

# Changed

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*Sample*

## Prologue

*Belltown, Seattle, Fifteen Years Ago*

One more taste before sunrise. Drunk on the bliss of the night, on that heartrending instant when you knew nothing would ever be the same—and not just because the sex had been life-altering—Bennett rose to kiss her again. The tip of her fang grazed across his lips as she taunted him. Adair smiled and trailed her fingertips over his jaw before giving in to the kiss. Warm and tangy, their breath entwined.

In stark contrast to the quiet of the stolen moment, the piercing shrill of sirens rattled the air around them. The crisp breeze over the rooftop served as a reminder that winter was heavy in the air. Beneath him, the sandpapery roof scraped against the skin of his back. Adair slid off and readjusted, then snuggled atop him, resting her head on his shoulder.

His voice filled with gravel, and coated with satisfaction, he said, “I knew training on the roof was risky, but the rocks digging into my ass have officially sealed it for me. I’m getting a bigger place. Something with room to train, add a gym, library, design my own living quarters. Maybe some outdoor furniture for more comfortable rooftop sex.”

“Or we could try a bed next time. You know, like normal people?” He felt her wicked grin against him as her fingertips trailed along the ridges of his abdomen.

“Normal? I can’t say I am familiar with the concept.”

“I am well practiced at normal. What better way to blend in?”

“Fair point.” He grinned, tracing the contours of her arm.

Melted into him, she tormented him with her touch—and not just because he wanted to go again, well, he did, but if she had a clue what she did to him, the corny thoughts in his head, she’d run far and fast. She sighed, “I suppose demon hunters don’t have time for normal.”

“I had the choice to live a human life, but it wasn’t for me.”

She shifted up to her elbows and grinned at him. “It suits you. Slayer of monsters by night, and debater of the nuances of ancient languages in the lecture hall by day.”

“I should have picked something more interesting, but it is useful.” He tipped his head up and pressed his lips to hers before lying back down again, hoping she couldn’t feel the flutter in his chest at the simple affection. “What about you? You have an eternity to do whatever you’d like.”

“I enjoy experimenting with normal, but there are only so many careers that don’t involve daylight. Perhaps I’ll try my hand at graphic design.” She settled her head back on his shoulder and wrapped her arm around his waist.

“You kicked ass the other night when we ran into those werewolves. If you wanted, you could try out life as a demon hunter for a century or two. Quinn and Lana are open minded and would be on board with you joining our team. My parents would flip if they found out about us in any form, but they’d come around.”

“Bennett. It’s more than that. I don’t give a damn what your parents think, nor your friends. They’re hunters; they won’t ever see past what I am, anyway. And sure, I can fight. Even vampires don’t last as long as I have without survival skills. But you were raised for this. You make a choice to dedicate your life to protecting the fucking world. I wasn’t. I didn’t.”

On his eighteenth birthday, Bennett had accepted his heritage, suffering the inelegant ceremony in which his parents, grandparents, and a few other demon hunting families gathered and watched him writhe around on the ground as his ancestor’s demon blood activated within him. While the others chatted and congratulated each other on his success, he lost his lunch. His skin prickled, sweat drenched his skin, and he fought the embarrassing tears of fear and pain as he transformed. It was like going through puberty all over again, multiplied by infinity, but within the course of an hour. Okay, so his mom and the other hunters in the room had tried to soothe the ache, acutely remembering the misery of the change. Especially the moment you believed you wouldn’t survive it. Because not everyone did.

When it cleared, they’d left him to recover blessedly alone while they shared cake and champagne. Breath coming easier, mind clearer than ever, he’d sat on the cool concrete of his parents’ patio. Cold was no longer painful, but simply a nagging reminder that he ought to move inside, eventually. Having prepared for the life of a demon hunter since infancy, Bennett was well trained in combat, but the strength running through his veins was intoxicating.

He’d wandered the first few years, traveling the world, learning the ropes as he tested his limits. But he’d missed home. So, four weeks and two days ago, he’d rented a simple apartment in Seattle. The place was exactly where he needed to be. The nightlife was vivid, the parties wild... and he knew vampires walked among them.

Demon hunters didn’t have keen smell or sight like vampires, certainly better than humans, but nothing one would call extrasensory. He simply knew.

And he’d been so right. Three weeks ago, he’d met her.

Trained well, he suspected the club was full of bloodsuckers. Bennett had been compelled to scope it out. Innocent in appearance, graceful in her movements, yet swift and assured, he’d known what she was. With the satin dress that clung to her body like sinful second skin, her sun-kissed hair, the dappling of freckles across her cheeks, and pink lips that formed a natural pout, she’d been a walking vision of all his fantasies come true. No doubt about it, she was absolutely a vampire; her allure seemed designed to tempt him.

Falling right into her trap—willingly and intentionally—he’d followed her to the dance floor and splayed his palm possessively over her abdomen as she leaned into him, their hips swaying together in a fluid, erotic rhythm.

But she hadn’t been at all what he was expecting. Instead of deigning to sink her teeth into him, she didn’t make the move. Not to say she didn’t make some moves. He had regretted that his first solo vampire slay was going to be such self-torture. But he’d been trained well.

Vampires would do whatever it took to lure in their prey. And he wasn’t about to blow it by falling for her charms.

She didn’t struggle when he held the knife to her throat, but asserted her vegetarian status, her innocent blue eyes swimming with honesty. Vampires had survival instincts stronger than any other as the only immortal breed outside the demon realm. So naturally, he hadn’t believed her at first.

When the dust settled from their battle of wits, he’d learned they had the same goal. Well, similar. She wanted to maintain her safety in this corner of the world and was seeking to clear the area of bloodsuckers. He wanted them annihilated.

“Bennett?” Adair murmured, her porcelain skin warm against his. Yet her voice was colder than the sleet that teased in the air.

“Yeah?” Fuck. He knew that tone. Well, not from experience, but he’d known it was inevitable. She’d made it clear he was little more than a dalliance. As she’d put it, minutes before thrusting her tongue down his throat that first time, their ages, and lifestyles were insurmountable barriers.

He’d scoffed. Sure, she was five centuries older. What guy wasn’t younger? Yes, he was a few months shy of twenty-one, and she was his first, but he knew what he was getting into. Adair looked no older than her early twenties, and would for the rest of eternity. As a demon hunter, he’d age a few more years, then hold steady for at least two or three hundred years. At least they’d look the same age for a few hundred years.

Interrupting him from his memories, waking him as he’d been falling asleep, Adair finally murmured her question, “You know this can’t happen again, right?” Her sunny brown hair tickled his skin as she sat up.

“Why not?”

“*Why not?* Come on.” She gestured to herself in general, but his eyes drew right to her breasts, spectacularly perky... he grinned with pure postcoital, no-longer-a-virgin euphoria. Gliding the tip of her tongue over one of her razor-sharp canines, she bit down until a drop of blood clung to her tooth before she licked it away.

He sat up and embedded his hand in her beachy waves, cradling the back of her neck, and pressed his lips to hers. Without force, without plea. The blazing hot fire the simple connection stirred was off the charts. Didn’t matter that he had nothing for comparison, human or not. He knew. They shared something extraordinary.

“Bennett, you’re a sweet guy, but...” she trailed off, looking at the glow of sunrise threatening in the distant sky.

Thumb tracing his hand along the curve of her jaw, he shook his head. “I am a sweet guy. And I’m not an idiot. I’m not expecting white picket fences.” An ache in his chest, his breath grew heavy as he accepted the inevitable.

“This was a mistake. I’m sorry.”

The last trace of hope exhaling from his empty lungs, he shook his head. “It wasn’t, but I know where you stand.” Regrettably.

She slipped her feet into her panties. “Please say you won’t go after them alone. Call in your mother’s team or something.”

Teeth gritted tight, he grabbed his jeans and shoved his feet into the pant legs, lying back on the rough surface of the roof to pull them over his hips, the sharp pebbles digging into his skin. He kept his hand over the goods and tugged up the zipper, not giving a fuck where his underwear had gone. “Hell no. First, demon hunters don’t join forces with any hunter outside their own team once their parent has trained them and deemed them ready. Second, they won’t understand that you’re not like other vampires and will go after you too.”

“You don’t have a team. Come on, you told me yourself, Quinn hasn’t accepted the demon blood yet, and Lana is away at college.”

“I’m not calling for my mommy and running from the first decent fight of my life.”

“There are too many of them.”

“Fight with me. I know you’ve got the skills.”

“We won’t survive it.”

“What about your brother, isn’t he getting back into town soon? Quinn will accept the gift when she turns eighteen in a few days, and Lana can be here at a moment’s notice. We’ve been training together since we were in diapers, and I know they’ll be game to dive right in. With your brother too, we can take them.” He was floored that her brother, her actual biological brother, was part of her life. Bennett didn’t even have a sibling, but his parents were in their reproductive prime, so maybe someday. But it was different now that he was old enough to have his own.

His jaw dropped, and whatever she’d been saying melted right out of his ears. She pulled her top over her head, closing her eyes and running her fingers through her hair. Before tonight, she had gifted him with a few third-base make-outs, but something about tonight had been special. Maybe she’d agree to a few years of more nights like this—

“Bennett?” She raised an eyebrow and cleared her throat when he didn’t look away.

“Huh? Sorry,” he muttered, sporting a sheepish grin as he raised his gaze to meet hers.

Adair wasn’t merely alluring because of her natural predator appeal. Something in her azure eyes and freckled cheeks gave her an air of naivete, but her wicked grin and sinful body promised so much more. And, well, damn, he knew that was absolutely true thanks to tonight. “He’s up in the highlands, and there’s no service at the castle, but he promised he’d be back by the twentieth.”

“Where you were born?”

“I wish. Our home crumbled long ago. This one was much more solidly built by the descendants of our cousins. We invested a lot to restore and modernize it.” She held her breath. He knew there was more to it, but she shook her head. “I can’t let three young demon hunters get killed by some old friends of mine.”

“Old friends?”

“Very old. They’re experienced, they’re smart, and they’re vicious. Even with three, you don’t stand a chance. So Logan and I will lend a hand—”

“Great. You and me, your brother, Quinn, and Lana. We’ve got this.”

She glanced to the sky and clenched her jaw before letting out a controlled exhale, “We finish this, then I’m out.”

“You have better things to do with your eternity?”

A wicked shine flashed in her gaze, “Deflowering a newbie demon hunter is one thing.” She rose to her feet and extended her hand. “But keeping him on the hook? Not my style.”

As he met her grip, the shock of the connection sent heat radiating up his arm, surging through the rest of him. She’d surely had plenty of lovers, didn’t she realize this sort of thing wasn’t your run-of-the-mill affair?

Maybe she did. As he stood, she took a long, heavy breath, her eyes drifting over his shoulders, trailing down his abdomen where her tongue had been an hour ago.

“Adair?” he teased, biting his tongue as he watched her blush. So vampires could blush. Good to know.

She cleared her throat and looked up at him. “Sorry, I, uh, I think I’m hungry. Sun’s coming up soon anyway, and I’m not looking to get a tan today.”

“Sunset again? My place?” he asked. Not that it would be her place, as she wouldn’t even let him know where she lived.

She nodded, backing away. Reaching down, he snatched his shirt from the ground and watched her strut away.

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It didn't take long. Having never been foolish enough to observe demon hunters at work before tonight, Adair could say with certainty that their reputations were well earned. An inexperienced team, one of which was only days out of the change, yet the three hunters sliced through the lair.

Extracting her knife from the chest of a fallen vampire, Adair checked the room for the next threat. But the remaining bloodsuckers weren't going to last much longer.

Fast as lightning, a vampire sprinted across the room and leaped on Bennett's back.

Bennett snapped his head back and crunched its nose. With a howl, it dropped to the ground.

Shield bashing into the vampire in front of him, he spun and lowered to his knees, his sword gutting the first, then drove back into the neck of the second.

Quinn swung her great sword and a vampire head hit the ground and rolled under the tablecloth.

Axe striking into the chest of another, Lana slammed it to the ground and finished it.

And Logan. Ever the warrior, stealthier than in his clunky days as the Scottish raider, Adair's brother snapped a neck and cleared the far corner.

Adair inhaled deeply and caught a familiar scent. She gritted her teeth and crossed the bloody backroom of the club.

Bennett finished off his prey and ran to catch up. He nodded to the door, silently asking what had caught her attention.

She moved to unlock the office door, withdrawing a pin from her hair.

Before she got the chance, Bennett nodded to the door. "May I?"

With a shrug and a curious nod of her head, Adair stepped back.

He kicked the door, and the hinges snapped on impact. The door crashed into the room with a deafening clatter.

A bullet whizzed toward them, aimed straight for Bennett's forehead.

Adair gripped his shirt and tugged him out of the line of fire.

Not fast enough.

The bullet struck his shoulder. Bennett recoiled and growled, glaring down at the blood trailing from his wound.

Simpering with a sardonic smile, Sonra whimpered, "Adair. It has been too long."

Bennett stopped in front of Sonra and glanced back, waiting for Adair's okay, despite the blood oozing from his shoulder. It had to hurt, even with his abilities, but he didn't let on that he was even fazed by it. Too sweet for his own good.

She shook her head, drawling over her name in return with a mockingly sympathetic cadence. "Sonra. It hasn't been nearly long enough. Foolish as ever. I would have thought someone would have silenced you for your recklessness by now."

Sonra panted with excitement. "It doesn't matter anymore. We will rule this world." She smirked knowingly and looked to Bennett. "All thanks to you."

Adair ached, watching the woman she once considered a dear friend, now so caught up in the evil that the demon side of her craved. "It doesn't have to be that way. Finding our place doesn't have to be so complicated; the world isn't what it used to be."

Sonra pulled back her lips. "No, but it could be so much better." Snarling, she raised the gun and pointed it straight between Adair's eyes, smug and not having a clue what was coming.

Slamming his shield into Sonra unceremoniously, Bennett knocked her flat and finished her off with a fluid sweep of his sword.

The others came sauntering in, their clothes stained with blood, thrill and relief mirrored in their expressions. Logan nodded to Adair. "Let's go. Calloway will come when he finds out it was you."

"Good." She nodded, holding her breath as she looked over the bloody scene. Her stomach rolled, imagining how she'd once reveled in being on the other side.

Lana called in the local coroner's team to take care of the bodies and coordinate clean-up as they sped away from the scene. Sunrise threatened on the horizon, the gray glow of morning teasing at the corners of the sky.

Bennett's hands glided smoothly over the wheel, taking every turn with a confident leisure as he drove them back to his apartment. He reached across and rested his hand on her thigh, a smug grin as he rode on cloud nine, pleased with the success of his first big mission. Adair shook her head and grinned, utterly and completely charmed.

Quinn, Lana, and Logan crashed in sleeping bags on the apartment floor, wiped out from the long night.

Adair tugged Bennett by the belt and shut the bedroom door behind them and had him undressed before they reached the bed. The adrenaline from the night pumped through her, the urgent need for him thundering in her veins.

Fingertips trailing along the angle of her jaw, Bennett slowed them down. With a savoring leisure, his pace, his attention to detail was intoxicating. Patient, attentive, he made love with her all day... like they had all the time in the world.

She did.

He didn't.

As the last scrap of daylight faded around the edge of his window blinds, she laid her head on his shoulder. A fat tear beaded at the corner of her eye. She eased up and took one last look.

The front door slammed open and shattered her silent escape. A furious roar shook the walls. Thundering closer, the demon threw open the bedroom door, and the growl threatened the structural integrity of the building.

# Chapter 1

*Industrial District, Seattle, Now*

Breath fast and unsteady, Bennett jerked up and scanned the room. Safe. Home. Alone. He flicked off the smooth white sheet and buried his face in his hands, rubbing his eyes until the dream faded.

Damn, when had his beard gotten so ragged? Since Typha and his disembowelment, he hadn't bothered with niceties like haircuts. Quinn had always cut it for him. And asking her now? No fucking way. Beyond her normal snarky, she'd gone from months of cranky pregnant woman to sleep-deprived new mom.

Not his problem anymore.

As he rose to his feet, he guarded the nagging pull in his abdomen. Although physically healed months ago, the blistering sensation of his gut healing itself from the inside out had yet to fade. Rapid healing was great, as the injury should have taken his life, but the close call still haunted him. That was the life of a demon hunter. Potentially centuries long, but it could be ended damn fast in combat.

Each strike of his bare feet over the cool concrete ricocheted off the high ceilings of the empty building. He'd considered renovating the rest of the warehouse. He could make a killing, cashing out on the trend of urban lofts in the area, but he preferred the privacy and anonymity of the discrete structure. The ground floor had evolved into an elaborate training room for the team, so the investment had at least paid off in that respect.

Through the floor-to-ceiling windows, the gray of the Seattle sun wasn't telling if it was sunrise or sunset. Not that it made a difference normally, but today... today he had to travel.

He clicked the coffee pot to brew on his way past the kitchen and lumbered into the bathroom. The slope of the brick tile floor declined as he crossed into the walk-in shower and flipped the knob to steaming. Palms pressed flat against the wall, he bent forward and let the heat pool above his broad shoulders before washing away the useless memories that were nearly fifteen years expired. Those pouty lips still haunted him.

After a brilliantly long shower, almost enough to make him feel as half-human as he was, Bennett snagged a towel from the heated rack. Sparing half a glance at the mess he'd become, he shook his head and stalked out. Over these last few months he hadn't been idle, despite minimal demon inactivity and the team hunkering down for some well-deserved quiet.

Any given day, and he could take a few vampires without a fuss. But with the gift of enhanced strength and endurance from his demon-mother ancestor last year, he could sit on his ass for a month straight, then walk out and knock a werewolf on its ass without breaking a sweat. Still, not his style. He'd always been the first one to hit the training room floor. But after last year? When he wasn't hitting the streets, he was in his gym from sunrise to sunrise to ensure no demon would bring him so close to the brink again.



Not bothering with a towel or bathrobe, he trudged into the kitchen. His phone blinked with an alarming blue light to let him know he had a message. Not that he needed to check it to know exactly what it said.

He poured a cup of black coffee and took a long, mind-melting pull. Without a second glance at his phone on the counter, Bennett strolled across the open floor plan to his dresser and tossed on a pair of distressed jeans and a black t-shirt that clung to his tight abs, then added tan leather chukkas and a matching belt. When he could stall no longer, he skimmed the barrage of messages and sent a quick thumbs-up to the group and let them know he'd be there in ten.

Not bothering with the little-used freight elevator, he steadied his coffee and dashed down the steel staircase to the main floor. He dropped into his McLaren, the cargo bay door rising as he fired up the engine. He turned onto 4<sup>th</sup>, crossed the wide spread of railroad tracks, and slid in front of an exhaust-puffing semi onto Marginal Way. A few safety checkpoints at the airfield, and he slipped into his hangar.

Lana was waiting for him, eyes rolling and hands on her hips. Dark hair flipped to the side, miniskirt and spike-heeled boots not giving the slightest nod to the brisk morning, she shook her head with an ornery smirk. "Sleep in a bit this morning?"

"Sorry," he muttered, continuing his clipped pace toward the private jet.

Arms folded over his chest, Vann's expression remained stern. "Ready?"

Bennett nodded. "Let's go."

Astrid was already in the cockpit, pouring through her latest training manual with her typical intensity. Blond hair smoothed out of her face, she offered him a brilliant smile. "Hey." She nodded, then back to her book. "Thought you were at your place in BC?"

Shit. He'd been a total ass and dodged a dinner hangout a few nights back, claiming he would be off the grid for a few days. Usually when things got tough, or even blissfully quiet, he retreated to his parents' home north of Victoria. Well, his home now. They'd built the seaside structure shortly after he was born, and after thirty-five years, they decided the home they had built to raise him in was truly his, and they were ready to turn over a new leaf. "I was going to, but, I didn't go."

"Oh." She pursed her lips tight, worry drawing her eyebrows together.

"I'm fine."

"I know," she smiled. "When you're not, don't hide, okay?"

He nodded, then turned back into the cabin. Exploring the ins and outs of the jet with vibrant curiosity, Bodie grinned. "Is the landing strip at the ranch big enough for this?"

Bennett leaned against the wall and folded his arms over his chest. "An experienced pilot in a pinch could land there, but you wouldn't need something this big. I got this to fly the whole team, plus all our gear, anywhere in the world. If you invest in a sturdy prop plane that can handle your Montana winters, you won't need much."

"Fair point. Probably not as fast, though," Bodie bit his lower lip and grinned like the first time he'd driven Bennett's McLaren.

Unlike Vann and Quinn, who had ragged on him for the lack of subtlety in his toys, like the jet and the car, Bodie had gotten a kick out of all of it. Raised in isolation on his pack's Montana ranch, Bodie had only recently discovered the joys of fast toys. No wonder he'd taken right to it; as the wolf, Bodie was fearless. The corner of his mouth quirked up, Bennett let the lightness of the moment and Bodie's easy manner tame his mood. "True."

On the flight to Eureka, his friends joked and hung out, taking the edge off his angst. Astrid was the eternally attentive student and handled most of the flight herself, sporting an eager grin the entire time. Hell, she didn't even need him in the cockpit.

The drive to Quinn and Ryan's home was gorgeous in the chill wind. The isolated structure stood proudly on the hillside, dreamily looking over the Pacific. A year ago, if anyone had told him his girlfriend would dump his ass, declare their relationship as boring, then days later fall for the son of the king of the demon realm and bear his child—after telling Bennett she wasn't ready for marriage or children? Oh, and let's not forget his guts getting sliced out of him when he'd convinced the team a little recon wouldn't hurt, her crying over his dying body before she was blasted across the fricking arctic and into the arms of her soulmate...

He rubbed his hands over his face and shook away the redundant self-torture. He'd known Quinn was right about them. Friends-to-lovers wasn't always a true love story. Besides, destiny had played a strong hand in bringing it all to pass.

Fate was a bitch like that.

As they parked the SUV, Ryan met them on the front step. Barefooted, dressed in an old white t-shirt and faded jeans, with the bleary eyes of a new dad, Ryan managed a sleepy grin. "Hey guys. Quinn's been going nuts waiting for you. Of course, she and Skye are passed out now."

Lana bounced up the steps and spun Ryan for a giddy hug, whether he was ready or not. The rest filtered in a bit more sedately. With high ceilings, massive windows, wood beam ceilings, and plank floors, warmed by plush area rugs and overstuffed furniture and a fire roaring in the hearth, the home was exactly what Quinn had always wanted. The rest of the team had already seen the place, helping with the big move a month or two back, but Bennett had been on a solo recon to investigate a possible leviathan that turned out to be as ridiculous of a rumor as it sounded.

"Fiona and Quentin left this morning?" he asked Ryan.

Nodding as they walked in together, Ryan said, "It's been a whirlwind, both our moms here for the birth, happy as anything I've ever seen, then Quentin flew back from his latest mission last weekend and they stayed until today, then Fiona and my mom will take turns coming to help when I go back out to sea."

"Bet you guys need some time to yourselves. I think Lana's planning to move in, but I'll drag her out with the rest of the team when we leave."

"As much as Quinn loves the company, yes, please, I'm looking forward to a few days alone with my family before I ship out," he chuckled.

"Go catch a nap while you can."

The others were already heading down to the basement, which apparently was filled with bedrooms and a gym dedicated to training. Quinn had wanted a comfortable place for the team to crash anytime and for however long they needed.

Ryan hesitated, his eyes black as midnight, and the circles under were equally dark.

"Go. You're dead on your feet."

"I've fought monsters for days on end, but up rocking and pacing and changing diapers? Way more exhausting." Ryan ran a hand over his stubbled beard before turning and heading to the bedroom. "You guys can make yourselves at home, fix whatever you want for lunch."

Bennett chuckled under his breath. Strolling to the windows, he looked out over the endless ocean, at the fog blurring the horizon and spreading onto the expansive field of yellow grass and wind-sculpted trees. Some might see it as desolate, but it was remarkably soothing. Sunshine,

Ryan's mother, had made an impact, dotting the patio with brightly colored noninvasive plants to bring life to the patio. The others laughed and chatted downstairs, already at home.

Running a hand over his face, Bennett couldn't decide if he wanted to sit or stand... or run screaming. He wanted to hate Ryan for stealing the life he'd envisioned for himself. But, turns out, Ryan was a tough guy to hate. And loved Quinn in a way that Bennett never could.

With his mother and her father on the same demon hunting team, they'd been best friends since infancy. And they wanted the best for each other, even though that wasn't together. They'd really only dated two years, so they'd been friends for far longer than they'd been lovers. Still, the downshift was never as easy as the move forward.

Soft steps padded out of the nursery, the sweet whimpers of a newborn and her mother's soothing coos erasing the anxiety that had clawed at him all morning.

Turning, he caught sight of his ex. "Hey," he smiled.

"Hey," she grinned, her sleepy smile about knocking him flat with hundreds of memories of when she'd looked at him like that.

"I made your husband snag a nap. Guy's a wreck."

"How'd you get him to take a break? I've been trying for days. I honestly don't think he's slept in the two weeks since she was born." Rubbing a sleepy face against her mother's chest, Skye wound up with a pitiful cry.

"As he was about to fall asleep on his feet, I think he was done arguing." Bennett slid off his leather jacket and tossed it onto the entry hook. Holding out his arms, he reached for the precious package that crashed her cranky head into her mother's sternum.

Quinn smiled and passed her to him. Cradling her close, he held her like a little football and rocked her in his arms. Sweetest little thing he'd ever seen. Dark, onyx eyes like her father, burgundy fuzz atop her head and bow-shaped lips already hinting at a wicked sense of humor like her mother. She was everything Quinn deserved. Amazing and sweet and fricking adorable. Lowering to the corner cushion of the couch, Quinn pulled her legs under and melted in.

"You did good." Bennett tapped his fingertip on the little one's nose.

Reading him as easily as she always had, Quinn's smile was affected by the lines across her brow.

He bit his lip and shook his head before she could say it. "No. Let's not go there. You were right all along. I was set on the perfect life and thought that was you and me. This," he glanced around the house, toward the main bedroom where Ryan had escaped, and down at the infant in his arms, he shook his head, "this is incredible. We would never have had it quite like this."

Tiny black irises with silvery-blue flecks swam with sleepiness in his arms. Stroking a finger over her little nose a few times, adding a soft *shh*, she fell asleep in his arms. Propping her up against his broad shoulder, Bennett moved to the recliner and savored the genuine innocence that couldn't be beat.

"You're a natural."

"She's a good baby."

Wrapping a throw blanket over her legs, Quinn sighed. "I know nobody else is even close to ready, but I wish she was going to have a little friend. Like we always had each other."

"We were lucky. While our parents planned the next skirmish or toasted together at the holidays, you and I were the only kids."

"And eventually I was egging you on until you cussed and spit and Lizzy and Jonathan were horrified."

He laughed, careful not to wake Skye. “My parents were so pissed when we figured out how to get those swords down.”

“Even worse, the weekend after I turned eighteen? You were, what, twenty? Lana was nineteen. Our first big mission together, and we marched straight into the lair a few blocks down from your old apartment? Fighting alongside two vampires?”

“Your dad was livid. When Quentin found you and Lana in sleeping bags on my living room floor, a naked vampire in bed with me, and her brother in the kitchen sipping his evening coffee with blood for creamer?”

Laughing to the point of snorting, Quinn threw her head back and took a few minutes to calm down enough to respond. “I don’t think I’ve ever been as afraid of a demon as I was of my dad when he found us that way.” She pushed her lava-red hair out of her face and added, “You never said how Lizzy reacted when he told her. She had to have been pissed.”

Gnawing in his chest, he flashed back to last night’s dream. His subconscious felt the need to torture him regularly, near nightly the last few months. “Yeah, you could say that. Mom was full of warnings, mostly about how deceitful vampires can be, and Dad gave me the man-to-man lecture about not letting my dick do the thinking. I didn’t speak to them for weeks, convinced they were too narrow-minded to see that true love knew no borders.”

A scowl stirred Quinn’s midnight blue eyes.

He shook his head, taking a long sniff of the sweet baby smell of Skye’s fuzzy head.

“I know it sounds crazy, but why don’t you look her up? I know you—”

“She made her feelings quite clear,” he whispered, careful not to disturb the snuggly package that nuzzled into him. “You know me. I thought she was my fricking soulmate, but I was an inexperienced fool. Then I thought you were the love of my life, but I was wrong again. Oh-for-two.”

“Seriously. You and I have been best buds for forever. It was only natural to see if there was more. We were wrong, but it was a worthwhile experiment. You were different back then. With her.”

“I grew up.”

Swinging her hips as she strolled up the stairs, Lana grinned and aimed straight for him. “So sneaky up here, stealing all the baby time for yourself.”

Bennett forced a smile and rose to his feet, passing off the sleeping bundle, only a little smug when she pouted at the loss and Lana had to sing her calm. He stalked into the kitchen to pour a scotch big enough to knock him on his ass and into dreamless sleep tonight, wishing his demon hunter blood would let him get drunk, just once.