

THE PERCIVALS: LONDON CALLING

by Eboni Dunbar

"Damn, damn, damn," Eleanor cursed as they ran through the alleyway.

"Darling, language," Anna Maria said, taking a tight left turn, lifting her voluminous skirt so as not to trip. Eleanor followed close behind her, making the turn and then another, sending them around in a circle. They were going as fast as they could and the truth was Anna Maria could hear the creature behind them, catching up.

She turned again, right into the waiting arms of another vampire.

"Damn." Anna Maria came to a stop. Eleanor smirked as she moved to stand with her back against Anna Maria's and rolling her shoulders, ready for a fight.

"Ready to die, Percivals?" The vampire in front of Anna Maria slurred.

It had hidden its true face behind the beauty of a handsome young woman, bright pink cheeks, and long glossy blond hair. Now

though, the Monster's hideousness could not be mistaken. Its red eyes glowed, cheeks marred by wrinkles where the flesh had stretched and contorted around its elongated fangs. The glossy hair was gone, replaced by dry stringy remnants. It sneered as best it could with such a full mouth.

"Not quite yet, no." Anna Maria threw her holy water into the monster's face.

She lunged while it caterwauled and bellowed. The vampire tossed her aside, into the building that was nearest them. Anna Maria struggled to stand. The creature stalked forward and she forced herself to straighten. She ran a hand over her dress to smooth it and let out a melodic shriek, the sound causing the monster to close her hands around her ears. She forced her stake between the creature's ribs, piercing its heart. Usually, she would have taken the time to watch the second death, to see it take hold of the vampire. Now though, she had Eleanor to think of.

Yet, nothing to worry about. Eleanor was scratched along her face but the creature she'd been fighting was slumped against the wall. She was breathing heavily as she pulled the stake back out and looked at Anna Maria.

"I hate the docks. Too many vermin," Eleanor said, reaching

out and pulling Anna Maria into her arms. Anna Maria smiled up into Eleanor's face. "And I'm not even certain these two beasts are what we were looking for. Why would vampires wait for the full moon? Even if it is a full nest, the behavior is odd."

"I'm not sure either, but that's the point of hunting. We'll find our prey and end them. Now for the moment, isn't this lovely? A dark corner of the world just for us. Couldn't you endure it for me?" Anna Maria said.

"I would endure everything for you." Eleanor leaned down and Anna Maria lifted up on to her toes, pressing their lips together. Eleanor put one arm around her waist and the other through her quickly curling hair. All that sweat had not been good for her press.

"Shall we burn the bodies, love?" Anna Maria said breathlessly, when Eleanor released her.

"With pleasure, my heart," Eleanor said.

They released each other, pulling the two bodies together and lighting them on fire. They stood in the glow, holding hands, making sure the fire didn't get out of control.

#

The huntresses took their time walking to their next engagement, stopping briefly at the chimney boy's place in

Spitalfields to let him know he shouldn't have any further issue with creatures. It had taken them three days to sniff the beasts out and now they were finally ready for an evening off.

The Wellmingham Ball had been James's favorite event of the year. It had been his opportunity to show Anna Maria off and, in the time since his passing, she had not been able to say no to continuing the tradition. Of course, without James's charm and wit, she was left feeling out of place in the room full of old, white, titled fools.

She wished, bodily, that she had had the time to rest: A few hours before the party to dress, re-press her hair, and hopefully get rid of the cold that was settling into her chest and head. Still, she would not be deterred from attending. For James's sake.

She could still hear his deep voice as he'd praised her to everyone who would listen. Everyone had liked to listen to James.

Alone now, Anna Maria and Eleanor made their rounds, speaking to whomever deigned to speak to them as they searched for their host. Neville Wellmingham had been a dear friend of James and Alexander both. James had often joked that Neville was his second brother, he'd followed the pair so closely in school.

Seeing him reminded her of evenings with the four of them, five when Eleanor joined them, out to parties or the theater. There had been a time when she had wondered if he might join them, despite his views on the impossibility of vampires; though it had never happened, he had treated Anna Maria like any other English gentleman's wife, and not like some exotic treat which he would gladly take a bite of.

"Neville," Anna Maria said, holding out her hand as Neville reached for it.

"Anna Maria," He said, kissing the top of her hand and pulling her close. "You look...in need of rest."

"Aren't you the charmer?" She said with a cheeky smile. "I wouldn't miss the ball, not even ill. James would never forgive me."

Neville's smile was weak as he took Eleanor's hand and gave it a friendly squeeze. "I'm shocked you let her out of the house, Ele."

"I considered it." Eleanor pulled him in for a hug, and Anna Maria rolled her eyes.

"Well, I'm glad you came anyway. Let me know if you're not feeling up to singing, I'm sure Beatrice Cole would be ecstatic if I asked her," Neville said. Anna Maria scrunched her nose. It

wasn't that she didn't like Beatrice's voice, it was only... Neville laughed and lowered his voice. "Her selections will be nowhere near as interesting as yours. And we both know she'll be insufferable."

Anna Maria hid a chuckle. "I think I'll be fine."

"I'll get you some tea." Eleanor bowed slightly to Neville and walked into the crowd. The sight of her retreating back felt like a reminder of how alone Anna Maria truly was. She turned to follow Eleanor but Neville grabbed her hand.

"Well, hello old sir, just the man I should want to meet with this lady here," Neville said to someone behind Anna Maria. She turned and was shocked by the handsomeness of the man behind her.

He was tall and dark-haired with light eyes that reminded her of James. He wore a warm smile and, though there was some slight surprise as he took her in, there was mostly interest. He smiled warmly and stepped in closer so he could be introduced.

"Sir Arthur Bors, I have the pleasure of introducing you to Mrs. James Percival," Neville said.

Anna Maria smiled, offering Sir Bors her hand to kiss. "And are you the younger or the elder?"

He pressed soft, warm lips to her flesh and gave her a wry

smile. "The younger. And do you perhaps have the Holy Grail in your handbag, Mrs. Percival?"

"However did you know?" She batted her eyelashes. Sir Bors laughed, and it was rich. She could not fight the warm feeling that suffused her, but she tried anyway.

"Do you know, quite a few people mentioned that London was beginning to rebuild its own roundtable but I didn't know what they meant," Sir Bors said. "I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance."

"As am I," Anna Maria said. "And more pleased that you are not sensitive to a little good-natured laughter."

"Of course. Will I have the pleasure of meeting your husband, Mrs. Percival?"

Anna Maria's smile faltered but she tried to keep the cheer in her tone as she spoke. "I'm afraid Mr. Percival is no longer with us."

Sir Bors' hand sought hers and pulled it close. He gave her a slight squeeze. "I'm very sorry to hear that."

"Ah, I have to go and say hello to a few other guests," Neville said, and Anna Maria had nearly forgotten he was there. "I leave you both in excellent hands."

Neville winked at Anna Maria before he disappeared into the

crowd. Anna Maria smiled shyly and Sir Bors' smile grew. She let him lead her to a few of the chairs that sat along the outer edge of the room and listened as he told her of his origin. She'd begun to feel they were in their own little world when someone cleared their throat. Anna Maria raised her face and looked up into Eleanor's. It was carefully blank but Anna Maria could see the confusion written in the slightly clenched jaw and the way the cup in her hand shook slightly. Anna Maria stood, taking the cup from Eleanor.

"Eleanor, thank you. May I introduce you to Sir Arthur Bors? Sir Bors, my sister-in-law and companion, Mrs. Alexander Percival," Anna Maria said. Sir Bors stood and shook Eleanor's hand. She gripped his fingers more firmly than was strictly necessary.

Sir Bors smiled. "A pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Percival. It seems you Percivals abound."

"Actually, aside from our mother-in-law, Eleanor and I are all that remain of that line," Anna Maria said.

Sir Bors nodded, his face taking on a concerned look. "I'm very sorry. At least you have each other."

Anna Maria looked up at Eleanor and the other woman offered a soft smile. "Yes, we certainly do."

"I'm sorry to pull her away," Eleanor said. "But Neville is ready to start the entertainment."

Anna Maria nodded. "Ah, of course. Will you excuse us, Sir Bors?"

The gentleman nodded and Anna Maria placed her hand in the curve of Eleanor's arm. Eleanor led her through the crowd, the room parting for them easily. No one wanted to be required to speak to them unless it was absolutely necessary.

"You seem to be feeling better," Eleanor said.

Anna Maria felt her face heat. "I suppose I do feel a little less ill."

"That's not what I meant," Eleanor said. Anna Maria raised an eyebrow. "You haven't looked at a man like that since James."

Anna Maria hid her face in Eleanor's arm as they exited the ballroom and came to stand in the hallway near where the performance would take place. Eleanor wasn't wrong. She'd loved Alexander, but losing James had made them both...distant with each other. Since James had died, Eleanor had been almost her sole source of love and pleasure, but it hadn't bothered her, right up until the moment that she lost Alexander too. She wished she had cherished him more after, loved him better. Wouldn't they have been happier if they had leaned on each

other? Would Alexander still be here if he had thought he could come to her with his plans?

Anna Maria fidgeted uncomfortably. "It's not--"

Eleanor looked around the hall and then pressed Anna Maria into a small alcove. She pressed one hand to Anna Maria's cheek running her thumb over the soft skin. "I'm not bothered by it in the least. I love you very much and your happiness means everything to me. Perhaps, slowing down with hunting means picking up a social life."

Anna Maria frowned. "I have a social life, thank you."

"You have us, but maybe you need more than that. Maybe..." Eleanor frowned too. She lifted Anna Maria's chin and searched her eyes for a moment before she kissed her gently. "Let's discuss it later."

"Alright," Anna Maria didn't like the way Eleanor wasn't meeting her eyes. They slipped back out into the hallway just as Neville was stepping in from the concert area. He waved them over and Anna Maria went.

#

Despite her cold, Anna Maria was in her element before the assembled group. She sipped her tea and sang old and new favorites, all to the applause of the crowd. For all that they

would not stop to speak to her, they certainly did not mind enjoying whatever entertainment she was willing to provide.

"If you will indulge me for a moment. This time of year brings to mind my darling husband. I would like to sing you his favorite song." Anna Maria thought of James's face in the crowd, of Alexander beside him. The two of them whispering back and forth to each other about how lucky they were. Or at least that was what they said.

*For all the worlds for you,  
 For all the story's changed,  
 Every heart my love deserves,  
 And his own heart now to save  
 For I have loved him but my love simply begins  
 For all the worlds for you, my love  
 No matter what it says.*

She played the interlude and took a moment to survey the room. Eleanor stood in the doorway at one end of the room, her face stoic. Anna Maria continued, until she found Sir Bors, who smiled warmly at her. She didn't linger too long, taking in the rest of the room--

The man at the other doorway was tall and broad, his clothes filthy, shredded by claw or fang or some other

instrument. His white blonde hair was wet and stringy. She could see his chest rising and falling quickly. His eyes... the longing and the anguish she could see sent a bolt of lightning through her chest.

Her hands faltered on the piano and she stood, taking a step toward the corner. There was no one there now, but he had been. He had, there was no mistaking those eyes.

Neville stood and stepped into her sightline. "Anna Maria?"

"Did...Did you see?"

He followed her gaze. "I don't see anything. Are you alright?"

Anna Maria looked up at him and then back toward the door.

"No, I don't think I am."

Eleanor had moved through the room and she came to stand on Neville's side, blocking the remaining view of the room.

"What is it?" Eleanor asked.

"I've just seen Alexander Percival in the flesh," Anna Maria said.

Both Neville and Eleanor's eyes bulged and a shiver crawled up Anna Maria's spine. If she had seen what she thought she had, what did that mean?

#

When they returned home, Anna Maria went for the books. She spent the entire evening buried in every book in the library, searching for some way Alexander could be alive that didn't end with her former lover becoming a vampire. She ignored Eleanor's protests as well as the protests of the rest of her household. Charlie Parson, their resident medium and vehicle to the dead, tried to get her to eat and Victor DePaul, the other hunter that lived in their house, tried to carry her off to bed bodily. He was quickly reminded that however ill, Anna Maria was still a fighter. She put each in their place and woke two mornings on the sofa of the study, her neck and back aching and her cold significantly worse.

And she found nothing. Everything led her back to monsters. Led her back to Alexander's soul defiled. Could the same be true for James? Her stomach knotted at the thought.

On the third morning after the ball, she woke to Charlie Parson's face above hers. Anna Maria punched out and Charlie managed to narrowly avoid being hit. Her heart raced and she sat up, trying get her bearings. She could feel the blood pumping furiously in her veins. She took deep, steady breaths, trying to slow her heart. She closed her eyes and began again, filling her chest with air.

When Anna Maria could feel herself settling, she opened her eyes. Charlie was kneeling on the floor by the sofa, his eyes wide. She sighed.

"I'm sorry, darling, you frightened me. I apologize," she said.

Charlie's voice was barely a whisper. He was extremely sensitive to the moods of others, having suffered abuse in his youth. "Are you feeling better?"

"A little. I'm a bit hungry," Anna Maria said.

"I'll get you something," Charlie said, moving to leave the room. When he reached the door, he stopped. He tensed for a moment, his eyes scrunching in thought. "James says, look in the book. You've got to use that pretty head of yours, not just your voice."

He looked up at her, anxiety in his face. She smiled, trying to reassure him. James had never chosen to speak through Charlie before. Not that she knew.

She tried to sound nonchalant as she spoke. "Did he say which book, darling?"

"Alexander's."

She nodded her head and Charlie left the room, leaving additional questions in his wake. Every book in the library was

Alexander's. She loved her husband but he was not the scholar his brother was.

Eleanor returned shortly with a tray of soup and a buttered biscuit, sitting down on the floor. She said nothing as she placed a napkin in Anna Maria's lap. Eleanor carefully spooned the hot soup into her mouth.

Anna Maria sighed after swallowing. "I've been a bit difficult.

Eleanor raised an eyebrow. "You? Never."

"I'm sorry. I love you."

Eleanor put the soup spoon down. "You were the same when James died. I was grateful that you came to me when Alexander...When we thought he had passed."

Anna Maria waited, letting Eleanor say everything she needed to say.

Eleanor sighed. "I don't want to lose you too. The only reason I'm here is you. You're all--"

Her voice broke and Anna Maria pushed herself down to the floor, pulling her lover into her arms. Eleanor sobbed into her shoulder and Anna Maria closed her eyes, trying to keep herself from crying. She hadn't known Eleanor felt this way. Hadn't even considered it. She always thought of Eleanor as so strong.

Anna Maria whispered. "I'm sorry, love. You don't need to worry about me."

"I do. Because you don't worry about yourself."

"I'll do better. I promise."

Eleanor raised her head and kissed Anna Maria possessively. "Then come to bed."

Anna Maria nodded. She let Eleanor stand up and then pull her to her feet. They left the study and went up the stairs, Eleanor's arms wrapped tightly around Anna Maria's waist. They crawled into bed together and Anna Maria wrapped herself around Eleanor as much as she could.

#

She dreamed of the night she'd first met Alexander--the night that truly changed her life. She and James had met a few weeks prior and their love for each other had grown with each passing day. He had decided she needed to know about the business that had brought him to the pub she had been singing in. He decided she needed to meet his brother.

So James had invited Anna Maria to Grosvenor Square to meet his mother and brother. She'd spent hours trying to make a dress that would be acceptable for a family who had been a wealthy for a few generations. When she'd arrived, she'd known she'd made an

error. The Butler's raised eyebrow was enough to tell her that.

"Anna Maria," James had said as he'd rushed down the stairs to take her hands. The adoration in his eyes had been the only thing that kept her from running right back out the door. "I'm so happy that you're here. Come and meet Alex."

He'd pulled her into the study, where Alexander had stood at the desk, writing in a diary, a stark contrast to James's dark hair and light eyes. Alexander's hair had been ice white, his eyes a piercing brown, and he had looked at her for a long, assessing moment before James finally spoke.

"Anna Maria, Mr. Alexander Percival, my brother and business partner. Alex, meet Anna Maria, the love of my life," James had said, his voice going gooey and loving. She'd smiled then and it warmed her even in her dream to hear him say it.

"You are not what I expected," Alexander had said, his tone bland.

"Alex," James had said by way of warning.

"I expected a strong beauty and what I see here is a weak woman playing dress up in three year old silk. Did you think you were working at the whore house this evening rather than meeting your lover's family? James you cannot be serious about her," Alexander had said. Her whole face had gone hot and she'd had to

grasp James firmly before he told his brother off.

"And yet, you're jealous," Anna Maria had said because it was true. It wasn't until later that she'd realized he was not jealous of her having James, but James for having met her. He'd wanted her to run so that at least the brothers could be alone together.

Alexander's eyes had widened, his lips had pursed and he'd looked poised to pounce. And then he'd smiled.

"At least you have a bit of wit."

How many times she had awakened in a cold sweat because she had given the wrong answer. Because she had cried. Because she had run from the room. For all the pain that she had suffered, a life without ever having known James and Alexander was not a life she wanted to live.

When she woke, Eleanor was still in bed beside her, breathing steadily. Anna Maria reached out and ran her hand over Eleanor's cheek. She leaned up on her elbow and kissed that cheek before she slipped out of bed. With deft hands she pulled her robe on and went down stairs, her focus on the desk. The drawers rolled smoothly as Anna Maria pulled each open and searched for the diary. When she found nothing, she stepped back surveying it, then went to her knees, running her fingers along

the desks edge and searching for some sort of latch or hidden compartment. When she felt the latch deep beneath the desk her heart stopped. She pressed and a tiny drawer at the floor on her left snapped open. She pulled the drawer open further, pulling out the diary that Alexander had been writing in all those years ago. The book was leather bound, with a leather string across the front.

Anna Maria's hands shook as she opened it. Tears welled in her eyes at the sight of Alexander's careful script and James's less careful additions. Where younger brother wrote a clear, complete account of the creature they had faced, the elder added notes that many people would have thought inconsequential, striking out long descriptions to say "face like a vampire" or "skin like a fish", not incorrect based on Alexander's description but quicker. She turned through the pages, looking for what she knew she would find. She took the book back up to Eleanor, waking her with kisses.

"Good morning," Eleanor said in a sleepy voice, looking her over. "What have you been up to?"

"I think I know who's really been doing all these killings in London and why I saw Alexander the other night," Anna Maria said.

Eleanor pressed up onto her elbows. "You do?"

"Yes," Anna Maria said and kissed Eleanor again. "Let's have a bath and then wake Victor."

Eleanor's grin was lopsided as she looked over Anna Maria and leaned in for yet another kiss. "Alright."

#

Victor and Eleanor sat on the sofa as Anna Maria paced the floor in front of the fireplace. They waited patiently while Anna Maria composed herself. Victor had been with them several years, helping to hunt and manage the household as best he could. It was Victor who had brought Charlie to them, wanting to give his delicate lover some stability. Victor was an excellent hunter, eager and skilled, and it was a blessing to have him. Anna Maria was even more grateful now.

Anna Maria stopped in front of them. "You both know we've been concerned about the potential of a new nest. Except this nest never behaved in a way that made sense. It hunted only over a full moon and never over the same area. And then there were several months when nothing happened."

"Certainly a puzzle," Victor said folding his arms over his chest. "No vampire I know behaves that way."

Eleanor teased. "Because you know so many?"

"Sod off."

Anna Maria sighed, trying to redirect them. "We've been looking at this the wrong way. There is a particular kind of monster, that only hunts around the full moon, and wouldn't need to hunt any other time. We thought it was vampires because that was what we knew, but we were wrong. It's a shifter," Anna Maria said showing them the drawing Alexander had done in the diary.

The drawing was rather lifelike. The creature it depicted had a man's legs but a wolf's torso and head; its snout was lifted to the sky, to the moon from Alexander's notes.

"A Werewolf?" Victor said looking up at her. "I thought they were a myth."

"It seems the Percival Brothers have left us ignorant to many potential dangers in our land. They had us focused on vampires, but that book discusses...hundreds of creatures who would kill us all given the chance," Anna Maria said, stilling.

"What does this have to do with Alexander?" Eleanor asked looking up at her.

"We never found his body. We assumed he died and was burned in the fire. But what if he didn't die? What if he was saved by creatures who could control themselves most of the time, and they could save him by making him one of them?" Anna Maria said.

She could see Eleanor trying to think it through.

"Why wouldn't he have come before?" Victor asked. "To tell you he wasn't dead? He can't have wanted you to be hurt."

"Think about werewolves, of the myth of them. Do you think they would let him just come home? Knowing what he would become? No, whoever took him, or Alexander himself, decided it was easier that we believed him dead."

"And when he exposed himself to you?"

"I don't know," Anna Maria said, dropping onto the sofa across from her family.

"How do we find them?" Victor asked, ignoring the tension in the room. She was glad he accepted her word.

"The moon, we have to chase the moon. There was a pattern to their attacks, always over a full moon and always in a different area. Between us I think we could cover the potential ground," Anna Maria said. Eleanor still looked uncertain but Victor looked ready to jump into the fray with her. "Eleanor?"

"Give me a minute," She said looking at the book. Anna Maria waited patiently. "Yeah, alright. I'm willing to try it."

"Thank you. That gives us a few days to do as much research as we can on Werewolves. Not that we have any idea where to look," Anna Maria said.

Victor took the book back and studied it. "They didn't leave us much did they?"

"They really were trying to hide things from us," Eleanor said. Anna Maria smiled sadly.

"Where do we start?" Victor said.

"Now that we know what we're looking for I'm sure we have some books on the subject. We just have to look."

Victor and Eleanor nodded, standing. Anna Maria sighed. She couldn't decide if she hoped she was wrong or right.

#

Anna Maria stood under the streetlamp of a Park Lane corner. She pulled her shawl a little tighter over her shoulders, fighting a shiver as she searched the street for any activity. She was geared to the hilt with every bit of silver she could find. The full moon glowed with power and Anna Maria felt certain she could feel it drawing night creatures.

They had decided to split up, much to Eleanor's chagrin, each of them taking a likely spot from their research. Anna Maria was fairly certain that Eleanor had assigned her the least likely spot of the three they'd chosen. She sighed and closed her eyes, trying to steady herself. She still was not entirely well, not that she'd said anything about it. With her eyes

closed, she could feel the pain behind them and the ache in her joints. She opened her eyes again and her hand went right to her blade.

"Don't," Alexander said, his voice rough and his eyes glittering unnaturally gold. "Don't Annie. You'll wake the wolf and you don't want that."

"Alexander," She said, and her eyes welled with tears. The creature who had been her lover leaned closer, staring down into her face. He looked wild, his blond hair scraggly, his face unshaven, and his eyes darting all over her.

"So beautiful," He said. "And clever too. I knew you'd figure it out."

"Is there...is there nothing--"

Alexander growled and turned his back to her. At first, she thought he meant to leave but then she saw them just over his shoulder. There were six wolf men before her, their snouts lifted as they sniffed. She wondered if she knew any of these men.

"Leave her alone," Alexander snarled. One of the wolf men howled, long and loud, and it made the hairs stand up on the back of Anna Maria's neck.

"We warned you," a man's voice said. Anna Maria looked but

she did not recognize the man before her. He was struggling to be human enough to speak, his claws ripping at his own flesh with the need to change. "No one can know of us. And now, your beloved negress will have to die."

He stopped trying to maintain his humanity, leaping forward. Alexander shifted as well, meeting the man in challenge, their jaws open and trying to tear at each other. Anna Maria didn't hesitate, throwing a blade at each of the other five. They moved like animals, faster, snarling and running towards her. One was hit by her blade and it staggered back whining as the silver tipped steel began to burn its flesh. He fell to the ground. The others were luckier, taking her blades to their extremities and tossing them aside with ease. Anna Maria pulled out another blade just as she was slammed by the nearest wolf, knocking her on her back and the air from her lungs. She plunged her blade into its heart and the wolf jerked then stilled, its body becoming dead weight on top of her. Another wolf leaped on top of them, its jaws snapping as it attempted to get past its fellow to maul Anna Maria. She tried to work her hands out from between her body and the wolf's, to pull another blade from her gown.

Another wolf appeared behind the second and it shoved him

aside, pulling the dead man from on top of her. It snarled, baring its teeth and standing over her menacingly. Anna Maria pulled another blade free and pushed herself backwards, trying to put some more space between herself and the wolf. A howl filled the air and Alexander smashed into the back of one of the two wolves standing over her. The last wolf jumped at her, but its bright gold eyes went dead and gray before it reached her. Anna Maria looked beyond him.

"Mrs. Percival, you were not what I was expecting," Sir Bors said, freeing his sword from the wolf's chest. He held his hand out and she took it, letting him pull her up.

"I must say, Sir Bors, you are the very last person I was expecting," Anna Maria said. A snarl interrupted any words she would have said and she turned her attention to Alexander.

The wolf he had attacked was supine, transformed into its human form. She didn't recognize this man either. He begged, his hands scrabbling over Alexander's shoulders and neck. Sir Bors raised his blade and Anna Maria stepped in front of him.

"Madam, you will not keep me from my work," Sir Bors said in censoring tone.

"Nor will you keep me from mine," Anna Maria said. She looked over her shoulder as her lover finished the last wolf.

"Alexander?"

The wolf raised his head. His eyes were feral and glittering and where the others had seemed to be able to change back, with some difficulty because of the pull of the moon, Alexander made no attempt, or if he did, he failed.

"Run, darling," Anna Maria said. Sir Bors stepped forward as though he meant to push past her and Anna Maria raised her blade to his neck. "Don't."

Alexander howled, long and loud, like a heart breaking into tiny pieces. He snarled in Sir Bors direction and then ran. When they could no longer see him, Anna Maria stepped back, putting her blade back in its holster. Sir Bors stared at her then looked off in the direction Alexander had gone. Anna Maria braced herself to have to stop him from chasing her former lover.

"I think, Mrs. Percival, that you and I need to have an honest conversation about what has happened here," Sir Bors said.

"I agree. Will you accompany me home?"

Sir Bors held out his arm in answer and Anna Maria slipped her hand into the crook of his arm. They strolled as though they were simply taking the air and not catching their breath after

battling werewolves. Anna Maria hoped that wherever Alexander had gone he was safe.

#

Eleanor was pacing the foyer when Anna Maria and Sir Bors entered the Percival House. She pointedly ignored the man and pulled Anna Maria into her arms, hugging her tightly before she held her at arm's length to look her over.

"I'm perfectly fine," Anna Maria said. "A few bruised ribs. Thankfully, Alexander and Sir Bors were there to help me."

"You really saw him?" Eleanor said the surprise evident in her tone, though not her face. She eyed Sir Bors who watched the interaction with interest.

"Yes. I did, and it was as I feared," Anna Maria said.

"Old Alex is a werewolf?" Victor said, stepping out of the parlor. "And there is a strange gentleman in our foyer."

"Victor DePaul, Sir Arthur Bors. Sir Bors, Victor DePaul. Welcome to the Percival family vampire hunters," Anna Maria said. Sir Bors raised an eyebrow.

Introductions made, Anna Maria directed them all into the study and fetched tea for the lot. Charlie found his way into the room, sitting at the desk where he could observe but not draw attention to himself. Moira, the butler, joined him. Anna

Maria poured tea, and then took her place beside Eleanor. Sir Bors studied each of them in turn.

"Are werewolves your particular specialty, Sir Bors?" Anna Maria asked, sipping her tea.

"They are," Sir Bors said. "How are you all related exactly? The truth if you please. That wolf seemed quite taken with you."

"That wolf is my husband's brother, Eleanor's husband," Anna Maria considered. "And my lover."

Sir Bors froze in place. "Come again."

"I believe you understood me, though perhaps you don't believe me. We started hunting vampires because of my husband and Alexander. We believe that the latter became a werewolf shortly after he avenged his brother's death. We hadn't seen what we believe are werewolf attacks until about six months ago. And I believe you have something to do with that."

"What does he have to do with it?" Victor asked.

"You've been chasing this pack for some time haven't you?" Anna Maria said. Sir Bors nodded, sitting his tea down.

"Yes, chasing them from the city to the highlands and right back here to London. The behavior is more erratic than I'm used to with wolves. They like their territories. The movement must

have been because of your Alexander. He must have been eager to get back to you," Sir Bors said. "He cannot be allowed to live. That he was able to keep himself aware enough to kill his fellows tonight instead of you is a miracle. It will not always be true. And he may still kill others tonight."

"I can't believe that," Anna Maria said. "You saw him."

"Werewolves are consumed by the animal. Your Alexander may be fighting but he will not win. The moon will win. The beast will win. I imagine it is the same for vampires. There is no changing them. Only killing them."

"But most of the time he's of his right mind, is he not? Vampires are always impacted by their soullessness. Werewolves are men--" Charlie said from his spot at the desk. It was so unlike him to interject that Anna Maria looked at him as he spoke, his pale cheeks going redder with every word.

"Men who have been devoured by the beast. It is not only the full moon you must worry about. The three nights while it waxes and the three nights while it wanes are just as dangerous. But why am I explaining this to you? Stick to your vampires," Sir Bors said, looking Anna Maria in her eyes as she turned back to look at him. "Clearly, they are all you can handle."

Eleanor jerked forward, ready to fight but Anna Maria

raised her hand, stopping her. She stood up, letting herself tower over Sir Bors for a moment. She smiled her fakest smile.

"Your concern is noted Sir Bors, but what you may have neglected to realize is that you have no control here. This is the house of the Pericvals. Of the DePauls. Of Parson and Newton. I have not said Bors, have I? We are the deciders of our fate. Of our work. And while we would gladly take any recommendation that you care to give we will act as we choose. Hunt as we choose. And if you believe you can tell a negro, Diva, and huntress with more love than can be given to one person what she can and cannot do then you are sorely mistaken. Moira? See Sir Bors out."

"With pleasure, madam," Moira said with a smile, moving forward and gesturing for Sir Bors to proceed her. The man had gone bright red with every word spoken and he stood with indignation. He bowed, though not quite respectfully and strode out of the room.

Anna Maria let herself sink back to the sofa. Her headache was returning. Eleanor moved to the sofa, lifting Anna Maria's legs into her lap.

"Have I told you lately that you're stunning when you're angry?" She said, taking Anna Maria's hand into hers and kissing

it.

"Not today, no," Anna Maria said.

"I personally was quite terrified," Victor said. "Now that he's gone, what do we do? They won't stick to their pattern from here. Six dead, Alexander in the wind. It'll be a dangerous time to walk the streets of London," Victor said. Charlie stood up, joining him on his own sofa. Victor kissed the top of Charlie's forehead as the other man settled beside him.

"We'll think of something. We just need to know our prey better. Perhaps we can't track the pack but I think given the opportunity we could get Alexander," Anna Maria said.

"How?" Eleanor said.

"By giving him all his favorite things," Anna Maria said.

She pulled herself free of Eleanor's lap and went to the desk, sending off a quick missive to Wellmingham. He wouldn't like what she proposed but he was sure to do it. Now all she needed was the rest of her bait.

#

The "One Night Only! Diva Extraordinaire" marketing had worked well, gathering the elite of London into one room. Charlie was already posted by the door with a list to make note of any absences. They had to use every opportunity available to

them.

She checked herself in the mirror once more and laid the silver cross around her neck more carefully on her chest. There was a soft throat clearing outside the curtain and she took a deep, calming breath. Then she went out to meet her audience.

The crowd clapped politely and Anna Maria curtsied. She studied the crowd before her, looking at all the familiar faces. She caught Victor's eye for just a moment before he removed himself from the room.

"Ladies and Gentleman, thank you for joining us for this special performance. As many of you know, I was unable to finish the evening of the Wellmingham Ball and I could not allow myself to let that stand. And so tonight, I have prepared for you a few very special songs, inspired by the moon."

The assembled ladies and gentleman clapped once more and Anna Maria sat at the piano. She began to play, trying to impart the slow ease she had with all the songs she knew, even if this one was different.

*Oh she holds her sway*

*Bright and silver, filling the night*

*Those called come to play*

*Those basking in her glory*

*Come to me*

*Oh she holds her sway*

*The moon called*

*Come away*

*Away with me*

*And those not so blessed*

*Get thee to bed*

*Oh she holds her say*

*The silver, the gray*

*She holds the night*

*Let those touched by her light*

*Come to me.*

She felt it when the room went silent but she did not look up. If she was right, if the song had done its work, then anyone not moon-called, anyone not a shifter, should be asleep. She continued to play and sang the words again before she stopped, pulling her hands from the keys and turning to the room.

Four men stood, their eyes aglow from the magic of her call. The moon was on its final night of power. They had not shifted, but it was a near thing. Anna Maria smiled.

"Gentlemen, I want no grief with you, I only want Alexander," Anna Maria said. One of the men, and this one she

knew, a Lord Albert something or other, cocked his head. He rarely deigned to speak to her and when he did it was always from down his nose.

"We thought you would know where to find him. If you had waited, we would have sought you after the performance, but now..." He said letting his words trail off. The other three wolves, jumped over the heads of the guests, their faces contorting and shifting into their wolfish form.

Anna Maria pulled a silver blade free and whistled. Victor and Eleanor entered the room, both of them brandishing their own silver blades. Lord Albert Something let his own face change, howling with anger. The three wolves split, one attacking Victor, one attacking Eleanor, and one attacking Anna Maria. She made short work of hers--the wolf Anna Maria fought was young and foolish. He clearly thought her being a woman meant he had the advantage. He took her blade to heart. Anna Maria didn't stop, striding toward Lord Albert Something to attack him, but then someone stood in her way.

Neville held his hand up, his eyes aglow and filled with tears. Anna Maria stopped, frozen in place.

"I only wanted to help him, Anna," Neville said.

"Kill her, Wellmingham. Be useful for once," Lord Albert

said.

"Neville, you changed him?" Anna Maria said.

"I was closer than you were, to that nest. He came to me, begged me to fetch you but I knew he wouldn't survive--"

"And so against every law of the pack, against the word of his Alpha, he made your brother-in-law a wolf," Lord Albert said. He was moving through the guests slowly, making his way towards them. Anna Maria could hear Eleanor and Victor still fighting the other two wolves.

"But I don't understand," Anna Maria said. "Did...did they know?"

Neville shook his head, his eyes still glittering with tears and magic. Lord Albert moved to his side, shoving Neville toward Anna Maria. The younger man stopped short.

"I'm sorry Anna Maria. I don't want to hurt you but the pack...the Alpha is angry with me as it is," Neville said. His transformation was quick but there was something more beautiful about it than any of the others. Or perhaps it was beautiful in its sadness. Neville stepped towards her, baring his wolf teeth.

A howl rent through the hall, loud and long and dangerous. Anna Maria stepped backwards, keeping her eyes on Neville until a clawed hand pressed against her back. She looked up. Alexander

was focused on Neville and Lord Albert Something. Eleanor had killed her wolf and she made her way to their side, studying Alexander before she looked at Neville. Victor was slower coming and he was scratched and cut along one side, though the wolf he'd been fighting was also limping a bit.

"I think gentlemen, you'd do well to back down tonight," Anna Maria said.

Lord Albert shook his head. "The Alpha will have your blood."

"If the Alpha intends to survive another month," Sir Bors's voice came from the back of the room, startling everyone. "Then he'll leave the Percivals be."

Lord Albert's eyes bulged. He looked from Sir Bors to Alexander and back again. He growled but whispered to his companions. Neville changed face, his human cheeks flushed.

"Won't someone notice--"

"I don't care!" Lord Albert shouted. He led the remaining wolf, and Neville from the room, though Anna Maria could see the longing on his face to stay. She looked at Sir Bors, but he hadn't moved. He stood in the doorway where Anna Maria had seen Alexander for the first time after so many months. He smiled.

"I owe you an apology," Sir Bors said taking in the still

frozen guests. "I underestimated you and I underestimated him. Will you allow me to come to your home tomorrow and give you a more thorough accounting of my faults?"

"Yes, I think we can allow that," Anna Maria said looking up at Alexander. His face was still wolfish but she could sense the man beneath. She looked back at the werewolf hunter.

Sir Bors nodded and bowed, slipping from the room. Eleanor let Victor lean on her as she led Alexander out into the hallway. Anna Maria took her place at the piano, eager to finish her performance so she could rush home to her family.

#

Anna Maria walked herself home, her body tense as she waited to see if the wolves would attack her now she was alone. They did not, and she had to admit that they certainly seemed to be better gentleman than Vampires. When she arrived home, Moira met her at the door and took her coat. Her face was blotchy and red and her eyes matched, though she said nothing.

The Vampire huntress checked on Victor, though Charlie was doing an excellent job of caring for his lover's wounds. She kissed them both on the head and made her way, finally, to her bedroom. Alexander lay on the bed, Eleanor beside him, his head resting on her chest and her fingers running through his hair.

If Anna Maria had been a painter, she would have wanted to get this down on canvas. The light and the dark, god of day and goddess of night. The two looked up at her as she closed the door behind her, locked it. She wished James was at her side, wrapping her in his arms and helping her undress, preparing her for the other two. For once, she let a tear run down her cheek, but only one.

"Are you two ready for bed?" She said, stepping further into the room and beginning to untie her own gown. Eleanor moved to stand but Anna Maria raised her hand. "There will be consequences tomorrow. Changes to make. Words to say and actions to address. For now..."

She let her gown pool at her feet and felt the hunger from her lovers' gazes.

"Let's enjoy the night."