



KALLYSTEN

ONLY WITH  
THE  
*Heart*

# ONLY WITH THE HEART

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### CHAPTER 1

“Are you here to save me?”

With these few words, Lance’s frozen body started moving again. His hand shook when he lowered his sword, which he had raised to strike his next adversary—until he realized that said adversary was nothing more than a child.

God, he hated it when they were just children.

He could hear Ellie behind him, walking around, checking that they’d found all the vamps. In a minute, she’d join Lance to see what was holding him. If the kid had fangs...

Lance hated having to dispatch kids, but it was even worse for Ellie.

“Stand up,” he said in a cool voice. “Give me your hand. And don’t believe that just because I lowered my sword I’m not capable of defending myself if you attack.”

The kid did as he was asked, though with a deep frown.

“Why would I attack you? Aren’t you here to save me?”

Lance didn’t reply. Now that the boy was standing rather than huddled against the wall, he could see him properly. He wasn’t very tall, but even so his dirty, faded jeans left a couple of inches of skin bare over his ankles. His sweater was just as dirty but too large, and the sleeve covered half his hand when he raised it toward Lance as requested. His eyes were very dark, dark enough to be a vampire’s—or that might have been an effect of the poor light. His face was almost incongruously clean compared to his clothes, with only a trace of dried blood near his hairline. Matted as his dark hair was, it was hard to tell if there was more blood in it. Harder still to tell if it was his blood, or someone else’s.

“Pull your sleeve up,” Lance demanded gruffly.

Still frowning, the boy did, baring his wrist and arm halfway to his elbow. On his pale skin, the three sets of bite marks stood out vividly, and next to them...

Was that a cigarette burn?

Swallowing back the bile rising to his throat, Lance reached forward and took hold of that delicate wrist, pressing two fingers from his left hand to the child's pulse point while his right hand clenched reflexively on the hilt of his sword. If there was no pulse, no blood pumping through the child, no heartbeat to keep him alive...

The rule had always been that only vampires that were proved killers beyond doubt could be executed, but these days, when strange beasts were appearing out of nowhere in more and more places—when zealots said the end of times was coming, and scientists had no answers—strong suspicions were legally sufficient for a vampire to be dispatched by a Special Enforcer. Still, things were much murkier regarding children turned into vampires.

Lance had only met two in his career as a Special Enforcer, and both had lacked any sort of self control. They wanted blood, and cared about nothing more than getting it. A child vampire was bound to kill, sooner or later; what was the point of waiting for proof? It was more merciful to end it quickly.

He let out a relieved sigh when he felt a heartbeat under his fingers, a frightened staccato at odds with the child's calm demeanor. He wouldn't have to dispatch the boy.

"I'm not a vampire," the boy said, a thread of impatience in his voice.

"I can see that," Lance said, letting go of the child's hand. "What's your name?"

"James, sir. May I gather my things?"

Looking around to check that nothing moved in the warehouse other than Ellie, Lance answered absently.

"What things?"

"It's not a lot, I promise. Nothing that will slow me down. Just a couple of books and my jacket."

Confused now, Lance turned back to James and asked, "Slow you down? Where are you going?"

James stared back at him.

"Well, with you of course. You're not going to leave me here, are you?"

Ellie reached Lance as James said those last words, and she gave Lance an inscrutable look.

"Human?" was all she asked.

Lance nodded and asked, "Anyone else in here?"

Ellie glanced back at the large warehouse. Not an easy clean-out, but they'd done a good job of it. Quick and efficient.

"Not anymore. What do you want to do with your little friend?"

Stifling a grimace, Lance turned his attention back to James. He'd taken a step back and turned very still as Ellie approached, and now he was watching and listening, waiting for his fate to be decided. Running his eyes over him again, Lance couldn't help but wonder whose past decisions had brought James here.

"Get your things, then," he told James, then turned to Ellie. "We'll drop him off at the police station. They can get him back to his family."

James didn't move a muscle. He might have been carved stone, if not for his eyes, running back and forth between Lance and Ellie.

"Are you all right, kiddo?" Ellie asked kindly.

"I'm fine," James said in a completely level voice. "But there is no family to return me to. May I stay with you, sir?"

The last was directed at Lance, startling him.

"With me?" He shook his head. "I know nothing about children. Besides, I'm pretty sure there are laws about what we're supposed to do if we find an orphan. Aren't there, Ellie?"

Ellie took a beat longer than necessary to answer. Her eyes were still fixed on the child, but with such an expression that she appeared to see right through him. Lance's guts twisted in discomfort. He had no doubt whom Ellie was seeing instead of James, even if there was no resemblance.

"Laws, yes," Ellie finally murmured, tearing her gaze away. "We're supposed to turn him in to social services." After another pause, she added, "It's late. If we call them now, it'll be hours before they come get him. How about we put him up for the night and bring him to them tomorrow?"

Sheathing his sword, Lance gestured for Ellie to come with him and they retreated a few yards away from the boy. He continued to observe them, still and silent.

"Do you really want to take him home?" Lance said quietly. "What about Evan?"

Ellie gave a small shrug and looked away, her gaze sweeping the warehouse.

"He'll understand. It's just for one night. I'll explain."

Somehow, Lance doubted it'd be that easy. He knew how much Evan still hurt, and was about to say so when he thought better of it. Evan had

been his best friend since childhood, but he was Ellie's husband, and they shared their pain in a way that Lance couldn't quite approach.

"All right," he said, "if you think that's best."

He turned back to James, finding him in the same place and just as still as before, although now a child-sized carry-on suitcase sat upright next to him, his fingers clutching the handle so tightly they were bone white past the hem of his too long sleeve.

"We'll give you a place to sleep tonight," he told the boy, going back to him. "Tomorrow, we'll get you to the authorities so they can find a place for you to live."

James didn't respond to Lance's pronouncement, but he seemed alarmed when Lance took the suitcase.

"It's not too heavy," he said hurriedly. "I swear it won't slow me down. Please don't..."

"Don't what?" Lance asked, mystified by his reaction.

"Don't throw it away, please, sir," James all but whispered. "Or... can I at least take my book out before you do?"

In Lance's hand, the suitcase suddenly seemed to weigh a lot more. An odd sense of resignation was coming from James, as though he'd made this same request more than once before—as though his possessions, few as they might be, were routinely left behind.

"I merely wanted to carry this for you because you look tired enough to fall asleep on your feet," Lance explained. "Come on, let's go."

He led the way, acutely aware that Ellie had missed nothing of the exchange, though Lance would have been hard pressed to say what she thought of it all. Before, he might have guessed, but nowadays...

He pushed the thought firmly out of his mind as they walked out of the warehouse through the loading dock, the same way they had entered it. It had started raining while they were working inside, a fine but heavy rain that draped itself over the night like a dark gray curtain. Lance paused under the overhang, wishing they'd parked closer than a block away. He'd worked up a sweat in there, dispatching three vampires on his own, and already a chill was settling down his spine. This downpour wouldn't help.

He looked down at the kid; his jacket didn't look like it'd do much to protect him, either.

"You two wait here and I'll go get the car," Ellie said, swinging the crossbow she'd used in there over her head, a leather strip running diagonally across her chest and holding the crossbow within easy reach.

She could pull it up, loose her first wooden stake and reload as quickly as Lance could draw out his sword and take his first swing at an enemy. “No sense in all of us getting drenched.”

Lance pulled the keys from his jeans, but hesitated before putting them in Ellie’s outstretched hand.

“I’ll go,” he said. “You stay here out of the rain with James and I—”

Snorting, Ellie swiped the keys from him.

“If there wasn’t a child here,” she said dryly, “I’d tell you where you can shove your chivalry, lil’ bro.”

“No chivalry about it, princess,” he retorted. “I just don’t want to listen to your whining later on about how the rain messed up your hair.”

With another snort, she pulled the hood of her sweatshirt over her pixie-cut hair—it was shorter even than Lance’s—and jumped off the loading dock, her boots splashing water from a puddle. Holding the crossbow with her left-hand so it wouldn’t bounce against her back, she started jogging toward the street in the direction where they’d left the car.

Lance looked around, his instincts once more searching for signs of life—or at least, signs of vampire activity. He thought he’d seen something move on the roof of the warehouse next to this one while he bantered with Ellie, but it must have been a trick of his mind; there was nothing to see there. Finally, his gaze fell back on James, who had been silent the entire time and who was watching him with undisguised curiosity.

“Something wrong?” he asked, his eyes going for another sweep.

“No, I just... She’s your sister?”

Smart of him to realize that from one throwaway nickname, Lance thought.

“She is, yes.”

“You two don’t look much alike, sir.”

Another accurate observation, although this once was made by just about everyone who’d ever met them.

“She looks like our mom, I look like our dad,” he said, the old explanation rolling automatically off his tongue.

As trite as the words might be, they held some truth. Ellie really had inherited their mother’s button nose and clear eyes, while Lance had their father’s square jaw and brown eyes. But Lance’s auburn hair was their mother’s, while Ellie’s strawberry blondness came straight out of a bottle rather than from her DNA. She’d started dyeing it and keeping it

ultra short almost a year earlier. Lance missed her crazy curls, sometimes. He missed her smile even more.

"I looked just like my dad," James murmured, so low that Lance wasn't sure the words had been meant for him.

He didn't reply. The past tense in that comment, and James' earlier claim that he had no family made him uncomfortable. Kids that young shouldn't be without parents.

And parents, his subconscious whispered back at him, shouldn't be without kids.

He shrugged, uncomfortable at the turn his thoughts were taking. At least, for once he wasn't thinking about Taylor.

He groaned inwardly at the moment her name rose in his mind. So much for not thinking about her. Quick, find a distraction. Something. Anything.

His fingers clenched on the handle of the suitcase and he asked, almost automatically, "What book?"

James looked up at him.

"Sir?" he said, confusion filling the short word.

"Lance. My name is Lance, not sir. And you said earlier you didn't want to leave a book behind. What book?"

"Oh. The Little Prince." After a second, he asked, "Have you read it?"

Lance shook his head. "I haven't, no."

He hadn't, but the title was familiar. He remembered packing it, along with the rest of Taylor's possessions, when he'd put her things away. The boxes were still waiting in the garage, taking too much space and stabbing him in the heart every time he saw them there.

"Maybe I could lend it to you. It's a really good book, I'm sure you'd like it."

"Maybe," Lance repeated absently, not bothering to remind James that he wouldn't be staying with him very long.

It was always the same. Every day, he'd manage to keep Taylor's memory at bay until night time, but there always came a point when the questions refused to be ignored anymore.

Where was she? What was she doing? Did she have her fangs in someone's throat at this very second? Would he soon need to dispatch her?

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Taylor hated the rain.

She didn't use to. Rain used to be something of an annoyance, but little more than that. Now, she truly hated it. All it did was make her clothes uncomfortable. She wasn't even cold, just wet, and she couldn't wait to strip down and take a shower. As temporary as the heat might be, it always made her feel a little better.

An easy solution would have been to get a better jacket, but a little voice inside her resisted that idea. Why should she get a jacket when she had an excellent one waiting for her at her old place? Leather, thick, with a jersey hood and an assortment of pockets, she'd always loved that jacket from the moment Lance had given it to her on her birthday. She should go and get it back, but she was scared to discover that Lance had gotten rid of it, along with the rest of her things.

She was already soaked when she reached the car, and it wouldn't make much difference now, but she unlocked the passenger door and sat inside to wait for Ellie. After all, they weren't going to talk in the rain and she'd have invited Taylor to climb in anyway, so Taylor was just speeding things up a little.

Or maybe she didn't want to know if Ellie would have preferred talking to her in the rain rather than be stuck with her in a car.

It took Ellie a couple more minutes to arrive, long enough for Taylor to recognize Lance's scent, lingering in the car. A pang of longing rang through her and she made the conscious effort to stop breathing. It wasn't as though she needed to, after all.

When Ellie finally approached, Taylor leaned over to unlock the door for her. When she pulled back, she sat sideways, her back to the door, about as far as she could be from Ellie while sitting next to her.

"God, I'm freezing," Ellie said, turning on the engine and putting the heat on full blast. She then turned to Taylor, giving her an up and down look. "How are you? Other than drenched, I mean."

Taylor gave her a small shrug and an even smaller smile.

"Fine. How did the fight go?"

She'd tried looking in from skylight windows on the roof but the angle was such that she'd missed most of what happened. It had been torture not to join Ellie and Lance, fight at their sides again, the way she used to.

"It went all right," Ellie said, frowning ever so slightly. "Five vamps, three of them I recognized from the database."



Taylor nodded. Ellie had always had an excellent memory for faces, which helped a great deal.

“What about that kid?” she asked. “Who is he?”

“How do you know...” Ellie’s frown deepened a little more. “You were watching us? Why didn’t you come and—”

“And what?” Taylor cut in. “He doesn’t want me there. I’m not stupid enough to delude myself about that.”

“But if you two just talked—”

“He’s going to wonder what’s taking you so long. I have a lead on another killer. Operates alone, I think. I’ll text you when I have something concrete.”

She’d already opened the door when Ellie caught her hand and squeezed it.

“Or you could come by,” she said softly. “Never mind what Lance thinks, I miss you.”

Something tightened inside Taylor’s chest; her heart, maybe, trying to come back to life. She managed a smile, managed to squeeze Ellie’s hand back, but speaking was beyond her. She pulled her hand free as gently as she could and slipped out of the car. She closed the door and tapped the hood twice as a goodbye.

Ellie started driving down the street toward the warehouse—toward Lance, and that kid, whoever he might be—toward people who were alive. Taylor thrust her hands in her pockets, hunched her shoulders, and started walking the opposite way. If tears trickled down her cheeks, the rain washed them out so quickly it was as though they’d never been shed.

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