



KALLYSTEN

ONLY WITH  
THE  
*Heart*

# ONLY WITH THE HEART

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### CHAPTER 14

The dining room door was still closed, muffled voices occasionally coming through from inside. Rather than knocking, Lance sat on the floor across from the door, his back to the wall. Ellie's words still echoed in his mind. His heart ached from the promise she'd all but extracted from him, but the most painful part of him was his soul.

For months he'd been lying to everyone about what had happened that night, and the shame and guilt were consuming him alive. He'd almost told Ellie, up there. Almost confessed. Only the fear that he might see horror and disgust in his sister's eyes—disgust directed at him—had kept him quiet. But the truth would come out eventually, wouldn't it? How much longer could he go, carrying a burden that was growing heavier with each passing day? Ellie had called him an asshole earlier, but how long until she and everyone he loved realized that he was much worse than that?

The door finally opened, and for a brief moment Evan stood there, frowning at Lance as though he wanted to ask him what on earth he was doing sitting on the floor.

"Come in," he said in the end, and Lance got to his feet to follow him inside the room.

James was standing by a chair, sliding his polo shirt back on. Next to him, medical instruments gleamed on the table, metal against polished wood.

"Are you sure?" Evan said quietly. "You're old enough that I don't have to tell him a thing if you don't want me to. It's your decision."

"It's fine," James muttered, although the way he kept his eyes directed at the floor suggested otherwise.

Evan observed him a few seconds longer before turning to Lance. His expression was as void of emotions as his words when he said, "Multiple burn and bite marks. Some are healed, but I prescribed a cream that will help minimize the scars. Others are still healing. One is infected. I prescribed antibiotics as well as an ointment. Twice a day for the drug,

daily application for the ointment and cream. Some are on his back, he'll need help for those. Overall health seems good enough. I see signs of vitamins deficiency, but I'd need blood tests to confirm. Fresh fruit, veggies, whole milk, protein, balanced meals. No frozen dinners or stale cereal. Fresh air, exercise and sunlight wouldn't hurt either. Questions?"

As he finished, he handed out a prescription script to Lance. Lance took it more by instinct than from conscious will and looked at the three lines there, followed by his friend's familiar signature. He hadn't realized Evan could still prescribe anything—but of course he could. Officially, he was only on a 'sabbatical', nothing more.

"Questions?" Evan repeated, and maybe this time he sounded a little warmer.

"Just one," Lance said, managing the barest hint of a smile as he looked at his friend. "You don't happen to know where he can get these 'balanced meals' you're talking about? You know I can't cook worth anything."

Unlike Evan, who was pretty handy with a pan and had never minded sharing...

Judging from Evan's eyes, he knew exactly what Lance was hinting at. The way he briefly pinched his lips together answered before he did.

"I'll do breakfast. But lunch and dinner are on you. I've got cooking books you can borrow if you want to learn but it doesn't have to be very complicated."

Although Lance nodded absently, he had a feeling that it might not be as easy as Evan made it sound. At least it wouldn't be for very long. The police would find James' family soon and then he would be back where he belonged. Lance only had to do his best until then.

"All right," he said after clearing his throat; Evan looked like he was expecting an answer. "I'll do what I can."

Nodding once, Evan turned back to James, who stared right back, a gleam of defiance in his eyes. Whatever this was about, James seemed to know what Evan was thinking because he muttered, "He doesn't need to know that."

"You just said it was fine," Evan countered.

"But I didn't mean..." James' features lost all expression. "Fine. Tell him what you want. I don't care."

With that, he walked out of the room, walking past Lance without as much as a glance at him. He did care, that much was clear, but care about what? Lance turned to watch him go; hands in his pockets and shoulders

hunched, he walked down the corridor and back to Lance's side of the house.

"What is it then?" Lance asked, crossing his arms and leaning against the nearest wall.

Standing in front of the table, Evan was rubbing alcohol over his medical instruments before putting them away. He seemed to deliberate for a moment before he finally said, "The cigarette burns. Some are fresh, like I said. The most recent is from two or three days at the most. But the oldest ones..." He sighed and turned a dark gaze to Lance. "How long was he with the vampires?"

Lance was beginning to see where this was going, and he didn't like it one bit.

"Close to three years," he said, pushing the words past his tightening throat.

Evan's only outward reaction was a very slight nod.

"The oldest burns are at least twice that long. Hard to tell exactly. I asked him, and he says he doesn't remember. Are you sure you're equipped to deal with something like that?"

Bowing his head for a moment, Lance considered the question. Bringing James back to Children Services was still an option, he supposed, but Lance remembered all too clearly the scene he'd witnessed there. What would be worse for James—to stay a few more days with someone like Lance who might not really know what he was doing, or to be foisted onto a foster family already dealing with more than it could manage?

"I'll do what I can," he said again, more quietly, and cleared his throat. "Thank you for doing this."

Evan gave a slight shrug.

"It's my job."

Lance probably shouldn't have pushed, but he still found himself asking, "Is it? Does that mean you'll be going back to the hospital?"

"I don't know," Evan murmured with a tired sigh. "I don't know if they'd take me back. They might be waiting for me to get better to fire me properly."

It wouldn't have surprised Lance if it was the case. Evan was well-liked at the hospital, and everyone there knew what he'd gone through. He might have broken the rules, but Lance doubted anyone would have found it in them to blame him. If they had, Evan wouldn't be here right now; he'd be in jail.

“But you *are* better, right?” Lance couldn’t help pushing just a little more. As uncomfortable as it made him to be so blunt with his friend, he had to know.

Evan’s only answer was to look him straight in the eyes and ask, “Are you?”

Stalemate.

\* \* \*

His mind still buzzing from what Evan had said about those scars, Lance walked back to the office. He’d expected to find Ellie there, but the room was empty. He sat at his desk, setting the prescription note in front of him, and picked up the phone, dialing the first preset number.

“Sergeant Lester,” came through after the phone only ringed twice.

“Hi Karen, it’s Lance. Just checking in to see if you found anything about the kid.”

“I did,” she answered at once. “I meant to call you sometime today. I found his mother.”

A flutter of hope started to rise in Lance, just long enough for him to remember James had said she was dead.

“I should say,” Karen added immediately, “I found the report about his mother’s death. It pretty much confirms what he said. Almost three years ago, no sign of forced entry in her apartment. She was found in her own bed. No sign of struggle either, but if the vampire enthralled her, there wouldn’t be.”

Lance didn’t bother pointing out that the correct term was ‘thralled’. It hardly mattered now.

“Any suspects?” he asked, professional habit more than actual belief it might be important; after all, the vampires who’d held James, and presumably kidnapped him after his mother’s death, were dead.

“Cold case,” she replied with a twinge of annoyance; she hated cold cases as though they were a personal affront to her. “She’d just moved into that apartment, the neighbors didn’t even know her name or the name of the child they’d seen with her. And when the police tried to find her next of kin, they couldn’t find anything. Fake ID, no paper trail.”

Tapping his fingers on the desk, Lance considered that for a moment.

“Fake identity,” he said slowly, “and she’d just moved from one end of the country all the way to the other side. What happened in Florida that caused her to run off with her kid?”

“Keep it up,” Karen said dryly at the other end of the line, “and you’ll end up with my job. I asked myself the same thing and started looking around for a woman of her approximate age with a child of James’ age. He gave his birthdate easily enough that I think it might have been accurate. He seemed more reluctant with names.”

Now that she mentioned it, Lance remembered that James had seemed to think before giving his name and his mother’s. At the time, Lance had only thought he was being shy, but it seemed it had been about more than that.

“Without anything more definite, it might take me a while to find anything more,” Karen said. “He said they moved from Florida, but that might have been incorrect as well. Do me a favor, try to get something else out of him? Maybe he got intimidated at the police station?”

“I’ll talk to him,” Lance agreed. “Thanks for doing this, Karen. I know it’s not your job—”

“Bah, don’t get maudlin on me, Enforcer boy.”

“It’s Special Enforcer for you, Sergeant.”

She laughed briefly.

“All right, give me a call if you’ve got anything more. I’ll talk to you soon.”

Lance said his goodbyes before hanging up. He remained in his armchair a little longer, using his foot to make it rotate back and forth, bringing Taylor’s desk in and out of view. She’d always been good with this kind of investigation thing. If she’d been here...

Jumping to his feet, Lance pushed back that line of thought. He pocketed the prescription and went to find James. He had to look through every room of this side of the house before he finally found him where maybe he ought to have looked first: his bedroom.

James had made the bed—something Lance never bothered to do when he was the one sleeping here—and the room looked more tidy than it’d ever been. An edge of chaos had never bothered Lance—or Taylor.

Seated with his back to the headboard with a book in his hands, James looked like he was reading, but his eyes remained immobile as Lance watched him for a few seconds from the doorway.

“Is James your real name?” he asked suddenly, hoping to catch him by surprise.

James’ eyes snapped up to him, and a flash of understanding ran through them—but nothing like guilt or remorse.

“Yes,” was all he said.

“But Mortson isn’t,” Lance said, and this time it wasn’t a question.

James didn’t reply.

“Why did you lie?”

Long, long seconds passed before James closed his book, his finger marking his place, but he still didn’t say anything.

“All right. How about this then. Were you truly moving to California from Florida?”

The extent of James’ reaction was a slow blink. Lance was getting annoyed, but at the same time he couldn’t help but wonder why James was being so cagey. Unless...

“Does the moving around and the fake names have anything to do with the burns on your skin that are older than three years?”

The catch in James’ breathing was an affirmative, Lance was sure of it. But it still wasn’t enough.

“We can’t help you if you don’t tell us more,” he said, using the last of his patience to keep his voice calm. “We need something that will help us find your family.”

“You already are helping me,” James said very low. “And I told you that you wouldn’t find anyone. Whether I give you my name or not won’t change that.”

“Then give it to me, if it changes nothing.”

Again, silence was James’ only answer. If there was a way to talk to children—or teenagers—and get them to open up, Lance certainly wasn’t privy to it. If it had been an adult, he’d have found a pressure point and pushed, but that didn’t seem like the best way to deal with someone who had panic attacks when stress got to him.

“All right,” he said, conceding defeat. “Let’s go.”

Alarm immediately filled James’ eyes as he sat up straighter on the bed. No, not alarm, Lance realized. More than that. Panic. The same panic that had taken him last night. Had Lance mistaken his demeanor for apathy when it was in fact the very opposite—when he’d been holding on to his calm by his fingernails?

“We’re just going to the pharmacy,” Lance added hurriedly, pulling the now crumpled paper from his pocket as proof. “To get what Evan prescribed. You said you wanted to come along if I went out, right?”

The brewing storm in James’ eyes slowly cleared out at those words, though he took in a shuddering breath or two.

“Are you all right?” Lance asked as neutrally as he could manage.

Spots of color appeared on James' cheeks and he all but hid himself by reaching for his shoes under the bed and bending low to put them on.

"I'm okay," he murmured. "I just... When you said 'let's go' I thought..." He breathed in slowly before finishing. "I thought you'd get rid of me because I wasn't doing what you wanted."

There was an odd sense of resignation to his voice, melding with his lingering fear.

One day. He'd only spent one day with Lance, a little more than twenty-four hours. Could he be that attached to him already? It hardly seemed possible. Then again, considering the situation he'd been in before that...

"I'm not going to 'get rid of you,'" Lance said gruffly, shoving both fists in his pockets. "We'll return you to your relatives when we find them, but until then I'm not just going to dump you, all right? I'll wait for you downstairs."

James didn't say anything as Lance walked away, and yet a little voice still rang in his mind.

*Are you sure you won't just dump him? That's what you did to Taylor, and you'd known her for a lot longer than one day.*