard of a cook. As for the couple, I followed our rules to the letter. Their bodies were properly disposed of.”

The slender one pivoted to face me. His expression was unreadable. “Hm, we will see. It’s in your best interest to tell me everything. Do you have anything else to share?”

I shook my head.

The bald one rejoined us, holding a huge butcher’s knife. “There’s no gas leak.”

“Yeah, we know. That was *Porsha’s* genius idea to clear the mansion of its guests by faking a gas leak,” Aylin shared.

I could tell she still felt betrayed by my honest telling of the events. The men didn’t have anything to add to the conversation as they made their way towards the solarium. My ears perked up as a multitude of footsteps echoed in our direction. Aylin moved into the room, turning to face the door. A small group of men filed into the room with Hazmat suits and masks on. None appeared empty-handed.

One of the masked men stepped out of the crowd. "We have around twenty minutes before the police will be involved."

"Did any of the guests say anything else useful?" the bald one inquired, stepping away from the solarium with his partner.

"No. They only talked about the bloody teenager, the lights going out, and a gas leak."

The bald one stepped up to one of the men, handing them the knife. "I need two men on room detail in the solarium now. Get me his fingerprints on the handle before disposal."

Two of the group disappeared, reappearing with their equipment in the room next to us.

"Did they share a description of the teenager they saw?" the slender one asked.

"No, sir. They only commented on the blood and how her hair covered her face. We kept our civilian clothing on and mingled, reinforcing the fear of a gas leak. Most of the guests are walking off grounds to the parking lot as we speak," another masked person shared.

Aylin snickered. That was how they knew about the gas leak. They acted as if they were a part of the party before suiting up somewhere that the humans weren't.

"It's safe to assume that our vehicles are now a safe distance away from the scene," the bald one added.

"Yes, sir. Our drivers are awaiting our call and coordinates."

"Good work so far," the bald one flatly praised.

"Aylin, did you go upstairs when you were warning the guests away?" the slender one questioned.

“No. I was in this room, hallway, ballroom, and the grand stairs,” Aylin stated with annoyance.

“Where are the breakers located?” someone asked.

I hurriedly answered, “In the basement. I can...”

The slender one raised his hand. “No, stay here. Two men split and cleanse the rooms mentioned by Aylin. After completion, one come back and fix the door the best you can and the other turn on the breakers.”

“Okay, let’s finish our job,” the slender one said with a grim smile. He turned to Aylin, “Let go of Jessica please.”

Aylin was about to protest when his expression darkened, making her think better of it. The group of masked people shot out and into the rooms at lightning speed. Jessica appeared to have gone into shock.

That is, until I noticed the concentrated stare the slender one had her locked in.

“Why didn’t you leave with the rest of the people?” he asked.

“I fell asleep upstairs after...” Jessica answered as if she had been drinking.

“After?” he added.

“After I did some lines and drank too much I woke up in an upstairs room. The people leaving woke me.”

“Were you by yourself?”

“Yes. I hoped Stan would’ve come looking for me, but... but...”

Tears fell from her eyes.

“Okay. Thank you for your honesty,” the slender one smiled.

I had the feeling she didn't have much of a choice other than telling the truth. I knew we were able to seduce people with our eyes, maybe his ability was being a human truth serum.

I looked around the room, noticing the door was already fixed. I had the feeling that most of the objectives, besides the Solarium, were close to completion. The door opened without its creak, revealing two masked workers. I thought the two people sent out into the house were back until I noticed the lights weren't on.

"Sir, here are the clothes you asked for. We have ten minutes left."

The bald one grabbed the articles of clothing.

My gaze fell on the room that was being cleansed of any trace of my dead husband. The flurry of activity was hard for even my vampire eyes to track.

"Ladies please follow me," the bald one quietly demanded.

Jessica tried to walk towards the person before the slender one stopped her. A fresh batch of tears drenched her face. Aylin and I made our way towards the door the bald one had already walked through when one of the workers left the Solarium.

"Sir, it's cleaned enough to be believable."

"The knife?" the slender one asked.

The person handed the knife over with a plastic sheath covering the handle. The slender one picked up Jessica, traveling the short distance in a split second before scanning the room and slitting her throat.

My breath caught. I knew she was going to die, but somehow it still surprised me. The cut was deep. Her

blood squirted forcefully over everything that was in its path, including the slender one.

Again, I had to swallow back the guilt. Partly because I found a tinge of satisfaction from her pending death. I was a vile creature, wasn't I?

"We have to go," the bald one said.

We turned to do what we were asked when I heard Jessica's body hit the ground. As I crossed the threshold, that wasn't all I heard. I didn't need to see that the slender one was now stabbing her over and over.

In that very moment the lights turned on. I numbly watched one of the masked men pick up Aylin while another waited to lift me as well. It looked as if they didn't need us re-contaminating the area. They hurriedly brought us out to the back of the mansion. I looked back over my shoulder at the house. The lights did little to lessen the creep factor of the estate. A flicker in an upstairs window caught my attention right before we made our way down the patio's stairs deep into the wild grass.

I didn't have a moment to think before the masked ones removed our clothes and began to douse us with a thick liquid that smelled a lot like bleach. They quickly brushed and splashed us until our skin felt raw.

"Two minutes," the bald man called out.

He handed us the clothes he held. Two longish sundresses. I felt a shiver down my spine. As we dressed, the others took off their masks and white hazmat suits.

"Where are the bodies of the couple?" The bald one asked.

Aylin pointed in the general direction of the bodies. "What about our car?"

“We will take care of that,” he answered. “Lilith said you have somewhere she needs you to go. I advise you begin there.”

“So, we’re supposed to make our way through the woods and city without a ride?”

“With the help we’ve given. I’m sure you two will make due.”

I got what he was saying. They had wiped the slate clean and it was time to find a way to pay Lilith back. It was time to find Danielle. I was sure Aylin would know how to get us a new car. It wouldn’t be the first time. And I was more than ready to get away from this place.

“Time’s up,” the bald one said before running off in a blur.

“Come on Aylin, we have to go.”

I took off without any more of a warning. I ran as fast as I could away from the mansion. If it was possible, I would run until I forgot everything that had happened there. There was another reason I was running that I didn’t want to admit to. The last image of the mansion played in my head. More so what I saw in the flickering light of the window upstairs, or *who* I saw. I halfway expected to see Clarissa looking at me menacingly, which I did. But the dark shadow behind her frightened me to my core. I didn’t know how I knew this, but it stared at me too. The little girl said there was an ancient attached to Clarissa, but all I got from that mass was pure evil. I couldn’t shake the feeling that it was following me. Even now I hoped it was Aylin running behind me and not that *thing*. The ancient one. The evil one.

I started to run faster.

“Are you planning on running all the way to Yuma?”
Aylin yelled.

“If I have to,” I said more to the wind as I made my way through the trees and brush.

I just hoped for my sake that my meeting with Danielle ended up going a lot better than my first hunt.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR'S PROJECTS

Thank you for reading! I hope you enjoyed spending an evening with Porsha as much as I enjoyed writing it for you. This was for everyone that wondered what Porsha and Aylin have been up to since their hospital break in my second novel, *The Beast Unveiled*. I'm currently hard at work on the third untitled installment of my *Changes* Series. Yes, Danielle, Killian, Porsha, and the crew are on their way back! So if you read the first two books and are waiting for another, boy you're in for a treat. However, if you haven't had time to read *The Beast Within* or *The Beast Unveiled*, you should read them now before the third novel's release! No pressure. Well, maybe a little pressure.

Happy reading to all!