



© 2009 Skyla Dawn Cameron

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: Stalkerish

**Briar**

“I’m glad you warned me to wear something crappy. I’m going to have to burn these clothes when we’re done.”

I looked at Sebastian across the trash heap between us and grinned. “You should never doubt your hoodoo spellcaster.”

“We should put that on a T-shirt.”

“Would you wear it?”

“Absolutely.”

We sat in a dumpster behind Noelle’s building. Yes, it’s as glamorous as it sounds.

I grasped a dark green plastic bag in my hands and yanked a hole in the side. Reaching inside with one gloved hand, I felt around until found some paper. I yanked it out and glanced at the name. Nope, wrong place.

With one heave, I threw the bag over my shoulder, and then I went to the next.

“What if stuff is under the guy’s name?” Sebastian asked.

I figured he was looking for a reason to get out of the dumpster, but no way would I be doing that kind of job by myself. “We hope that’s not the case.”

The evening had been rather tense every since that bitch Alicia took our money.

I'm not sure if anyone had really believed that three thousand dollars would make much of a difference, but...we hoped. And now it was all gone. I wanted to throttle Madam Curio. I think Liam was ready to throw his, "An it harm none" rule out the window too and just go totally nuts on everyone. But it was Lilith who calmly tried to reason with Madam. Can we cancel the cheque? Can she just speak to Alicia about replacing it with a post dated one? Can we re-borrow three thousand dollars?

*Oh, it'll all work out.* Hearing those words said with Madam's usual vague, confused smile just drove me over the edge. I left the office, went home to change, and then sat at the coffee shop across from Sebastian's building for three hours until he arrived to meet me for our nightly stalking of Noelle.

We were fucked. Completely and utterly. We had...what...a week and a half left? Something like that. I was too angry and upset to count the days anymore. The economy was shit and unemployment was on the rise—where the hell would I get a new job? I sucked at everything but hoodoo, and even that was looking a little weak.

I'd have to give up my apartment. No doubt about it. So I'd probably end up having to move in with one of the other two unemployed people I knew, and maybe combined we'd afford somewhere to live. Of course, those two people were Liam and Lilith. Liam and I would probably kill one another within a weekend. Well, I'd likely win 'cause I'd play dirty.

So then there was...Lilith. Lilith who would probably unleash her demonic powers and kill me the first time I left a towel on the bathroom floor.

"Briar?"

I looked up as I realized Sebastian stared at me.

"Huh?"

"Did you find anything?"

"Oh. Right." *Better start focusing on the job I currently do have.* I rifled through the trash in front of me. "Nothing here." The other bag slumped onto the pile behind me when I threw it over my shoulder.

"I'm a little worried," he said as he went through papers in the bag in front of

him.

“Why? ‘Cause I’m a failure and will never get you back together with your girlfriend?”

“No...’cause I can’t smell anything anymore.” He scrunched up his nose and breathed in deeply. “That probably means I now smell like what I’m sitting in, right?”

“Uh...probably.”

“And all ‘cause you had the brilliant idea to put us in a dumpster. Why are we doing this again?”

“Because you didn’t have the foresight to be creepy and keep your girlfriend’s hair.”

“So you thought we should be creepy and steal her garbage?”

“It’s not stealing. It’s now public property.”

“Says who?”

“A discussion on a hoodoo message board. Keep looking. Stop arguing.”

“Yes boss.”

I neglected to point out that since he was doing the paying, *he* was technically the boss.

“So I guess all this isn’t that bad.”

“What? Sitting in garbage and...going through garbage?”

“Well, at least we have fun.”

*Saints, this guy is weird.*

“I’m sorry you had a bad day after all the carnival stuff went so well.”

I sighed and ceased the busy work of sorting trash for a moment. “Thanks. I’m sorry the money your company donated went to that conniving bitch.”

“Thanks. You know, if you ever need help doing this kind of thing—digging through garbage, or stalking, that is—to cast spells on your ex-boyfriend, I’ll help out.”

“Will you be charging me as much as I’m charging you?”

Sebastian grinned. “Half as much.”

“You’re too kind.”

Several minutes passed with just the crinkling of plastic bags and occasional hacking as we ran into something rotting and gross.

“Oh! I recognize this!”

“What?” I dropped the stack of junkmail in my hands and leaned forward. I caught a whiff of something awful over to the left, suggesting that we couldn’t smell *that* bad yet ourselves if olfactory fatigue hadn’t totally set in.

“This.” He held up a make-up case. Leopard print. Broken zipper and a little worn. Smelled awful, like bad perfume, which was really saying something about how bad it was considering we sat in a fucking dumpster.

“It’s hers?”

“Definitely. She’s had it for years. See?” He turned it over and pointed out a little tear in the side. “This is hers.”

I grabbed the large Ziploc bag from the set we had sitting in a pile beside us and Sebastian dropped the make-up bag into it. I tossed the package over the edge of the dumpster onto the pavement.

“Remember,” I said as he rifled through the bag. “You may find things you don’t like in there. She’s seeing someone else...so she’s probably *sleeping with* someone else. So—”

“Oh god...” He dropped the bag. Resting his back on the side of the dumpster, his eyes rolled back and he frowned.

“What?”

He didn’t answer me.

“Um, hello? Bueller? Anyone there?”

“In the bag...”

*He found something like condoms or something.* I tried to warn him, but of course he wasn’t prepared. “Don’t fall apart. It’s okay—”

“You don’t understand.” His attention returned to the garbage bag, where he pulled out a few broken glasses and an empty jam jar. “They’re not recycling. I can’t believe this. I used to tell her how important it was to not overwhelm our landfills

and—”

I grabbed the damn bag and started going through it myself. “You’re so lame.”

We collected some of her cigarette butts and some bits of hair from the bottom of another bag. Not my favourite way to get that kind of stuff, but it had to be done.

We also found a few shorter, strawberry blond ones. I bagged those as well—would likely be the new boyfriend’s. We didn’t have a name yet, which kinda bugged me, but Sebastian wanted the focus on Noelle. Any mention of getting photos or something of the new guy left my client looking like a kicked puppy.

“We don’t need anything else?” Sebastian asked as I stood on shaky trash bags and hopped over the side back onto the pavement.

“This should be good,” I said. I was still pretty pissed off about Alicia and ready to pour all my anger into the most badass breakup spell I could think of.

### Lilith

“You really don’t have to stay the night,” I said, even as I tucked the bed sheet around the cushions on the couch for my mother to sleep on. No sooner had I stood and reached for the folded quilt when she flopped down on the neatly made make-shift bed and stretched out. The sheet pulled at the corners a bit and one of the throw pillows fell to the floor. *A mess already.*

Remote control in hand, she immediately began surfing the television channels.

I knelt to pick the pillow up, but Bill rushed over and promptly took a seat on the middle of it, gazing up at me lovingly. A low purr came steadily from his throat.

“As if I actually put that there for you,” I mumbled as I stood straight again.

“Hmm?” my mother glanced at me briefly.

“Nothing. Need anything?”

“Nothing at all, dear. Why don’t you call your boyfriend?”

I bit back a response. She’d seen Scott McLean, from the bank, gazing at me

for most of the afternoon at the carnival, and now had some sort of delusion that we were either involved or had recently broken up. I'd grown tired of arguing, and instead headed for the bathroom to shower.

My entire body ached, as did my mind. We'd worked so hard all day...and I was out of ideas. When I told my mother what had happened, she first suggested that we head to a bar and pick up some men. After I nixed that idea, she mentioned how she'd spoken quite a bit with the man who owned the vegan café, who did the carnival catering, and how we could probably "score some weed" from them.

I also declined that offer.

I stood in the hot water for at least fifteen minutes. I would have stayed longer, but didn't want the hot water to run out completely in case my mother wanted take a bath later. Not feeling the least bit refreshed, I stepped into the steamy bathroom and shut off the water.

My mother's voice, muted through the walls, sounded from the living room.

With a frown, I swiftly dried off and wrapped myself in a thick, terrycloth robe. *Please don't let her have actually invited any men here...*

I padded out of the bathroom and toward the living room. Bill immediately ran towards me so that he could run circles around my legs and nearly trip me as I walked.

My mother, still on the couch, had the phone to her ear, and she laughed into the receiver. I sighed with relief; at least she didn't have anyone there.

"Oh!" Mom's dark brown eyes, burning with that spark I always saw when she saw or spoke to any human with a "y" chromosome, glanced up at me. A slow smile spread across her lips. "She's right here." With a long, deliberately slow gesture, she extended her arm and held the phone in my direction. "It's for you."

*Please let it be Liam.* I accepted the phone. "Hello?"

"Ms. Marr—"

I recognized that voice all too well. And I snapped. "Mr. Mclean, unless you're calling to give us a bank loan for the shop, I don't want to hear from you."

"But—"

“I have told you, repeatedly, that I’m not interested in your advances, and this is bordering on harassment.”

“But I only meant to—”

“I am not interested in speaking with you unless it is in a totally professional manner and I’m seriously considering phoning the police at this point.”

“But I—”

“What?”

There was a pause of silence on the other line. It suddenly registered with my brain exactly what my mouth had been saying, and I felt my face blush at the thought. I never lost my cool like that. Never. What was wrong with me?”

Just as I opened my mouth to apologize, he continued.

“I just wanted to let you know how lovely the carnival was today,” he said.

*I am such an idiot.* “Thank you,” I said softly.

“And that you looked absolutely stunning—are you free next—”

I hung up immediately, then spun to face my mother.

“You’ll never get a boyfriend with *that* attitude,” she said, not taking her eyes from the television.

“How did he get my home phone number?”

“I gave it to him. Today.”

“You...what? You gave my number to a complete stranger? A *stalker*?”

“He seemed...nice.”

I couldn’t bear to even continue the conversation. Instead, I stormed to my bedroom and closed the door behind me. Just in case she got the idea to try to speak to me again, I turned the lock in the knob to keep her out.

The mattress sank beneath me as I sat down and switched on the bedside light. What an awful day. We had worked so hard...and all for nothing. The store would close. Perhaps I could get another job somewhere...a library, or a bookstore. That might be nice. I could work at cataloguing things. Somewhere...away from the public. Such a shame that there probably wasn’t a library night shift.

Bill leapt onto the bed beside me and walked across my lap, purring. I absently reached out to stroke his back.

“And what am I going to do about this mess, Bill?” I asked. Generally I wasn’t the sort of person who spoke aloud to my cat, but perhaps I ought to add, “crazy cat lady” to my list of things making a bad day worse. “Mr. Mclean from the bank won’t leave me alone. The store is going to close. My mother is driving me mad. And...” *And I have to admit—occasionally a boyfriend would be nice.* “And I often wish I wasn’t alone.”

Bill promptly left my lap, walked across the bed, and went towards the window. He gave me a look that suggested he expected me to open it for him.

With a sigh, I reached over and complied, and watched him wander along the ledge and off into the night.

*What’s it say about me when even my cat won’t stick around?*

*Read more at [www.CurioKilledtheCat.com](http://www.CurioKilledtheCat.com)!*