Poppy POV

My eyes widened and widened and widened until they could pop out. Something worse than fear stamped me down. Why did the color change to cyan? Words formed in my mouth and then some questions, but none took shape on my tongue. It was as if they all choked right up in my throat and instead forced bile to come out.

Damon too watched it all, stunned. In a voice that reeked of dread, he said, "What does this indicate, Anna?"

Anna took a long shaky breath. She picked up the cup and sniffed the ingredients. "Most likely this is wolf's bane," she said. "But I have to run tests to confirm its nature."

My knees became wobbly and I buckled, dropping to my knees as dread exploded inside me. Wolf's bane was given to kill a werewolf or to make him or her moon crazy. In high dosages, it could kill you instantly. Damon was by my side immediately. "Poppy! Poppy!" he rasped, cupping cheeks. "Goddess!" he said. Blood drained from my face and I became numb. I saw his mouth moving but there was no sound. I looked at Anna who was shouting at me, but I couldn't make out the words.

And then... darkness surrounded me and I welcomed it. Darkness was good. It lulled me in its warm, long talons. The

familiar nightmares that were better than reality. I wanted the wolves of my nightmare to eat me up or at least kill me. I had started hating the living world. Full of betrayals. Full of deceit. Even those who were your parents, left you, then why wouldn't those who were not, betray you.

The wolves with blazing eyes scratched my body and I lay there in the darkness with excruciating pain, numb, letting them kill me, bleed me. Hilda, my nanny, my mom, my everything, broke my faith in love and trust.

Many nightmares later, I saw her coming towards me with tea. "Have it, Poppy," she said with a brutal smile. "It will soothe you." Hidden words— it will kill you, slowly, painfully. When I refused, she grabbed my jaw and forced it open. A scream ripped through my throat and I jerked open my eyes to see the edge of Damon's jaw through a veil of tears. I realized that I was tucked against his chest, screaming, the sound shrill and with the taste of metal. I must have bitten my tongue.

I inhale his sensual woody and spicy scent which should usually comfort me, but right now it wasn't helping. My head felt like it would burst. I couldn't shake the nightmare no matter how many times I tried. I tried to speak, but his grip tightened around me and all that came out was a curdled cry.

"I am here, Poppy. You are okay." He rocks me gently in his lap and strokes my hair softly. "Shhh..."

I dug my claws in his chest to hold onto one true thing that I thought was there. He groaned but he didn't leave me. I must have scratched him, but he didn't leave me. I hid my head in his chest, in those stone hard muscles and closed my eyes, wanting to forget it all. He didn't leave me. He continued to cradle me and rock and rock till I fell asleep all over again. When I got up, my hands were still on his chest and I was still in his lap, in his protective embrace.

When I looked up, I saw his jaw. He was resting against the headboard and sleeping. The moment I tried to step out of his lap, he got up with a growl in his chest and tightened his grip around me.

I tipped my head up and said, "I am fine..."

His brows furrowed as he assessed me. When I let him assess me and didn't move, his wolf got satisfied. "You need a bath," he said, seeing all the sweat that had made my hair sticky. He switched on the bedside lamp.

I chuckled. "I do." He didn't release me from his arms, still unsure. "I am fine, Damon. Really, I am."

His Adam's apple bobbed before he released me. "Keep the bathroom door open," he said. I whipped my head to the door and realized that I was back in his apartment. The furniture was lying scattered but several things were still working. "Don't make me break it."

I shook my head. "I won't."

Instead of hot water, I stood beneath cold water in the bath stall. It soothed my body and my mind. I had kept the door open because if I wouldn't I was sure that Damon would peel the door out of its frame to enter.

While I was taking a bath, my thoughts went back to Hilda and her words. 'Sinclair would be coming to the academy.' Why was she giving me wolf's bane? How did she manage to get grandfather's approval for Sinclair? Nothing made sense and too many questions snagged in my head. I picked up the bottle of shampoo and generously applied it on my scalp. I thought I was finally getting control of my life when life was slipping away from me.

The feeling of panic rose in my chest and I leaned against the glass wall to stop myself from panicking. Damon rushed to me and held me from behind. "Let it go," he whispered as he too got wet with the cold water. He placed his hand on my chest. "Breathe Poppy, breathe." I couldn't. I didn't want to. "Please Poppy, breathe." He slammed my back and pressed my chest. My mouth opened to take in a large gulp of air.

He shut the cold water and dried me with a fresh towel as I stood numb. Then he wrapped me with it and took me out to the room. He made me sit on the bed and dropped to his knees. He cupped my face in his large hands and said, "I know that you have gone through a lot, Poppy, but unless you gather yourself, you won't be able to piece it together.

You understand?"

I nodded, my eyes stinging with more tears. In a gravelly voice I said, "I loved Hilda. I trusted her more than life."