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## Broken Harvest

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Quinn jolted, sleep to full awareness within a blink of an eye. His muscles tensed as his gaze scanned the room for anything unusual. When he finally realized he was the lone soul in the moonlit room, he knew something was wrong.

*Evande.*

Sleep wasn't the highest priority for her. But her quiet movements around the house despite its large size usually woke him in a routine he'd grown used to. He searched his memories, tried to recall if she said anything this evening. Made some reference to troubled sleep he'd missed earlier during dinner.

Everyone had dreams and a five hundred year old vampire was certainly no exception. With her age, those visions were probably more vivid and realistic.

He'd once wished he could take them away completely.

Worry creased his forehead as he pushed the sheet aside and slipped on a pair of black lounge pants that lay pooled on the floor by the bed.

The moon beamed like a spotlight through the window, a shining beacon in the cold grip of winter. Mother Nature had pummeled them for the past few days with a vicious blizzard and this

was the first night the clouds had broken enough to allow the bright orb to shine. The bright light guided him to the wide door of the bedroom and he made one last cursory glance just in case he'd missed something.

When he found the room empty, his soul filled with a vast hollowness he'd become all too familiar with lately. An uncomfortable sensation, he pushed it away with a heavy sigh as he stepped into the hall.

The hardwood floor was smooth and cold under his feet. The winter air outside seeped under the foundation of the house he'd built one year prior. As he yawned, he made a mental note to look into a new heating system to overcome the chill. While it may be welcome in the summer as it brought relief to the sometimes humid Kentucky summers, full blown winter was another story entirely.

Thoughts of a radiant heating system vanished as his breath caught in his throat when he spotted her at the opposite end of the hall. He grinned at the quick flutter his heart gave. Christ, he loved that feeling. After hundreds and hundreds of years, she still managed to take his breath away.

Not something he'd openly admitted to her, though. Their agreement to sever their physical relationship years ago ensured his mouth stayed closed when he would have much rather opened it and talked some sense into her. Some battles were simply futile and he was old enough to know better.

It still hit him like a quick shot in the gut when he thought back to the very first night they'd fallen into bed together. Though it had

occurred so long ago, the memory was still vibrant as it was something he drew upon during the darkest of times.

The loss of her love was still a deep slash on his soul.

They caused one another more pain than joy and they were both known for their stubborn streak which resulted in fights where they ended up hating each other for days on end.

That wasn't any kind of relationship to try to sustain for hundreds of years.

She wanted something from him, something he suspected she'd wanted for quite some time but was too scared to ask. At first it was hard for him to accept because he'd spent so many years watching her feed right before his very eyes. He equated the act as nothing more than a necessity for her to live. To him, there was nothing sexual about it. Why should there be? He wasn't a being that needed the liquid in order to live. He was Dagda, High King of the Tuatha Dé Danann, and there was nothing about his immortality that required him to depend on another creature to live.

Quinn O'Brien just *was*.

While he didn't begrudge what she needed to live, he'd noticed something about those feedings. Time after time, he found he wanted to be the one her lips were on. He wanted his neck to be the one her teeth were sunk deep into.

The desire had grown, increased with each passing day.

He had tried to keep his struggle under wraps, but the occasional glances she gave told him she knew the torment he faced, which only made matters worse.

Despite their agreement to remain distant, the need hadn't diminished. The knife edge of it was certainly gone, kept far under wraps to ensure it never became an issue between them again. However, it still swam under the surface of his skin. Paced silently in wait for that one moment it could latch onto and punch him in the gut.

*Get a handle on it, O'Brien.*

The oddly shaded yellow color of the upholstery did nothing to enhance the woman sitting in the chair, but the bright beams of moonlight set her aglow. Then again, she was beautiful no matter what and the chair would stick out like a sore thumb with any décor. It was ugly and pitiful with its dark curves of antique wood legs. He'd never taken the time to throw it out because it wasn't a priority.

Now he was glad he hadn't.

And he vowed he never would either. Not now.

Despite the fact his gut screamed for him to turn away, he instead advanced forward a few steps. With her enhanced hearing she would be aware the moment he'd stepped out of the bed—possibly the second he'd awakened—and he waited for her to acknowledge him.

Moments later, her head turned slightly, but not enough for him to see her whole face. *Oh, you know I'm here all right.* Her mouth turned up slightly as she brushed her white blonde hair to the side and he relaxed into an easy walk up to stand beside her.

"Trouble sleeping?" He heard her ask and her voice slid over him like aged whiskey to create a burn low in his gut.

"Seems as if you're having trouble yourself."

The white shirt she wore rustled softly as she shifted to face him. In her apparent haste, she'd carelessly aligned a few buttons. The view this angle afforded made him unwillingly tense and he second guessed the decision to walk over here.

Her gaze lifted and he saw her eyes were a dark shade of blue, an indication she hadn't fed recently. She never intentionally forgot, but sometimes she would become so absorbed in other things, feeding wasn't a priority.

And that was dangerous for them both.

It confirmed his suspicion about a nightmare and made him wonder if she'd done this to herself on purpose. To remind herself of everything she both was and wasn't.

She rose from the chair, unfolded herself with an easy grace and shook her head. "I'll be fine. I'm going to try to get some rest now."

As she hastily brushed past him, he fell into the chair she vacated with a heavy sigh. Despite the fact she'd just been here, the cushion was still cold. Maybe he really should kick up the heat a few notches. Though it wasn't as if she put off any body heat of her own.

Not unless...he shook off the reminder of what happened when a vampire did have heat in their skin. His fingers tapped a pattern into the arm of the chair and he realized with a start she stood over him. Her body was so close and it was tempting to simply tell her what he wanted and worry about the consequences later.

Without thinking, his fingers brushed over her bare thigh and the contact made him shiver. But his reaction wasn't due to the temperature of her skin and he quickly clasped his hands in front of

him as he purposefully stared out the window to avoid looking at her. To possibly see the curves of her breasts through the thin shirt. He just couldn't take the chance she would see the desire that flared through his veins.

“Quinn?”

His gut clenched at the hushed tone of her voice. It wasn't hard to tell she wanted something. It could be thousands of things, innocent and perfectly harmless. But even as he thought of a few, he wished for only one.

“Yes?”

“I...nothing,” she said hastily as she changed her mind mid-sentence and turned to walk away.

He couldn't take this oppressive awkwardness between them any longer. Before he thought otherwise, his hand shot out and closed over her wrist. She gasped from the contact and he felt a jolt shoot up his arm, originating where their skin met. Normally, he would have stammered out an apology and taken away his hand, but something tonight had him doing just the opposite.

He pulled gently, urged her to come back to him.

His gaze finally tore away from the window and his cock stirred in response to the flash of flesh he glimpsed as he did. He swallowed the lump that formed in his throat. “Just want to make sure everything's okay.”

“I'm fine.” She nodded and tugged lightly in indication he should release her hand.

Though he did free her hand, he did so reluctantly. The contact had brought to life everything he'd so carefully locked away.

*Christ. What the hell's gotten into me?*

This wasn't his usual behavior. He acted like some horny teenager with raging hormones, not a former king who'd once been in charge of an entire society. She fidgeted and the sound of her thighs as they brushed together got the better of him.

*Fuck it.*

He reached over, put an arm behind her knees and swept her legs out from under her. She gave a soft yelp as he deposited her into his lap and she tensed. His strong arms came around her waist to ensure she couldn't get away from him.

"Relax. I'm not going to try anything." He purposefully kept his voice level and calm to reassure them both, though it was hard to not simply take.

Tension tightened muscles but her expression softened as her gaze lifted slowly to his. "I think that's the problem."

"What is?" he asked, wondering if she would continue to hide everything from him despite their close friendship. Something was wrong and sometimes he knew her better than she even knew herself.

"That you're not. Trying anything, I mean."

Elation erased doubt.

He'd been right. Something had been off between the two of them recently. It wasn't necessarily a bad thing, but certainly something that needed to be addressed.

"Ev," he whispered her name softly as his hand lifted to her face and the warm skin of his knuckles brushed lightly against the smooth, marble-like color of her cheek. She surprised him by not flinching

away from his touch. Instead, she turned her face into his hand and pressed her lips against the tender flesh of his palm.

“We had an agreement,” she reminded him.

He decided not to mention the fact they both toed the edge of that agreement the longer she sat his lap. “I don’t see you trying very hard to get away.”

She frowned at his words, moved his hand as she started to push away. He was surprised, however, when she lifted her hands to his neck and pulled his lips towards hers.

Their lips met and a shiver of hot lust raced through his entire body before it settled low in his abdomen. He felt his cock go rock hard and he balled his hands into tight fists against the arms of the chair to keep them in place.

A small part of him fully expected her to pull away at any moment. But instead, her lips moved over his with renewed enthusiasm and gave no indication she intended to stop.

Before he gave in, he had to know. Had to have some reassurance things wouldn’t shatter the moment he threw himself fully into the moment.

He couldn’t take it otherwise.

His hands captured her face, pulled her mouth away from his in order to separate them. “Evande, are you sure?”

She nodded, but he detected the slight hesitation before she did and his hands fell away in defeat. No way would this go any further if she wasn’t absolutely positive.

Hurt painted her eyes when he moved away, but that couldn’t be helped. He wasn’t about to take them both somewhere they

weren't willing to commit to one hundred percent. Regardless of how much he wanted her.

It wasn't worth the damage to their friendship.

"No," he said softly with a shake of his head as he pulled her hands away from his neck. Firm in the belief it would cost them both too much, he started to gently push her off his lap.

She resisted and despite his own strength, her vampire nature definitely gave her the advantage. Pushing his hands out of her way, she wrapped her arms around his neck and crushed her lips to his. He resisted again, at first, at least that's what he would tell himself later.

Persistent, she maneuvered herself around so she straddled his lap before he became aware of the move. A flash of heat that nearly blinded him with its intensity caused him to respond and push away any lingering doubts he'd harbored.

His hands gripped her waist and she fought against the fastened few buttons. The cotton fluttered away, brushed against his leg as it cascaded to the floor. Knowing every inch of her flawless skin was now exposed to him, his hands wanted to be everywhere at once.

Reality slammed hard into his gut however when he felt the waistband of his pants pull away from his abdomen and her cool touch fluttered over his erection. He grabbed for her hands, but she evaded his touch and clamped her own hands around his wrists. She lifted them and pinned his limbs against the arms of the chair.

He started to protest, but snapped his mouth shut when she gave him a stern look.

“Don’t ask me again Quinn, my answer may change.”

“Fair enough,” he responded and she removed her hands from around his wrists. Sometimes, he forgot how strong she really was.

Evande stripped off his lounge pants as she lowered herself to her knees and when her mouth closed over his cock, he understood this was no time gentle foreplay. He let out a strained breath through clenched teeth and his fingers dug into the arms of the chair and fought for purchase amid the rush of intense pleasure.

Teeth scraped over hard, slick flesh. Her voice vibrated in satisfaction in her throat when she felt his entire body tremble in reaction to her skilled touch. If he didn’t do something to stop her soon, he would embarrass himself and ruin the long running hold he had on his self-control.

He moved, reached down so he could lift her to him with an effortless grace. She made no effort to struggle against him and wrapped her legs around his waist.

Just as he was about to shift their positions to allow for better leverage, she slid onto his cock without warning. His vision blurred as she surrounded him and a strangled groan escaped from between his lips as intense pleasure burst behind his eyes.

The heat of her, something that only occurred as her blood raced through her body in such a manner, enveloped him and he struggled to not drive himself over the edge with a few short thrusts. By the aggression she’d displayed so far, she needed, and wanted, more.

Existence contracted around them. He let her set the pace, followed her lead when she made shifts and alterations to suit her

comfort. He sensed she only had one goal in mind, one singular focus she raced toward.

He wanted to go there himself and he'd willingly follow her.

His teeth scraped over the tender flesh on her neck and she gasped out even as she purred in gratification. To anchor herself, she gripped the back of the chair with her hands. Despite her frantic movements, he knew her well enough to know she held something back and his teeth nipped harder to urge a higher level of violence. He needed it as well.

She groaned loud in the dark, slammed herself down as she rotated her hips in a quick circle before lifting again. The fabric under her fingers tore and the sound resembled the staccato of gunfire in his ears. She wanted something all right and continued to fight against it.

He reached up to try to pull her head down near his but she gave a firm shake of her head. But, he needed to know before he went over.

His strong hands closed over her wrists, pulled her hands down and away from the back of the chair. Using his own increased strength, he bound them behind her so she couldn't move. Reigning in his wildly spinning control, he slammed the door on their release so they could finally clear the air.

"Look at me," he demanded.

Evande stopped moving, her face still tilted up to the ceiling as she shook her head slowly from side to side. Her breath quick from exertion, her pulse beat fast and heavy where they were intimately connected.

Narrowing his eyes, he gritted his teeth. “Damn it, Evande, look at me.”

Just as he was about to take her face between his fingers, force her to look, she lowered her face and her eyes slowly came into view. Their normal icy blue color was gone. They’d been altered by the violent need for blood to sustain her life and were now a dark fathomless blue. As dark as the deepest caverns of an untouched ocean.

If she allowed herself to continue without blood, those beautiful blue eyes would turn a monstrous black and she would no longer be in control of her choices. He’d fend her off if necessary. He’d done it before. But given their current position, he preferred not to.

“Let me go,” she said slowly and the strain in her voice signaled the struggle she fought to contain her hunger. The desperate joining had apparently kicked her body into overdrive.

“It’s time to end this once and for all, Evande.” He firmed his grip certain she would try to break free the moment he gave respite.

“Let me go, Quinn. This was a mistake.” She tried to free herself from his grip, but frowned when she found he wouldn’t release her easily.

He lifted an eyebrow and gave her a half smile. “Suddenly now you think it’s a mistake? A little late for that, don’t you think?”

Her chin tilted down even further and those eyes flashed to solid black as her mood instantly shifted from intense pleasure to obsessive gratification.

“Don’t think for a second that scares me. We’ve been around each other for too long for that look to sway the situation.” Unafraid,

he released her arms and relaxed into the spongy cushion of the chair. Sure in his choice, he tilted his jaw to fully expose his jugular while keeping his gaze directly on hers.

The surprise was evident on her face despite the frightening color of her eyes. She hadn't expected him to give up this easily. To be honest, he hadn't expected of himself either. He never thought the decision could be made this effortlessly. He didn't even question how he could be this sure, this unwavering, in his choice.

Her hesitation stretched out into a long pause.

He waited, enjoyed the varied emotions on her face as she appeared to heavily debate the issue.

"Fuck." She closed her eyes with a quiet oath and something deep inside him unlock—*relief*. This would finally be over. They could stop tiptoeing around her need for blood finally and just *live*. Joyous this would finally be over, he reached to pull her closer, but her hands pushed against his chest. "I have to go."

His hands gripped around her biceps as she started to lift herself away and he struggled to stop her. "Evande." Even he heard the near plea in his voice and cursed.

"No, Quinn. I can't...I have—I have to go," she repeated, forcibly pulling her arms out of his grip to lift herself off of him completely. Her lithe form disappeared down the dark hallway and the front door slammed a few moments later.

He didn't go after her. It wouldn't make a difference.

The offer, the one that she couldn't bring herself to ask, had been made without a spoken word and she'd blatantly turned her

back. He'd been wrong to even try. The damage hadn't been worth it because he just lost her.

He'd failed her.

She looked to him to keep her safe and he'd cast their long standing relationship aside as if it were nothing more than a piece of trash to be discarded.

All because he thought he knew best.

Dropping his head into his hands, the gravity of several hundred years crushed down, burned a gaping wound on his soul and broke him.