WarZone Entertainment presents

Summer Living

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Chapter 1

Liam looked out over the flat plains as his mom drove them through the wastelands of Texas, her country music blearing in the background. Liam did his best to tune it out with his iPod but it wasn’t much help. The streets were largely empty of fellow cars and past the streets there seemed to be nothing but grass. *How do people live like this?* He wondered to himself. He grew up in Chicago and had no interest being so far from real civilization. He was just entering high school, this was his year to be someone, do something great and break away from the pack. Now what?

He knew deep down that his mom needed to get away. They didn’t have the greatest home life. His dad was kind of a jerk, but whose father wasn’t? It wasn’t a reason to just forget their whole life and run away. It was never as bad as his mom made it out to be.

A sign up ahead showed them a series of fast food joints off of the next exit. Liam’s stomach started to growl, he hadn’t realized how hungry he was.

“Can we get some food?” It was the first words either one of them had said to each other since getting into the car a few days ago. It was the single most awkward trip he had ever been on and he couldn’t wait for it to be over. He wasn’t even sure where they were going. He couldn’t even GPS where he was or call his friends because his mom threw out his phone before they left. It was all about their “fresh start”.

He looked over at his mom, she was acting like she didn’t even hear him. She was determined to just keep driving, no matter what. They must be going to Mexico or something, which was great seeing how he failed Spanish and didn’t remember a single word. Making new friends was going to be so easy, he thought to himself bitterly.

His mom finally turned off on an exit. He let out a sigh of relief. This damn trip was finally coming to an end. The empty fields give way to a small town, although town was a word that was too grand for this shit hole. Liam shook his head in despair as he looked out at his new home.

“Almost there now, it should be just up the road.” His mother’s first words since dragging him out of bed and forcing him into the car. A car he didn’t even know they owned by the way. When did his mom buy a new car? And far more importantly, how long was she going to keep up this charade of leaving his father? Hopefully it didn’t last all summer, he better be home before school started.

They turned onto another street, this one more residential than the rest. Old houses that looked like whoever owned them use to have money, maybe back in the dark ages. These houses could be something special if people just took the time and effort to keep the upkeep, well up. They drove past the endless row of houses and got back to large open areas of grass. *Great, more pointless plains of grass.*

“Where are we going?” he tried once more to get it out of her. She looked at him, a hollowness in her eyes that he had never seen before. It chilled him to his core. He tried to shake it off by looking back out the window. Houses started popping back up, not as nice as the ones they just passed and not as close together. It seemed these houses were far and few between.

They pulled up to an old two-story house, it looked as if no one had worked on the yard for months, it had weeds growing as high as Liam’s knees. There wasn’t another house for a ways in either direction. There was an old pickup truck in the front of the house, parked on the lawn. This couldn’t be it, he looked over at his mom as she checked her map. She smiled and looked up at Liam as the car came to a stop next to the truck.

“We are home.” She said cheerfully. The hollowness was still in her eyes, but now there was also a gleam of hope. *This was going to be a long summer, please let it only be the summer.* She got out of the car and started towards the house. Liam got out of the car and reluctantly followed after her.

The pathway up to the house could hardly be called a pathway. By looking at it you could tell there was a pathway there, somewhere under the overgrown weeds. It just wasn’t visible to the naked eye. Liam wished he was wearing jeans as he felt the weeds brush past his legs, making him itch uncontrollably. His mom made it up to the front of the house, it had an old oak door. It would have been nice if it wasn’t so faded and had parts of it chipped off. His mom knocked on the door. The sound on the oak echoed through the house on the other side.

“They aren’t home, maybe we should go.” Liam threw out there, trying hard to convince his mom. She turned around to look at him. Her firm mom look.

“This is our home now Liam! Get used to it.” She snapped at him. He shifted uncomfortably at her glaze. This was not his home and never would be. No matter how much she wanted it to be. You can’t just pick someone up and drag them away from their life and expect them to be okay with it.

“Fine, home sweet home.” He snapped. Maybe there was a bus stop nearby. His mom turned back towards the door, just as Liam started to hear the sound of faint footsteps nearing the door. Just his luck, it seemed someone was home. The door opened and a hairy man right out of duck dynasty answered the door. He smelled of liquor and had the look of someone who had been hitting the bottle a bit too much.

“Ms. Tyers?” his breath made Liam recoil. He couldn’t handle the smell of his breath. He had seen people drink before but never seen someone this drunk during the day. He couldn’t understand why someone would drink this early, let alone want to live with someone like that.

“Yes, you can call me Sarah. This is my son Liam.” She shook the man’s hand and motioned towards Liam. Liam nodded his head at the guy, his nonverbal way of saying high. He really wanted to get a feel for the place before he committed himself to anything. He couldn’t help but laugh, he kept thinking about all this like he had a say in the matter.

“Name is Bruce, please come inside. After all this is now your home as well.” He said cheerfully. He led them into the house proper. It was poorly lit; the walls were pealing. A dead plant sat near the front door, Liam tried to ignore the smell of mold coming from under the carpet.

Bruce led them into the living room, it wasn’t much of a living room. There was a big TV, that didn’t look to be working. An old beat up couch, with an old beat up lady laying on top of it. She was asleep and didn’t look so good. A pill bottle laid at the foot of the couch.

“This is my wife Martha. She isn’t feeling so well right now. A few weeks ago she got into an accident.” He looked at her, sorrow on his face. “She forgot her bus pass and they kicked her off. As she was leaving, the bus driver closed the door and her arm was caught. The bus driver drove off and he dragged her two and a half blocks.”

“Oh my god.” Liam all but yelled out. He didn’t mean to say it out loud but couldn’t stop himself. That was so horrible, how could that happen to someone?

“I’m so sorry. I can’t believe that could happen. Is she okay?” Sarah said, looking at the poor woman on the couch. Bruce nodded and turned back to look at them.

“She will be, but for the time being she is on a lot of pain pills. So I’ll ask, while you are staying here, let her sleep.” He asked politely yet firmly.

“Of course. Anything you need.” She replied quickly. “Where will we be staying?”

“Up stairs, the last room on the left. But before you go, let me introduce you to the girls.” He told them. He looked over at the stairs. “Girls come down here!” he yelled out.

*Girls? This might not be as bad as I thought.* Liam thought to himself. Maybe things would work out. A few minutes dragged on with no reply.

“Hurry!!!” he yelled again. This time Liam heard the sound of people coming down the stairs. A tall bigger girl came down the stairs first. She was cute but not really Liam’s type. She had long blond hair and dark brown eyes. She walked over towards her father.

“This is Eliza, my oldest.” Another girl started walking down the stairs, this one short and petite but very pretty. “This is Elena, my middle child, and my most difficult.” He said with a laugh. She smiled as she walked over towards them.

“You know you love me pop.” She said with a laugh. He hugged her as she stood next to him. He looked from her back to the stairs.

“Where is your sister?” he asked. She just shrugged.

“Around. Who knows, who these people?” she asked, not really caring.

“These are our guests. Sarah and her son Liam. They will be staying with us for a while.” He told her. The oldest sister walked over and greeted his mom. Elena looked them up and down.

“Cool.” She said simply and walked away. Liam couldn’t help but watch her leave. The other sister said something to him, but he didn’t really hear her. He gave her a polite greeting and took off, he might as well go outside and explore. After all he didn’t want to be here and didn’t plan on spending a lot of time in this house or around these people.

As he left the house, he heard his mom tell him something about not being out late, but he just ignored her. The moment he walked outside the heat hit him. He always figured Texas was hot, but this was just crazy. The sun should not be allowed to exude this much heat. It was un-American!

He started back down the path when he spotted something that changes his whole life. The most beautiful woman he had ever seen was leaning against his car smoking. She looked to be around Liam’s age, with long black hair and a natural beauty that not a lot of people have. She looked over at him and let out a puff of smoke.

“New boarder?” she said with a look of annoyance. He knew she was waiting for him to reply but he couldn’t think of anything to say, he just kept grinning at her. “You speak?”

“I speak. Name’s Liam and yeah, me and my mom are boarding here. I’m guessing you are the mystery daughter?” he asked, trying to play it cool, knowing he already blew that chance.

“That would be me,” she said as if she didn’t have a care in the world. “Name’s Alyssa. Want me to show you around?” she put on a smile and it was the most beautiful sight he had ever seen. He knew right then and there that this girl was going to be trouble for him. And truth be told he couldn’t wait for it.

Chapter 2

He followed her through the empty fields that surrounded her house, she walked fast and seemed to be in a bit of hurry. He tried to keep up with her but it was bit of a chore, Liam wasn’t used to getting much exercise.

“So what brings you guys out here?” she gestures around the large amount of nothing around them. “I mean it’s not exactly a tourist hotspot.” She said it with a laugh, as if she was joking but Liam heard a bit of pain in her voice. She wasn’t as happy go lucky as she tried to let on. There was more to her than met the eye.

“Hell if I know. My mom just woke up this morning, pulled me into the car and started driving.” He said bitterly. He didn’t want to sound like a whiner to her, but he just couldn’t keep the bitterness out of his voice. He didn’t want to be here.

“Just this morning?” she asked as they started passing by the row of houses that he had just driven past. He nodded as he checked out the houses. Most of them had nice long driveways, made out of what looked to be marble, layered underneath a great deal of dirt. If he ever owned a house as nice as these he would make sure they were in good condition.

“Yeah, it was the weirdest thing.” He said simply. She looked at him puzzled.

“Your mom booked the room a month ago. She said that she was just waiting for you to get out of school. At least that’s what my dad told us.” She said it so matter of factly. Why didn’t his mom tell him? How long had she been planning to abandon dad?

“That’s news to me.” He said, wondering where they were going. They were about half way down the row of houses and she didn’t seem to be slowing down any.

“So, what is she running from?” she turned around to face him but kept walking backwards. There was something about this girl that just intrigued him. She wasn’t like the girls from back home at all. She seemed to be able to read between the lines and didn’t shy away from asking the questions she wanted to know.

“Nothing.” He replied automatically*. Running from? What on Earth would his mom be running from?* He thought to himself. The look on Alyssa’s face told him that she didn’t believe him.

“Really? She just hopped in the car and drove half way across the country to start over and isn’t running from something? If you don’t want to tell me it’s fine. But don’t lie to yourself.” She told him while turning back around. She crossed the street and Liam had to jog to catch up. They came to a path in-between two houses and she led him through it. The fences on either side were over grown and even had holes in the fence.

“Alright, you want the truth?” he asked her before he could even think to stop himself. She turned to face him and leaned back against the fence, pulling out a cigarillo and lighting it up.

“That’s the only thing worth my time.” She said as she lit it up. Taking a deep hit off of it and handing it over to him. He couldn’t believe she smoked, it wasn’t good for you, everyone knew that.

“I’m good.” He waved off the cigarillo and she just shrugged.

“If you say so.” She took another hit waiting for him to talk. This was his own fault for bringing it up. He took a deep breath, maybe he should talk about. Couldn’t hurt.

“My dad. Their marriage has been having some problems and I kind of thought for a while she wanted out, but never thought she really would leave.” He leaned back against the other fence, this got far too real, far too quickly. Her hand blocked her face as she took a hit. It made her a lot harder to read than he would have liked. Liam wasn’t one for opening up, he didn’t know what came over him. She moved her hand and let the smoke out slowly before looking at him. Really looking at him. It unnerved Liam a bit. She nodded her head just a bit and gave him a sad smile.

“Problem between the rents,” she shook her head. “Never a good thing.” She eyed him, and he looked away, he just couldn’t handle the pity. He stood up straight and tried to get the tension off of himself.

“It’s whatever. So where are you taking me?” he asked, a bit more forceful than he felt. Her smile turned to a real one, she licked her lips and got off of the fence.

“My friends and I have a secret spot, it’s nice and isolated.” She glanced around as she said it. Almost as if making sure no one over heard her.

“A secret spot?” he didn’t believe this. What were they twelve? He tried not to laugh as he asked the question but by the look on her face he could tell that she picked up on it. He should say something to fix this, who knew how long he would be here, it could help to have some friends. “What do you do in this secret spot?” great the mocking tone came through in that sentence as well. Maybe he should write a book on how to quickly lose friends and piss off pretty girls. He seemed to be good at it. She didn’t seem fazed by it at all.

“We have fun. Trust me, once the novelty of being stuck in the middle of nowhere wares off, you will be desperate to find a way to pass the time.” She walked towards him, Liam couldn’t help but notice how beautiful she was, how amazing she smelled. “You want in?” she said with just a hint of flirtation in her voice. Things could get interesting around here.

“Lead the way.” he told her with a grin. *Let’s see where this goes and how things work out.* They continued down the alley and exited out into a field. It seemed to stretch as far as Liam could see. “This is new.” She laughed and looked back over at him.

“Not really, empty fields are all this place is. I hate it here.” She kept walking and Liam hurried after to keep up. “Once I turn eighteen I’m out of here.”

“Where are you going to go?” Liam never really got why people rushed out of their homes at such a young age, but to be fair he always liked his life. He already knew that if he was stuck here than he was gone the day he turned eighteen as well.

“Don’t know, don’t care. Just away. Far.” She said as they crossed the field. A few buildings that looked to be half way finished lay up ahead.

“I can get that. I just got here and I’m already ready to leave.” He said, meaning every word. She looked back and laughed.

“Don’t worry, it gets worse.” She told him, and he honestly believed her. They started to near the half-built houses, they looked as if no one had been there in some time.

“This is your secret spot? Isn’t it a work site?” he asked, already suspecting that he knew the answer, sure enough she didn’t disappoint.

“It was, but this is a small no money town. The money being put into the place dried up and along with it the job. They just abandoned the place.” She said it with a bit of pain in her voice. Almost as if she was ashamed to live here. Truth be told he didn’t blame her.

“Must be nice to have all this to yourself.” He said simply. He really had no idea what to say to make her feel better. She didn’t seem to need his pity, she shrugged it off like it was nothing.

“You have no idea.” She led him into one of the only buildings with walls already in place. The sounds of people talking could be heard coming from the top of the stairs.

“So what type of fun do we have here?” he asked, a million thoughts racing through his head. He knew what kind of fun he wanted to have and felt kind of bad about it. He just met her, and her family was letting his stay with them. He shouldn’t be thinking about her like that. It was wrong, but she was just too beautiful, he couldn’t help but want her.

The stairs curved upward, the walls were half finished, they had insulation but were not covered over yet. Liam had a bad feeling that they would get in a lot of trouble if they were caught being in here. His gut told him the best thing to do would be to turn around and leave. So of course he continued up the stairs following Alyssa. They made it to the top of the stairs to find a large empty room with four people, two guys and two girls sitting around. Drinking, smoking and having a good time.

They look over at Alyssa as they walked up, everyone yelled out a greeting to her. She smiled back and moved forward into the room.

“Hey, this Liam, he is leeching off my family for a while, so I thought I’d show him a good time.” She said as a joke and walked towards her friends as they parted to allow room for them to sit. Liam was taken aback by what Alyssa said. He and his mom were not leeching off of her family. They were paying rent, it wasn’t like they were free loading.

“Liam, nice to meet you. Have a seat and take a drink.” A guy in a shorts and a wife beater said. Liam took a seat but didn’t grab a beer. He had never drank before and wasn’t too excited about starting now.

“Thanks, so do I get introductions?” He asked as Alyssa sat next to him. She reached over and got herself a beer, popping it open.

“My mistake,” she put the beer down and pointed at the wife beater. “Jake,” she pointed at the girl next to him, she was wearing basketball shorts and a black tank top. “Jane” she pointed to the black guy next to her, he was a bit heavy set and dressed a bit too uppity. “Carl and this is my best friend Kate.” She said as she pointed at the dark-haired girl sitting next to Liam, she was pretty and wearing a black jacket and skirt. As she introduced all of them they said hi to Liam. These weren’t the types of people that Liam was used to hanging out with, but you had to make do with what you could get sometimes.

“Nice to meet you all.” he said simply.

Chapter 3

It was near dark by the time that Liam left the half-built house with Alyssa. He was more than a little tipsy, a sensation he had never felt before. He had meant it when he refused the first beer offered to him, but he had also not intended to spend all day there hanging out with a group of strangers. Yet he had. He had found friends, something he never thought he would do in a backwards town like this.

He spent the first hour or so sitting in silence, not really feeling like he fit in. But every once in a while someone from the group would ask him a question, normally his take on whatever they were talking about at the moment. Forcing him to interject something which would spark a whole new conversation. Before long he found himself engaging with everyone else without having to be asked.

It wasn’t until the third time that Jake had offered him a beer that he finally relented and took one. It was a bitter taste, one that he didn’t much care for, but Alyssa was watching him, so he drank it. And then another, and another. After a while he found that he didn’t mind them so much. He also found that the more he drank the more fun he had, the more he started to like his new group of friends.

“So, what did you think of my friends?” Alyssa asked him as they rounded the row of half-built houses and started through the overgrown grass.

“I liked them! They were a lot of fun!” He said, a little too excitedly.

“Can I ask you something?” She said with a bit of a smile, as she pulled out another cigarillo and started to light it.

“Anything.” He said, without missing a beat.

“Was tonight the first time you drank?” She said, as she took a drag of the cigarillo.

“What? No! Why would you ask that?” He asked, as he did his best to act sober. She laughed and shrugged.

“No reason.” She said. “So, tell me, what did you do for fun back in the big city?” They spent the rest of the walk home talking about his friends and the different shit they would get into. The more he talked, the more he realized that by and large it was the same thing that Alyssa and her friends did for fun. He just had more places to do it at.

It wasn’t till they made it back to her house that he realized that he had done most of the talking. She had asked him question after question about himself and he had opened up and spilled his guts to her, but she had skillfully avoided answering any about herself. She never refused to answer, it was more like she would give vague answers that felt like real answers until he reflected on them. It wasn’t until he was in bed later that night that he came to the realization that he knew nothing about her.

He didn’t have long to dwell on that before his mother came bursting into their room. She looked like she was in the middle of mini panic attack.

“Where the hell have you been?” She all but screamed at him.

“Out.” He said simply. Not feeling like he owed her any kind of explanation. After all she had forced him to come out here, leaving his whole world behind.

“Out? Out! That’s your answer?” She demanded.

“Yeah.” He replied. He rolled over, so as to turn his back towards her.

“Liam Tyer! Look at me while I’m talking to you!” She barked at him. He let out a sigh and rolled over, sitting up on the end of the bed.

“What do you want?” he asked her. Not at all happy being spoken to that way.

“Do you have any idea how worried I was about you?” She said, losing the sharpness in her voice. She took a seat next to him on her bed. She seemed legitimately worried. “I didn’t know what happened to you. Someone could have just taken you.”

“Mom, I’m 14. I can take of myself.” He said, he was so tired of her always treating him like he was a baby who needed protection. He was almost a man now, he could take care of himself.

“Liam, I know you can. I just worry. That’s my job. I just…I just want you to tell me where you are going. Okay?” She told him.

“I didn’t know where I was going. I went exploring. I don’t know this town.” He answered truthfully, while leaving out the abandoned houses and the drinking. No reason to sell himself out if he could help it.

“I know, but until we settle in. Stay close or tell me where you are going.” She told him, more firm than before.

“I mean, if I had my phone it wouldn’t be a problem, you know?” He told her.

“No phones. Lucky for us the Millers don’t have internet.” She said getting to her feet. “That wouldn’t work at all.” She said more to herself than to her son.

“Wait, what?” He asked, getting to his feet. There was no way he was going to stay here with no internet. His friends must be so worried about him, how was he going to get a hold of them with no phone or no internet?

“It’s a distraction, now go to bed. We have a busy day ahead of us tomorrow.” His mom said as she walked over to her bed on the other side of the room.

“Mom!” Liam said, not ready to let this conversation drop.

“Goodnight dear.” She said getting into bed.

“Mom! I need internet. You can’t just cut me off from the rest of the world!” He demanded.

“Go to sleep. We can talk about it later.” She said, in her don’t push me voice. He knew he wasn’t going to get anywhere on this subject tonight. He sat down on his bed, pissed. He couldn’t for the life of him figure out why she was being like this. His parents had always fought like cats and dogs, but this was taking it to a whole other level. He couldn’t even use the internet now? Was she afraid he would reach out to his father? Did his father even know where he was? What happened that was so bad that she went into hiding like this? He laid back onto his bed, his eyes wide open as he thought endlessly about what had happened to his life.

He wasn’t even aware that he had drifted off to sleep until his mother woke him up the next morning. She had a list of errands that she needed to run, and she wanted Liam to go with her. At first it was small stuff like picking up some groceries but before long they were shopping for clothes and looking at the nearest schools. It was starting to become clear to Liam that he was here for the long haul, whether he wanted to be or not.

It was well into the day before they finally made it home. The sun had already started its slow descent in the sky. He was beat, part of him just wanted to crawl into bed and pass out. Another part of him wanted to go out into the woods and scream till he was horse. He was going to be stuck here for who knows how long. His mother had just decided to uproot them and move them here without ever consulting him. It wasn’t too long ago, just the day before in fact, when this place started to feel like it could be a fun place to spend the summer, but that was a far cry from abandoning everything he had ever known and living here forever. That he wasn’t ready to accept.

His mother’s odd cheerfulness wasn’t helping matters any. The more they settled into their new lives the happier she seemed to be. This was the life she wanted, and the one she was forcing on him, against his will. He dropped his new stuff off in their room and headed downstairs to look for Alyssa. He could use a friend right now. Someone to talk and vent to. He didn’t know how much he was willing to tell her, after all, he didn’t want to seem weak in front of her.

He made his way towards the kitchen, walking past Miss. Martha, who was snoring loudly on the couch. Liam still couldn’t believe the story he was told about her. That must have been so horrible for her. As he neared the kitchen he could hear talking. He took that as a good sign. He pushed open the door and made his way into the room, a feeling of disappointment quickly taking root inside him as he found no sign of Alyssa. Instead he found her sister Elena sitting at the table talking to some guy in what seemed to be a serious conversation. They both turned to look at him, neither seemed to be all that happy to see him.

“Who the hell are you?” The man demanded.

“Our new house guest. Luke is it?” She asked. A fake smile on her face.

“Liam.” He replied, correcting her. It wasn’t a hard name to remember, he hated when people got it wrong.

“Liam, sorry about that. Um, if you could give a few minutes, that would be great.” She said in a fake tone that matched her smile.

“Don’t bother, I’m out of here.” The man said as he got to his feet.

“Kevin! Don’t be like this!” Elena pleaded with him as he started towards the back door.

“Like what? You know how I feel about that guy! And you just ignore that! Are you with me or not? Because if you want this to work you can’t be spending your days talking to your fucking ex! I mean who the hell does that?” he demanded. Liam backed out of the kitchen, feeling extremely out of place in that room. He was positive he wasn’t supposed to hear any of that.

He hoped they worked out their beef, but if she was really hanging out with her ex, he didn’t think it likely. But none of that was his problem. He just wanted to see Alyssa and get his mind off everything. If she wasn’t here where could she be?

It dawned on him the second he exited the front door that if she wasn’t here she must be at the vacant house. He just hoped he could remember how to get there. He had only been there once, and she led him there. He followed the path they had traveled the day before the best he could. It wasn’t long before the unfinished houses came into view. He smiled to himself, he was almost home free. He just hoped that his guess was right, and she was really there.

He wasted no time in heading into the house she had showed him last time. It wasn’t hard to remember the right one, due to the fact that it was the only one with a door in place. He pushed open the door and almost immediately could hear people speaking from upstairs. He smiled to himself, feeling confident that he had guessed her location correctly. He paused for a moment before heading upstairs, disappointed that he wasn’t going to be able to talk to her alone, but at least he wasn’t stuck at home with his mom, hearing how wonderful this new life was going to be.

As he made his way up the stairs he could start to better make out the talking in the room, only he couldn’t understand any of it. It was clearly Alyssa and their friends talking, but it wasn’t in English, or any other language that Liam had ever heard before. The door to their hangout spot was closed, taking a nervous breath, Liam pushed the door open.

His heart skipped a beat, Alyssa, Jake, Jane and Carl were sitting around a circle with candles in their hands wearing dark robes. In the middle of them Kate was floating in the air, her face screaming in an unhuman fashion. Liam had never seen anything so terrifying in his entire life.

“What the fuck?” He asked, stumbling back. All heads in the room spun to look at him.

“Liam, Liam, Liam, how is sweet old mom? Now that daddy dearest isn’t beating her nightly.” Kate taunted, not sounding at all human. She broke into a laugh that chilled him to the bone. Alyssa started to get to her feet, worry on her face, when Carl grabbed her wrist.

“Don’t break the circle!” He hissed at her and she sat back down.

“Sorry,” She said to Carl, she looked back Liam. “It’s okay, this isn’t what it looks like.” She tried to tell him. He could barely hear her. His mind was racing far too quickly.

“Don’t lie to the child. It’s exactly what it looks like. Liam, sweetie, I’mma eat your soul!” Kate said as her eyes burned red. Liam let out a scream as he turned and ran, almost falling down the stairs as he did so.

Chapter 4

Liam burst out of the house and kept running, not stopping till the house was out of sight. He collapsed to the ground, trying to catch his breath. His side had a stabbing pain in it, but he didn’t care. He was terrified. Alyssa and the others were talking to a demon. Kate was a demon! What the hell was going on? Liam always claimed to believe in God, but it was never something he really thought about. It was just something he said, not something he really put any stock in. All the sudden he was faced with the truth, that there was more out there than he had ever guessed. The supernatural was real.

“Liam!” Alyssa called out to him from back the way he came. She must have followed him out of the house. He didn’t respond, the last thing he wanted to do was talk to her. She was crazy. Dealing with something unhuman. Something evil. “Liam! Where are you?” She called out again, panic in her voice.

Liam slowly got to his feet, he needed to go home. Not her house, but home home. Back in Chicago. This was all too much for him. “Wait, I just want to talk.” Alyssa said from behind him. He turned around to find her standing there. She found him.

“What was that?” He demanded. His voice shaking as he spoke.

“It was nothing, we were just playing around. You didn’t see what you thought you did.” She said, a forced smile on her face.

“Didn’t I?”

“No, that’s what I’m saying. It was all in your head.” She said.

“Than, how do you know what I think I saw?” He demanded. Not really caring what she had to say, but not running away. He couldn’t figure out why he was even humoring her, but he wanted to know what had happened. It was too fantastical.

“What do you think you saw?” She asked. He shook his head and took a step back.

“No! Bullshit! You explain what the fuck was going on!” He yelled at her.

“Liam!” she pleaded with him.

“Kate was floating! Don’t just sweep that under the rug! What the fuck was that?” he asked, his voice cracking. She lowered her head, clearly fighting with herself on what to tell him. “I want the truth, or I go to your dad. He needs to know what you are doing in that house.” He bluffed. There was no way he was really going to tell her father, it would mean his mother would find out he was hanging out there. Mutual assured destruction.

“You really want the truth?” she asked, not meeting his eyes.

“Yes!” he told her, she looked up, locking eyes with him.

“You can never tell a soul.” She told him.

“I won’t, you can trust me.” He told her, meaning it.

“I have a friend, he’s more a guru of sorts. He taught me all about meditation and how to expand my awareness of the world around us.” She said.

“Awareness of the world around us?” he said in disbelief.

“It’s hard to explain, but we all have an aura around us. That reflects our inner selves.” She told him.

“Don’t tell me you’re one of those people.” He said, more mocking than he had intended.

“It’s all true, Liam. You might not want to believe it, but it’s true.” She said with a smile.

“What the hell does that have to do with Kate flying around the damn room?” He all but screamed.

“I’m a curious sort. Once I learned there was more to the world than what we could see, I wanted to learn it all. I found an entity that you could summon, and host. It would grant you enhanced senses, giving you a new way of looking at the world. You could see everything, feel everything. It connects you to the planet in a way that you could only dream of.” She said, getting more and more excited as she spoke.

“That’s what you were doing in there? Getting enlightened?” he asked, not sure he really wanted to know anymore.

“There was a catch, the entity that you had to host, it was a spirit known only as Na’ta. There was a summoning spell that said whenever Na’ta was summoned into someone, it wouldn’t want to leave. There were whole books on civilizations that it had tore apart.” She said, not as excited as before, almost ashamed now.

“Why would you want to mess with something that ruins whole civilizations?” He asked, trying and failing to keep the judgement out of his voice.

“Because. I just…I just needed to know what it felt like. My guru, he opened my mind up to so much, but I wanted more. I needed more. I got together a group of friends, who could exercise Na’ta, after I experienced it and we formed a circle, trapping it inside. I felt…well, I could never hope to explain how it felt, but it was life changing. It was, everything you could ever hope it to be, and oh so much more. Each and everyone of us have gone through it. Becoming better versions of ourselves.” She said, grinning from ear to ear.

“That’s insane Alyssa! Insane!” He screamed at her. His mind was racing with all the ways this could go wrong.

“Why don’t you try it for yourself? Before you judge us.” She said, he shook his head. There was no way he would ever allow something like that to be done to him. It was just insane.

“I would never.” He said, backing up.

“It’s safe. I promise, we have all done it. Once you do it, you’ll understand. It’ll change everything. Please, just try.” She begged him. He felt sick to his stomach. He couldn’t even fathom the thought of having some other entity inside him. Controlling him. Sharing his mind, his body. Just thinking about it started to make him feel sick. “Please!”

Chapter 5

Liam had no idea how he ended up here, in the middle of Alyssa and her friends as they chanted in what could only be Latin. They had their hoods up covering their faces, the only light in the room coming from the candles they held in front of them. Liam had never felt so scared in his entire life.

All he wanted to do was run out of the room screaming, again. He should never have come back, but there was just something about Alyssa that he couldn’t say no about. She was just so…intriguing. But as interesting as she was, she wasn’t worth his soul, no one was worth that. Even if he still wasn’t sure that souls were real. Although it was quickly becoming apparent that they had to be real. What else could explain what Alyssa and her friends were doing.

“Guys,” He started to say when he felt a weird sensation inside his gut. It wasn’t pleasure, it wasn’t life enhanced, it was pain. Pure and simple. It hurt. He wanted it to stop, needed it to stop. He wanted to let out an ear-piercing scream, but what came out couldn’t be more different. He laughed, it was a loud full bellied jolly laugh, and it shook Liam to his core. Because, he wasn’t the one that laughed.

There was something else inside him. That was the only way to explain it. It was almost as if he could see someone, or something just out of the corner of his eye. He could feel its presence standing right over his shoulder, only closer. Not right behind him, inside him. He tried to move his eyes, but he couldn’t. All around him was darkness and a cold that was beyond measure. Alyssa had sold this as something that made you feel amazing, spectacular and any other adjective that Marvel throws onto the front of a Spider-Man comic, but he didn’t feel any of that. He felt small, alone, empty. He felt dead, only he wasn’t. He kept breathing, kept existing, he just wished he wasn’t.

*We can fix that, Liam.* A voice said inside his head. He didn’t hear it in the conventional sense, he heard it in the way that you hear your own thoughts, only he knew they weren’t his. They were the others, the thing inside his head. It filled him a dread he had never known possible. *You don’t have to feel this way. Just let go, stop fighting and let me take the wheel. All those things your little girlfriend told you about, I can make you feel. Once you let go.*

Listening to the thought voice made him sick to his stomach. It felt like he had a cancer inside him and it was only getting worst. He wanted to cry, but his body wasn’t his own. He needed to expel this creature but didn’t have the strength.

*And you won’t get it Liam, unless you trust me. I can make you stronger than you could ever imagine, and I want to. I want to help you Liam. Me and you, we are the same. The way Alyssa and her little friends use me to get high, to feed their lust for power, it’s the same way that your parents use you as a pawn in their battles with each other. We mean nothing to anyone, but together, together we can be strong. We can save each other from this horrid world.*

He tried to drown out the voice, but it kept growing louder and louder. For a moment Liam thought that was the worst of it, but then he started to feel a burning sensation. It was excruciating, as if each and every cell in his body was bursting, ready to explode. Only it wasn’t his body that he was feeling, it was his soul. Any question as to its existence long since passed.

*This is why I need you to trust me, Liam. Your body can’t hold both of us, not when we are fighting for dominance. If you keep fighting me, we both die, in agony. The only way we make it through this, is if we become one. If we join together. Trust me, I won’t let you down. Not like everyone else has.*

“Ahhhhhh!!!!” He screamed out, he could hear his voice for the first time since the entity had taken up residence inside him. The second he had stopped fighting and embraced the entity he found himself screaming, it was the scream he wanted to let out all along, only with the sound went the pain. All the pain, not just the pain he felt since being possessed, but all the pain he had felt since birth.

He felt free for the first time in his life. No worries, no suffering, nothing but pure and total bliss. He felt happy, truly happy. He opened his eyes, and he could see, ever detail in the room in perfect clarity, despite the fact that the candles were still the only light in the room. He no longer needed light to see. He could see everything. He could smell everything. He could taste everything, all while standing in the middle of the circle.

The sensations went so far beyond anything that Alyssa had described. He never wanted it to end. He could still feel the other entity inside him, only it no longer felt foreign. It felt apart of him. No different than a limb. He could do anything as long as he had it apart of him. He could change the world and reshape it in his image.

“Ahhhh!” He screamed again, as the world was once more plunged into darkness as the entity was torn out of him. All the joy and confidence he had felt were quickly replaced with a sense of loneliness. As if his arm was cut off right in front of him.

“You okay?” Alyssa’s voice shook him out of his inner thoughts. He opened his eyes and the real world rushed back into focus.

“Aaa” he tried to speak, but he couldn’t seem to work his tongue.

“It’s okay Liam, don’t try to talk. It takes a while to get your bearings again.” She told him, rubbing her hand on his back, attempting to comfort him.

“The first time’s the worst. It gets easier.” Carl said. Liam just nodded, not sure if he could manage words just yet. The memory of what had just happened was already starting to fade, all that stayed was that he had felt whole and powerful and happy. He would give anything to feel that way again. Anything.

It was a good while before he started to feel back to normal. He Slowly started to sit up, Alyssa looking down at him smiling. Everyone seemed to be in good spirits. Everyone but for Jake, who was standing behind everyone, pure anger in his eyes. Liam quickly looked away, choosing instead to lock eyes with Alyssa. After all, he did this to make her happy.

“That was…that was something.” He managed to say. His voice still sounded strange. As if it hadn’t been used in years.

“I told you! It’s everything. It’s lifechanging.” Alyssa said, grinning from ear to ear.

“It does drain you, I’m feeling really beat guys, I think I’mma head home.” Kate said.

“I’ll walk you, my dad wants to have a game night. Joy.” Jane said as she got up and walked over to Kate.

“You ready to roll out?” Carl asked Jake, who hadn’t stopped staring at Liam.

“Yeah, let’s get the fuck out of here.” Jake said, finally pulling his eyes away from Liam and storming out of the room, not saying goodbye to anyone. Carl awkwardly smiled and shrugged as he followed him out, telling them all bye as a group.

“He knows better than to let it get to him.” Kate said as she walked out with Jane.

“Yeah, but he got it bad today, you gave it to him too.” Jane said back as they started down the stairs. Liam turned to look at Alyssa, he was so confused, what was going on?

“Why…” Liam started, but before he could get anymore out he turned away from her and started throwing up. He felt sick, he could only imagine this was what feeling hungover must feel like.

“Just let it out. It takes a while for your body to get used to it. You just put a big strain on yourself.” She told him, her tone not unkind.

“Does it get easier? Next time?” He asked, hoping the answer was yes, but knowing that he would do it again even if the answer was no. It was the greatest experience of his life.

“It does. After a few times, you don’t feel the after effects at all. All the reward, none of the drawbacks.” She told him.

“Really?” He asked, thinking it was too good to be true.

“As long as you don’t do it too often. Once or twice a month. Otherwise, you risk Na’ta consuming you. Once that happens there is no coming back.” She told him, all humor gone from her voice.

“That can happen?” He asked. Not sure he really wanted to know.

“It’s what Na’ta wants. Whatever it told you, it’s all talk. It just wants a host so that it can be free. But as long as we limit how much time it has on this plane, we can use it for our own needs. As illustrated tonight.” She said with a laugh as she got to her feet and held out a hand to help him up. His feet felt wobbly underneath him, but he managed to keep his balance.

“I don’t remember anything Na’ta said to me.” He said, trying as hard as he could to recall. “I know we spoke, but honestly, all I recall is how amazing it all felt.” He confessed to her. She nodded as she led him out of the room.

“That’s how it is. That never really changes. You get used to it. Just, going in, know to be on guard.” She warned him.

“Did…did I say something to Jake?” He asked, as they made their way outside. She looked away.

“His little brother died a few months back. He had gone missing for weeks. They finally found him, in the woods, dead.” She told him.

“Wait, what? Are you serious?” He asked, his heart sinking as he tried to imagine how horrible that must have been for Jake.

“He always used to go play out there, I mean, we all did. As you can tell, there isn’t a whole lot to do here. But, when he was out there, he must have gotten lost. He never made it home. Jake called all of us and we went looking. Must have been all through the woods, all night long and we never found him. The same thing the next day, but this time with the police. Day after day, until they finally found his body. Jake’s family was devastated.” She said, tears welling up in her eyes.

“I can’t even imagine.” He said, feeling sick all over again, but for a different reason this time.

“Jake just started coming around again. Today was the first time he came to one of the summoning’s. He wasn’t ready to be the host but thought he could be part of the circle. I can’t imagine he will be doing that again anytime soon.” She said, her voice full of regret.

“And here I made him go for round two. He must hate me.” Liam said.

“It’s not your fault. You didn’t know.” She told him. He just nodded, not knowing what to say.

Chapter 6

The next two months went by in a blur. It was the greatest time of his life. It took a while for Jake to warm up to him, but before long he was in close with the whole group. They treated him like he was part of the family. Because it quickly became clear that that is what they were, a family.

It had been weeks since he even thought about his home and his friends. He was really starting to feel at home here, even at the house. Alyssa’s sisters weren’t all that bad, and even Elena’s boyfriend, Kevin, was starting to grow on him. Not a hard feat when the man was at breakfast with them every morning. He basically lived with them, he was there often enough. It was nice to have a guy around to talk to. Even if it was just superficial.

The only relationship that didn’t seem to be improving was his one with his mother. Over the past few months they had grown more and more apart. They spent every night sleeping in the same room, but they might as well have been worlds apart. Anytime they spoke to each other you could cut the tension with a knife. He wasn’t sure why he was so angry with her. If he was truly starting to feel at home, truly starting to be happy, why did he still blame her? Why did he still resent her? None of it made sense to him, but he couldn’t help how he felt. He was pissed. She tore him away from everything he had ever known. Even if he was happy, it didn’t make up for everything she stole from him.

“Did you hear me?” his mother asked yet again. He had come home just to change real quick and head back out. The gang was meeting up at the house for another summoning. They normally did one a week, but they were doing a second one this week to see if they could petition Na’ta for information on Jane’s mother. She had fallen ill and no one seemed to know why. The doctors were all stumped. Liam wasn’t sure why they thought a demon they used would provide the answers for them, but he trusted them to know what they were doing. It seemed that Na’ta gave them advice if it was in the mood. Never directly, more in a beating around the bush type way. Taunting them with just enough of the information they needed to almost be helpful. The gang figured they could use what they got from Na’ta to guide the doctors in the right direction. It was a long shot, but one Jane wanted to take.

While he was grabbing his clothes, his mother blindsided him with dinner plans. It seemed that now was the time she picked to set right their faulty relationship. He wasn’t having it. His turn at being the host not the least of the reasons. It had been a while since he had felt the rush of having Na’ta inside him. It was a high that exceeded anything else he had ever felt. It also came with an added benefit. After the first few times, he had stopped feeling hungover at the possessions and felt remnants of the power and confidence. It never lasted long, just a few hours. But it was enough for him to do what he needed to do tonight. Tell Alyssa how he felt. It was something that he had been feeling a need to do more and more. He just couldn’t keep it inside anymore. He had had feelings for her since the moment he laid eyes on her. Feelings that had only grown stronger the more time they spent together. He wasn’t about to let his mother ruin his big moment.

“I heard you. I just chose not to acknowledge it.” He said as he pulled on his shoes.

“You don’t talk to me like that! I’m the mother, you’re the child, you will talk to me with respect!” She screamed at him. Liam stood up from his bed, without looking at her he headed for the door.

“You’re the kidnapper, I’m the victim. Not a whole lot of respect involved in that relationship, but you have a great dinner.” He said, as he exited the room. He rushed down the stairs, not waiting for her to respond. Thanks to her sudden need to play mom he was running late. He just hoped the others didn’t start without him. He was really looking forward to playing host again.

He wasted no time in making it to the house, his moms words ringing in his ears the whole way. He was starting to feel guilty for blowing her off. True she stole everything he had ever known from him, but the truth was she threw away everything she had too. Whatever had happened between his parents must have been bad. He asked her about it a few times when they had first gotten here, but she would never tell him anything. She would just change the subject. So, he stopped trying. Maybe that was a mistake.

No sooner had the thought crossed his mind when he was brought back into reality by the sight of Alyssa and the others standing around outside the house. Jake was shaking with silent fury, as Jane was crying next to him. Alyssa and Carl were standing a few feet away, they looked as if they had been crying. Kate was nowhere to be seen.

“Jane, are you okay?” Liam asked as he neared his friends. She looked up and started crying louder. Carl just shook his head as Jake charged at Liam, rage in his eyes.

“Where the fuck were you?” Jake demanded!

“At home, my mom kept me. What happened?” Liam asked, not sure why Jake was screaming at him. If Liam didn’t know any better, he was sure Jake was going to hit him.

“At home, at home! That’s your answer? This is your fault.” Jake screamed in his face. Before Liam could respond Jake stormed passed him. Liam watched him vanish passed the houses, confused out of his mind.

“I’ll walk you home.” Carl said, lifting Jane up. She nodded, and they started off.

“What happened?” Liam asked Alyssa, who looked up at him.

“Jane didn’t want to wait for you, so Kate took your place.” Alyssa started. Liam looked around, once more for any sign of Kate.

“Where is she?” He asked.

“Na’ta started taunting Jane and Jake. Told us that we welcomed death into our ranks and that it would find all of us sooner or later.” Alyssa said, she started to cry as she spoke. Liam pulled her into a hug.

“I’m so sorry.” He told her, holding her tight.

“This is all my fault.” She wept. He pulled away from her, so he could look her in the eyes.

“None of this is your fault. We all know what we were getting into. This is on all of us.” He told her, and he meant it. He knew this was wrong, he had known it from the moment he found out about all of this, but he made the choice time and again to be apart of it. That put just as much of the blame on him as on her.

“But Kate…” Alyssa started, not finishing the sentence. Liam’s heart sank, he wasn’t sure he was ready to hear what happened to her.

“Where is she?” He asked anyway. Alyssa started crying, unable to answer. Liam pulled her back into a tight embrace. They stood there together, not saying a word for what felt like an eternity before she finally started to speak again.

“Na’ta got under Jane’s skin, she ran out of the room crying, Jake went with her. One of them, I don’t know which, hit a candle.” Alyssa started. Liam had a flashback to the moment he first found out about all of this. Alyssa had wanted to run after him, but Carl had warned her not to break the circle. They always made a big deal about making it perfect, but he never stopped to think about what would happen if it was broken.

“In an instant, Na’ta was free and made to attack us.” She told him, her eyes read from crying.

“Oh my god, how did you escape?” He asked, his heart racing as if he was there.

“Carl. He’s always been so paranoid something like this would happen, he wasted no time in starting the exorcism. He saved my life.” She said, bursting into tears once more. Liam was afraid to ask the next question, but knew it had to be asked.

“What happened to Kate?” he asked, his voice shaking as he did so.

“She was shaken, to say the least. For the first time, she remembered everything. She wouldn’t say a word to us, except to say she was done. The rest of us…we stayed and tried to figure out what this all meant. Did we really bring death into all of our lives? My mom? Is that my fault?” she asked, the question broke Liam’s heart. Once more he held her, tears flowing freely down his cheeks. The truth of the matter was, this wasn’t her fault, it was his. He should have been the host. He could have kept Na’ta from hurting the others. He knew it was an irrational thought, but he couldn’t help but feel it was true. After all, he seemed to be the only one to come out of all this unscathed.

It was a few hours before they finally started to head back to the house. Neither one doing much talking. There was nothing more to really talk about. They played with fire and they got burned. They knew that come morning, their lives would never be the same.

Chapter 7

The next few days proved them right. Their group of friends dissolved in front of their eyes. They blamed Alyssa for bringing this demon into their lives and they blamed Liam for not being there when it all went to hell. Not a one of them seemed to be accepting their blame in any of it. That was fine with Liam. He barely knew these people. Sure, he liked them and considered them friends, but deep down he knew this wasn’t his life. He was just stuck here until his mother came to her senses, the one he felt sorry for was Alyssa. Her friends were the only ones she had. Her home life was shit and wasn’t getting any better.

The longer her mother was held up on the couch the angrier and more flustered their father became. He had a sense of helplessness about him that must be driving him up the wall. He loved his wife and could do nothing to help her, to make her better. It was how Liam was feeling about Alyssa as he watched her walk around the house in a funk. He didn’t know how to snap her out of it. He tried to joke around with her, he tried to cheer her up, but she just didn’t want him to. Anytime he would say anything to her, she would bark at him that she wanted to be alone. He didn’t think she blamed for what happened, she wasn’t talking to him like the others were. She was just depressed, not that he could blame her.

He had taken a job with his mom at the diner, as a dishwasher. He hated it, but it was a good chance for him to start to rebuild his relationship with her. When he got home from the house with Alyssa his mom didn’t say a word to him. She took his words to heart and he hated to admit just how guilty it made him feel. He didn’t want to hurt her. He was just hurt and lashed out. But it didn’t make it right.

So here he was. Working nights at a run-down diner with his mother, for next to no money. It did the impossible. It made him hate this town even more. The only bright side was that he was finally on talking terms with his mom again. It was still a bit strained, but he knew they were on the right path.

“Ready to go?” She asked him from the front as he washed his hands. He had just finished his shift for the day. It was a long one. They had an extra busy day, he hated every second of it.

“I’m coming.” Liam called out as he made his way to the front room. She was holding the door open for him.

“Hurry up, we have a long walk ahead of us.” She told him, for the 100th time. Their car broke down a week ago and she hadn’t stopped stressing about it since. It got to the point where he had agreed to donate his paychecks, as small as they were, into the car fund. Once more making this job an even bigger hell than it already was.

“I’m aware. Let’s go.” He said as he slipped through the door she was holding open. She caught up to him after locking the door and started talking to him about the regulars and random stories that he could care less about. His mind kept turning to Alyssa. She was just sitting at home, bored, with no one to talk to or hang out with.

The walk home seemed to stretch on and on, his mom talking nonstop, with him just replying from time to time so as not to be rude. When they finally made it home, Liam was surprised to find Alyssa sitting in the kitchen with Elena. They seemed to be having a good time, it was an odd sight to see. Ever since he had moved in, Alyssa had never done anything other than complain about her sisters. There seemed to be a lot of bad blood between them. More so between Elena and Alyssa than with Eliza. But here they were, having a good time.

“Hey Alyssa, Elena.” Liam said, smiling. They both turned to look at him and smiled back, they were in great spirits.

“Hey Liam!” Alyssa said.

“How was work?” Elena asked.

“It was good, just really busy.” He said, taking a seat at the table. No sooner had he sat down than Kevin walked in from the back door.

“You ladies ready to go?” He asked, “Hey Liam.”

“Hey.” Liam said, wondering where they were going as the girls got up.

“Yeah babe.” Elena said.

“Been ready, shit, took you long enough to get back” Alyssa said, in the playful manner that she used to always use when talking to Liam. He hadn’t heard her this happy since the incident with Na’ta.

“Where you guys going?” Liam asked as the girls started towards the door, he was waiting for an invite, but none was forthcoming.

“Out.” Kevin said as he went back outside. Elena followed after him, waving goodbye to him. Alyssa stopped and turned back to him.

“I’ll be back, don’t stay up too late waiting.” She said, winking at him as she exited the house. His heart dropped as she left. She didn’t want him along. He wasn’t welcome. Part of him was glad that she was out of her funk, he was just dishearten by the fact that it was without him.

He stayed up for a while, sitting on the porch, his mind racing with fantasies of where she could be and what they were off doing. Each idea more fantastical than the next, but in the end, none of it mattered. They were out having fun and he was stuck here sitting on the porch like an idiot. His last friend in the wasteland had forgotten about him.

The next morning, he awoke early, only to find that once more Alyssa was out with Elena. He went for a walk to clear his head, the longer he walked the more he felt bad for feeling jealous. He shouldn’t resent her connecting with her sister. It just meant that he needed to find something to keep himself busy. He needed to find his zen.

Over the next week he tried everything he could think of. Started working out, it didn’t last long. He would feel so sore and it made work even more shitty. He tried collecting comics, but it was far more expensive than he seemed to remember from when he was a kid. He settled on writing.

He would sit up late at night on the back-porch writing. He would pour all of his hopes and dreams into the pages of his journal. It helped. After a few nights of it he was finally starting to feel normal. For the first time since the night his new world exploded.

It was well past midnight when he finished that night’s entry. As he was closing the journal he heard a car pull into the driveway. It had to be Elena and Alyssa, they weren’t home when he had gotten off of work. He hadn’t seen much of them the past few days, but he was trying not to let it get to him. After all, he finally found something that he enjoyed, and it was keeping him distracted.

He figured it wouldn’t hurt to go say hi. He made his way though the yard and opened the gate to the front. He was surprised to find that it wasn’t Kevin’s car out front. It was some truck he had never seen before. He watched it for a few moments, expecting someone to get out of the car, only no one did. Curiosity urged him forward. He made his way towards the truck, trying to get a look inside. He felt his heart start to speed up. After all, he could only think of one person who would pull up in front of the house this late. It had to be his father, finally here to pick them up and take them home. He tried to keep from smiling like an idiot as he neared the door.

His heart dropped, the excitement he felt was quickly replaced with disappointment. But that only lasted a moment, the second he recognized who was in the car the disappointment was replace with shock. It was Elena and she was kissing someone, only it wasn’t Kevin. It was some random guy. Liam backed away, not sure of what he was seeing. His mind started racing, not about who Elena was kissing, but about where Kevin and Alyssa were. Why weren’t they here? Were they together? What the hell was going on?

He was so far lost in thought that he didn’t even see the tree stump as he tripped over it, falling backwards. “Fuck!” he yelled out as he fell. The fall hurt, he started to get up, trying to ignore the pain when he heard the truck door open.

“Liam?” Elena asked, concern in her voice. The man in the truck asked her something, but Liam couldn’t make it out. “Just go! Please!” She hissed at him before slamming the door shut and rushing over towards Liam, who was already starting to get up. “Are you okay?” She asked. He nodded.

“Fine, just, you know, dark out. Didn’t see, so yeah, I tripped. But I’m fine, really.” He said, trying to wave her off. He didn’t want to have the obvious conversation. He was scared of where it might lead.

“Yeah, it is always hard to see in the dark. Harder even to see while walking backwards.” She said with the same kind of playful tone that her sister was famous for.

“That didn’t help.” He said with a laugh.

“So, what did you see?” She asked. He shook his head no, she smiled. “So, everything. Cool, you going to tell?”

“What?” he asked nervously.

“Look, I’m not about to ask you to lie for me, but… maybe it doesn’t come up, you don’t mention it?” She asked.

“So, you still with Kevin?” He asked, not answering her question.

“Yeah, I love him. Just, things have been tense lately. He’s working a lot, and you know everything Alyssa is going through, she needs us, so we don’t have a lot of time together. It’s just been hard.” She said, talking more to herself than to Liam. He nodded his understanding. “And as we all know, when shit is going bad, the world loves nothing better than to add onto our load.”

“I know how that is.” He said, thinking about how shitty his existence has become. He knew only too well what she was talking about.

“So, cue my ex-boyfriend Mark, showing up. Doing everything he can to win me back.” She said with a laugh.

“Just when your relationship was going through a rough patch.” He said, knowing just how complicated life could get sometimes.

“Yeah. Tonight, was the first time I hung out with him since he came back to town.” She said, as if she was trying to justify it to herself. “And this kiss, the one you just saw. It just happened. It will never happen again! I swear to you.” She said, tears in her eyes. “I can’t lose Kevin. I just can’t. But, I know secrets are poison, so if you can’t keep it, I understand.” She said on the verge of tears.

“He’ll never hear it from me. I promise you.” He told her, he meant it too. He didn’t want to cause her anymore pain. Life was hard enough. She broke down crying and gave him a hug. They spent the rest of the night talking. He learned more about Elena and Alyssa and their childhood than he would have ever thought possible. Even learned that the beef between the sisters went back to a few years before when Elena first spent the night with Mark, she made Alyssa promise to keep her sneaking out of the house a secret. Mark ended up getting into a car accident and Elena spent the next few months with a broken leg. Their parents blamed Alyssa for not telling them.

He also found out that Kevin was teaching Alyssa how to drive, getting her ready for her driving test. That was where they were tonight. Normally Elena would go with them, but she told them she had to work late so she could see Mark. Alyssa had come home hours before and Liam just didn’t hear her. He had missed his chance to speak to her, and he would have had a chance to talk to her one on one, something he had been wanting to do since the day he walked her home. Instead he had his first one on one talk with Elena. It was a great conversation, just with the wrong sister.

The sun was starting to come up when they finally went inside. He made his way up to his bedroom, he was asleep before he hit the pillow. Sleep had never come so easily for him.

Chapter 8

Liam awoke well into the afternoon. His mother had already left for the day. Slowly he got ready for the day and made his way downstairs where he found Alyssa eating. Seemed she had gotten a late start as well. He couldn’t help but smile to himself, it was the first time he has had a chance to talk to her one on one since the night of summoning gone wrong.

“Hey.” He said, trying to hide his excitement. He missed her so much that it hurt sometimes. He had so many things we wanted to say to her, but he didn’t have the words. She looked up at him and flashed him a smile.

“Hey you. How you been?” She asked.

“I’ve been great, just working a lot.” He said, taking a seat next to her.

“Food?” She asked, motioning her plate. She had cold bacon and a half-eaten muffin.

“I’m alright. So, what have you been up to?” He asked, trying to act as if no time had passed since they were close.

“Just hanging out with Elena and Kevin a lot. It’s nice, catching up with family.” Alyssa said. She did seem genially happy. It was a side of Alyssa that Liam had never seen before. He liked it.

“That’s good. I’m glad you guys are reconnecting.” He told her.

“I am too.” She said, taking a bite of her bacon.

“Speaking of reconnecting, I was kind of hoping that we could hang out today. Catch up some.” He said, nervously. Her smile became more a pity smile than the happy one she had moments before.

“I would love to, really, but I’m going out with Kevin and Elena. I’m sorry.” She told him, not unkindly.

“Oh, okay, that’s uh, that’s cool.” He said, disappointed.

“Just come with us.” Elena said from behind them. Liam turned around to find her and Kevin walking into the room.

“Is that cool?” Liam asked.

“Don’t matter.” Kevin said. He looked over at Alyssa, it was an odd look, one that Liam didn’t think the others noticed. He ignored it and got to his feet.

“So, what are we doing?” Liam asked. Alyssa just nodded, not nearly as excited as Liam would have hoped.

“Stuff.” Kevin said. And that’s what they did. Stuff. They drove around town with no real rhyme or reason behind it. Alyssa and Kevin seemed to be a lot closer than Liam would have guessed, they shared inside jokes that went right over his head. Elena seemed to follow the inside jokes, she just didn’t seem to find them all that funny. If Liam didn’t know better, he would guess she didn’t want to be there. He wanted to ask her about it but didn’t think she would want to talk about it in front of the others.

He finally got the chance when they ended up at a dinner near the edge of town. Alyssa went with Kevin to get them food while Elena stayed behind and played on her phone. Liam stayed back with her. He was tired of watching Alyssa and Kevin grow closer and closer.

“You okay?” He asked her. She looked up and made sure the others weren’t anywhere nearby.

“Mark keeps texting me.” She said, clearly upset by it.

“Did you tell him you don’t want to talk to him anymore?” He asked her. She looked away, not wanting to answer. “You don’t do you?”

“No…well, maybe. I don’t know. It’s confusing okay? He was my first love. And you see Kevin. He’s basically throwing himself at Alyssa. He doesn’t care what I do.” She said, almost as if she was trying to convince herself that it was okay to talk to her ex. Liam wanted to argue with her, but he couldn’t. He felt the same way every time he saw them together. They were becoming too comfortable.

“I’m sorry.” Was all he could say.

“If…if I go see him later, will you cover for me?” She asked, clearly forgetting her promise from the night before to not force him to lie for her. He just nodded. “Thanks.” She said, before he could respond the others returned to the car. The rest of the night dragged on and on. Alyssa and Kevin were really connecting on a level that Liam had never connected with anyone before. The closer they got the more distant that Elena became. Not that Liam could blame her. Who would be okay with their significate other bonding this much with their sibling? It wasn’t natural. Liam was so happy when Kevin finally dropped them all off back at the house.

Chapter 9

Elena stood in front of Liam at the door, pleading with him not to tell the others where she was going. He didn’t feel comfortable lying to everyone for her. He was never a good liar.

“What do I tell them?” He asked, not for the first time.

“Nothing! Tell them nothing. If they ask where I’m at, shrug. If they ask if you know where I’m at, shake your head. See, no words needed. Just don’t rat me out, all I ask. Please Liam.” She asked him, yet again.

“Fine, just don’t take too long.” He said, giving in. He was never good at saying no.

“Thank you!” She said excitedly, giving him a big hug. With that she let go of him and rushed out the front door. He watched her go, already feeling guilty.

“What was that about?” Alyssa asked from behind him. His heart stopped in his chest. He knew this was going to happen. No sooner had she walked out the front door than he was questioned on her whereabouts.

“Nothing.” He said, trying and failing to act normal. Even he could hear his voice cracking as he said the word. He couldn’t even say one word without giving away the truth. Maybe that was why she told him to just shake his head and not actually say anything. He really did suck at this.

“Nothing? That wasn’t nothing. Where is she going Liam?” She asked, not unkindly, but with a firmness in her voice.

“I don’t know.” He said quickly. The humor dropped from her face as she studied him. He could tell she knew he was hiding something. He silently cursed himself, why did he have to be so bad at hiding things from people?

“Liam, what is going on?” She asked, before he could even reply she walked over towards the door and peeked out the nearby window. “Is that Mark’s car?” She asked not amused. He let out a sigh, he failed her.

“She just needed to talk to him. She was afraid that you would worry.” He said, trying to explain. He was put in a hard place, Alyssa just had to understand. She did not look understanding, without another word she pulled open the door and rushed out. In full on panic! “Alyssa! Calm down!” He hurried after her.

She ran out to the street. She was shaking as she turned back towards him. He was starting to get the feeling that he was missing something. She hurried and pulled out her cell phone.

“What’s wrong Alyssa?” He asked her, she didn’t answer him, just started dialing on her phone. “Who are you calling?” he asked.

“Kevin,” she said, not to him, as she turned away from him. “Elena just drove off with Mark.” She said, her voice racing.

“Is that bad?” He asked, getting the hint that he already knew the answer. “She told me it wasn’t a big deal.” He told her. She spun around.

“Of course, she told you that!” she snapped, “Hurry up and get here!” she said on the phone before hanging up. “She needed you to cover for her! Do you have any idea how fucked up he is?” She demanded of him. The truth was he didn’t. All he knew was that Mark was her ex and no one seemed to like him.

“What’s wrong with him?” He asked.

“Isn’t that something you should have asked before sending her off with them?” She demanded.

“I didn’t send her off with him! She went, I just promised not to tell anyone. It’s not the same thing!” he attempted to point out. To deaf ears.

“You could have stopped her!” Alyssa said, not wanting to hear anything he had to say. It wasn’t long before Kevin pulled up. Alyssa wasted no time in getting in the car. Liam was about to pull open the back door, despite her protesting when he heard a second car pull up behind him. He turned to look and recognized it immediately. It was his father’s car.

“You getting in the car?” Kevin snapped. Liam didn’t respond. His mind was racing as he watched his father start towards their new house. He had started to think he would never seen him again, and yet here he was.

“Forget him!” Alyssa snapped and Kevin drove off, leaving Liam behind. For a quick moment Liam thought about going after them, but he was too distracted by the sight of his father. He didn’t know just how much he missed him till he saw him just now. He rushed for the house, just as his father went inside.

As he closed in on the house he started to hear screaming. It didn’t take long for him to recognize the voice. It was his mother. He slowed down, his heart racing. Why was she screaming? He knew she had come out here to get away from him, but why was she so upset with him? After all this time, she still hadn’t told Liam anything.

He slowly made his way to the doorway, terrified of what he might see. As he neared it he heard a loud slam, as if someone had been thrown against a wall. His heart stopped. He told a deep breath and stepped in front of the doorway, only to find his mom on the ground, with his father standing above her. She was crying, pleading with him to stop.

“Mom?” Liam said, unable to process what he was seeing. He always knew his father was an angry guy, but this was something far more extreme than he ever imagined.

“Pack your shit!” His father snapped at him. Liam didn’t know what to do or say. He just stood there, dumbfounded.

“Mom?” He asked again as she got to her feet. It was all he could manage.

“What the fuck did I just say? Get your shit boy!” His father screamed at him.

“Run!” His mother yelled at him, tears in her eyes. Without warning his father backhanded her, knocking her flat onto the floor. She started crying harder. Watching her there, laying on the ground crying, broke his heart. He wanted to reach out and help her, but instead he listened. He took off running down the street.

He kept running, faster and faster, till he could no longer breath, and then he ran some more. He wasn’t sure where he was heading, just that he needed to get as far away from that house as quickly as possible. It wasn’t till he saw Na’ta’s house. The second he saw it he knew what he had to do. He took a deep breath and headed into the house. He knew that none of the others would agree with what he was about to do. It was reckless and could only end badly, but he didn’t know what else to do. Everything had spun out of control. He was so lost, he just needed to find away to set everything right. He couldn’t do it alone. He needed Na’ta.

Liam took a deep breath before rushing forward into the house. He sped up the stairs to the room they used to use to summon Na’ta. This summoning was different, every time before he was surrounded by friends who would protect him and bring him back to himself when it was all said and done. This time, once the summoning was complete there would be no way to undo it. This was to be the last thing he would ever do, and he was fine with that.

He started the ritual, this time offering up a deal to the demon. He would give in, let go of any form of control, in exchange for helping Alyssa and Kevin catch up to Elena and letting him save his mother from his father. As long as she lived, he was okay giving up his life. Nothing in this life ever worked out for him anyways. He was a failure who had lost everything and anything that had ever held meaning to him.

*Deal!* Na’ta spoke in his mind as Liam was taken over by the pure bliss that always accompanied the possession. He knew as the demon took him over that he would use this new-found freedom to cause havoc in the world, a fact that Liam worried about. He didn’t want anyone to suffer, but he was willing to live with that guilt if it meant his ones he loved were spared.

Chapter 10

Kevin poured on the speed as they raced down the street. Alyssa had no real idea where they were going. She just knew they needed to catch up to Elena before that asshole Mark hurt her. He was crazy. After they broke up he became obsessed with Elena, following her around, stalking her. It was creepy and gave Elena the worst nightmares. It took them forever to finally get him to leave them alone. So why in the hell would Elena welcome him back?

“Where would they be going?” Kevin demanded. He was clearly as worried about Elena as she was. She felt a ping of jealousy at that thought, which made her feel all the worst. She just shook her head, not knowing what to say. The truth was she had no idea where to find them. They could be anywhere.

Her phone went off, she quickly checked it, in the hopes that it was her sister. It turned out to be Jane. She ignored the call and went back to trying to figure out where they could be headed. No sooner did she look up then she spotted Mark’s car. Only it wasn’t in the street. It was in the middle of the grass, crashed into a tree. Mark was standing next to it, his face a blank expression.

“Is that?” Kevin asked as they pulled to a stop. She stopped listening to what he was saying. It didn’t matter. Nothing mattered. Not after she noticed what Mark was looking at. She threw open the car door and ran, as fast as she could. In the middle of the field laid her sister. Elena, clearly dead, laid motionless in the middle of the grass. Alyssa fell to her knees; her mind couldn’t process what she was looking at.

“She just…the car…I just lost control of the car. It spun out of control and she flew out. I don’t…I don’t…” Mark was saying, clearly as in shock as Alyssa. Before She could say anything, she heard someone running behind her. She looked up just in time to see Kevin tackle Mark to the ground. He started beating on him, hitting him harder and harder.

Alyssa knew she should try to stop him, but she couldn’t bring herself to. Mark deserved it. He killed Elena. This was all his fault, so he deserved whatever Kevin did to him. She wanted him to pay for what he did.

Her phone went off again, out of habit she looked down to see that this time Eliza was the one calling. She answered, wanting to tell her everything, but not knowing what to say. How do you tell someone that their sister was dead? That you could have stopped it, if only you didn’t trust the stranger who moved into your guest room! After all, Liam was the one who let this happen. It was his fault just as much as Mark’s.

“Alyssa? Are you there?” Eliza’s asked, she seemed as stressed out as Alyssa. Could she know what had just happened? Did Liam tell her what he did? “Alyssa, it’s Liam.” She was almost crying now. It was all too much for Alyssa. What could he have done now?

“What about him?” Alyssa demanded as she watched Kevin continue to beat on a crying Mark.

“He…his father…he was here. He was hurting Liam’s mother. I wanted to stop him, but I was so scared. And then…” she started to tell Alyssa, her voice cracking. Mark’s cries of pain as Kevin continued to hit him was almost enough to drown her out altogether.

“What happened?” She asked, she had never heard Eliza like this before.

“Liam showed up. A look in his eyes, he just grinned and his father, he flew against the wall. How does that happen Alyssa? What the fuck is going on?” Eliza asked, crying. Alyssa looked at her phone in disbelief. She was surprised to see she had a number of texts. She glanced at them, they were from her friends. Every one of them were asking her for help, warning her that Na’ta had taken hold of Liam. That he was coming for them.

Alyssa dropped the phone, her mind racing. She looked down at her sister’s body. This was his doing. All of this was his doing. Her past mistakes were coming for her. Everything that had happened was her fault. She was to blame for all of this. If she didn’t run, and now, she would suffer the same fate that she had doomed the others too.

“Kevin.” She said, her voice breaking as she said his name. He looked up at her, rage in his eyes.

“We need to go, now!” She demanded. Her voice breaking as she said it. The rage fell from his face as he looked at her.

“What’s wrong?” He asked, getting up from a barely moving Mark.

“I’ll explain on the road. We just need to go now!” She begged him.

“Go? Go where?” He asked, taking a step closer to her.

“Away, as far and as fast as we can.” She begged him. “It’s my only chance.” She confessed. He nodded and made for the car. She followed after him. Before she knew it, they were in the car, speeding away from town. It would be awhile before she figured out how to tell him everything, but she knew she would need to. They ditched their phones and made for the state line. She knew that the odds of escaping Na’ta were unlikely. He was a demon after all, and as such, had all the time in the world to hunt her down. All she could do was hope to stay one step ahead of him, until she figured out away to exercise him and free Liam. Not that Liam deserved to be free, not after all the pain he had caused her.

She thought about the others, how each of them had reached out to her for help, in warning. She left them behind, knowing that she couldn’t save them. That in trying to help them, she would have joined them in death. Something she wasn’t eager to do. She was leaving behind her whole life, her sister, her parents. Her whole world, and all so that she could run from the mess that she had caused.

As they drove down the interstate, Kevin took her hand in his. She grabbed it back, thankful to know that she wasn’t in this alone.

The End.