

# When Lightning Strikes

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FOR RACHEY & AODHÁN--

Too soon but you will always be remembered.



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## PROLOGUE

“Where are you, dove?” The sound of a male voice carried through a silent house. “You know you can’t hide from me.” Footsteps could be heard on the stairs and Arita, who was hiding under her bed, bit down on her knuckles. She tried to even out her breathing and make no sound at all. “I know all your hiding places.” He continued on, and Arita could hear the maniacal glee in his voice.

What had she ever seen in him? He was clearly insane. She shifted, making sure her feet were under the bed as well.

“Are you under the bed, dove?” He was getting closer, and Arita could hear him on the walkway. She stifled a scared whimper. No sound, she had to remember that. Make a sound and he would find her and do all those things to her that he had been summing up right before she realised it hadn’t been part of their usual game.

Councillor Arita Trebeck loved to role-play in the bedroom. Submission was her thing, and the meaner they were to her, the more turned on she got. Except tonight, her partner in crime had ignored the safe word. She had seen the evil gleam in his gaze and knew that everything he had said to her, would come true if he caught her.

“Come out, come out, little dove.” He chuckled.

Arita faced her door; she had left it open and watched him pass by. Her heart was beating in her throat like a hummingbird on steroids. Cold sweat broke out over her body, and she closed her eyes just for a moment. When she opened them, a pair of shoes were facing her, and she had to bite down on her hand to not yelp in surprise.

“I can smell your fear, Arita,” he whispered.

She was certain that he would find her now, and that he would get on his knees or toss the bed and grab her and kill her. That’s what he had said. He told her that he would kill her and that everybody would find out about her fetish. His shoes moved away again, left the room and down the hallway away from the stairs. Arita calculated her possibility of escape. She was fast on her feet and in good shape for someone nearing her fifties. She heard a door slam shut, and she took it as her chance. She took the risk and rolled out from underneath the bed, springing up on her feet and ran for the stairs.

“There you are, dove.” He called out from the doorway of her spare room. She let out a scared yelp and dashed down the stairs. But once she reached the front door, it wouldn’t open. It didn’t budge one bit. He had locked her in.

She turned, watching him slowly descend the stairs, and she ran for the kitchen. Arita had to try; perhaps he had forgotten about the back door, but to her frustration, that one was sealed off as well.

Move, move, move, she chanted to herself, managing to slip into her study and dive underneath her desk. Arita heard his footsteps walk by and heard him go into the kitchen and check every cabinet in there.

Her heart was racing. She closed her eyes firmly and tried to activate the pendant around her neck again. It should’ve worked by now. Somebody should have arrived and come to her rescue. But she was alone. Nobody would come. Not in time anyway.

Hot tears streaked down her cheeks, regret washing through her. She

regretted giving in to her desires. It mingled with her fear, and it only spiked when she heard the door to her study open.

“Are you in here, my clever dove?” The voice sounded amused, and a soft creak of the hinges told her that he was pushing the door open further.

He was coming in.

There was no place to go. She was trapped.

His footsteps came closer and closer. Then silence. There was nothing but dead silence in the room, and Arita didn’t dare breathe. She waited and actually thought he had left when all of a sudden, a hand reached under the desk and snatched her by the hair.

The scream lodged in her throat broke free. She screamed in terror.

“Lookie, I caught myself a dove.” His insane laughter mingled with her screams as she stared in the face of her murderer. Her back came crashing down on her desk as he threw her down on it, wiping all of the paper, pens and paraphernalia off to the floor. She struggled, trying to fight him off, but it was to no avail. The last thing she heard in her life was him chanting a spell. The next scream she had been building up to died on her lips when he finished that spell.

## ONE

Cracking open an eye Sierida was sure something had woken her up. After all you did not dream about a loud banging on your door just for the fun of it. Not when said dream had included a very sexy man only paying attention to her and clothing had been flying around. Lifting her head from her pillow she strained to hear the noise that had woken her. Perhaps she had dreamt it after all? Nope, there it was again; the loud banging on her door. Most definitely not a dream. Rolling onto her back she let out a groan. It felt like a truck had run her over. She was so, so tired still. Glancing at her alarm clock she saw through bleary eyes it was just barely seven in the morning. She had gone to bed at ten the night before so it didn't make sense why she was still so tired but the person assaulting her door wasn't really in the mood to wait for her to get to a conclusion on why she was still so tired. No instead the banging grew louder and louder until it was matching the growing ache in her head. Brilliant.

She dragged her feet out from under the covers and planted them firmly next to her bed before she pushed herself up in a sitting position. Sierida brushed her long, black hair from her face and grumbled at it for being in the way. Maybe she should cut it off or something. She was only half way through her

room when she heard the deadbolt on her front door slide back. Apparently she was taking too long and whoever was standing on the outside had had enough of the waiting. Or the pounding. Whatever. She closed the distance towards her bedroom door and opened it up before he would start banging on that one too.

The man walking in right now, crossing her small hallway, didn't give a damn about her locking her door or respecting her personal boundaries. Not for the last ten years anyway. "You're awake. Why didn't you answer?" He rumbled at her and she could hear the annoyance in his voice.

"I only woke like ten seconds ago, Arias." She muttered back, standing still in the middle of her bedroom. Arias de Clare, the bane of her existence, stalked towards her with an angry scowl on his face.

"Why you keep thinking that that damn lock will keep me out is still a mystery to me." He came to a halt in front of her and if her head hadn't been pounding like a mad man on drums she would've just glared back up from her five foot eight height at his six foot four tall frame. Instead she opted for staring at his broad, muscled chest that was currently covered by one of the hundreds of black t-shirts this man must own. Sierida was sure that were she ever to catch a glimpse at that closet of his, it would be black shirts from here till kingdom come.

"Why did you wake me? It's seven in the freaking morning." Sierida rubbed her temple to ease the ache while wrapping her other arm around her waist.

"If you answered your damn phone I didn't have to get up here and wake you up in person." He snarled at her. That did make her look up and she regretted it the moment she saw the look on his face. He was so not looking happy. His short, spiky auburn hair was looking dishevelled and his green eyes were set to if-looks-could-kill mode. Yeah this was going to be another joy filled day.

"My phone?" Had her phone made any sound? She turned around, looked at the side table next to her bed and she noticed then that it looked like a complete warzone. Her covers were nowhere to be found and it made her frown. What

the hell had she been doing in her sleep? Had she been reenacting her sexy dream or something? Making the short trek to her bedside table she snatched up the phone and swiped the screen. Cursing under her breath she saw she had put it on silent the night before and had now several missed calls.

“You put it on silent?” Arias voice came from directly behind her and she jumped slightly. He sounded angry now and she tried her best not to give him a snarky retort. It only got her into more trouble with him than she wanted. Besides, whatever she did or said to him, she couldn’t do any good in his eyes. After all he kept on reminding her that she was just his Bleeder.

She never liked the term. In fact she hated it with a passion. It was like calling her a blood slave behind her back. Which she was technically but she didn’t have to like how they were calling her. She was the walking, talking food bank for Arias since the night she turned eighteen. That had been almost ten years ago.

She had tried to ask him what his problem was many times. He had remained silent but his animosity towards her had grown as time had passed. He seemed to simply ignore that it hadn’t been her idea to get a contract with the Bureau of Servitude. Hell, she had been four years old at the time when her so called mother had given her up for some quick cash, making Sierida sit out a thirty year contract with the de Clare family; a family of vampires.

That deal would eventually make her the Bleeder she was now. But first, maturity would have to be reached, or so said the elders of the family. So they had tried to give her somewhat of a normal upbringing. For as much as that was possible around a large group of vampires.

Now Arias, a son in the family’s youngest generation, was of course something else. A dhampir. Another thing that actually existed. Only half vampire, half something Sierida had yet to figure out. He could walk in the sun, whenever he wanted, and easily pick whatever time of day to breathe down her neck. For example right now.

“Apparently I did.” She murmured turning the volume back up and checking the message that should have woken her up instead of the angry dhampir standing behind her. “Do you need to eat?” Sierida heard the sharp intake of breath and as she turned around he was already stalking away from her. It was as if he didn’t want her blood, which was ridiculous because come feeding time he looked almost feral at the pulse in her neck.

“Get dressed. You have fifteen minutes or you can walk to headquarters.” He slammed the door behind him and she restrained herself from throwing her phone at him. Fine. No eating then. No reason to be so rude about it. She glared at the door and started moving.

She didn’t actually want to walk to work but she could still be miffed with him and get ready at the same time. So getting dressed it was. And that’s what she did. She had gotten her toothbrush and managed to clean her teeth while pulling on her jeans, a shirt, and her favourite pair of boots and after spitting out the toothpaste, she quickly ran a brush through her hair only to tie it back into a ponytail. It would have to do for now. She grabbed her work ID, her phone and some cash and headed out of her bedroom.

Sierida considered going left into her small bathroom and put on some make-up but she was cutting it close already with the fifteen minutes he had given her. So instead she headed towards the front door to go down the stairs and glanced longingly into the living room that was also doubling as her kitchen after pulling open said door. Coffee. She really needed some and fast too. Even more than putting on some mascara.

No time. She only had like one minute left and she still needed to cross the garage and get outside. Yes she was living above a garage. One of the few smaller servant apartments the family had created above the large garage that came with the big ass mansion next door. There were three in total but she was the only one using one of them at the moment. They all had their own entrance and she had to take the long route and go around the building. Which was fine,

since it had been her own choice to get that particular apartment, except for this morning where she had to make a run for it to make sure her ride wouldn't leave without her.

And he would do it too. He would just leave her behind to make a point and make a fool out of her in front of all the Enforcers. It wouldn't be the first time either. Each time she had to come in and do her duty, Arias would make sure she would leave with the need to murder him in his sleep. The day before he had decided he wanted to have a little snack and since it was her day of work at the Enforcer building he had called for her and publically fed on her. Which would have been degrading enough if he hadn't ramped up the hormones on purpose and made her all aroused and needy.

Vampires and dhampirs have this ability to put their food at ease by using hormones which are released the moment they bite into an artery. They can control the amount of these hormones and either cause extreme pain, straight on lust or anything in between.

By the time Arias was done though, she was lusting so badly after him that she was already undressing herself and ready to throw her body at him. If Tane hadn't stopped her, Arias would have let her. Nothing but a cold shower pulled her back from those damn vampire hormones. She didn't even dare to look at Tane who was seething with anger. She could sense it, could sense the hatred coming off of him in waves and she cringed every time he came near to see if she was doing alright.

After that little stunt she had called in sick and left for home. Sierida had heard the whispers though as she walked through the hallways. Arias had shown them exactly what she was. A Bleeder, a blood whore who didn't belong with the Enforcers. Even if it was just as a Runner, the lowest rank possible. The only rank possible for humans.

Rounding the corner she saw him glancing at his watch as he leaned against his car and she ground her teeth together as she hurried to catch up. Why did



such a bastard need to look so incredibly sexy leaning against a car? Because he was damn good looking if she was honest with herself. And she hated even thinking like that. His hair, framing a strong angular jawline, his broad, muscled chest and Sierida knew that he had a set of perfectly formed abs hiding under his shirt, which happened when someone adamantly insisted on doing his workouts without a shirt on. He didn't even look a day older than mid thirty, which she knew couldn't be his true age since she had been around vampires who were centuries old and looked the same age as he did. Her eyes travelled down to those strong powerful legs because if she let her eyes linger too long on his midsection she would...

And there she went and did it anyway. She looked and gave herself an internal smack over the head. This was so not the time and she really didn't want to look at him like that. He was an ass. Besides if she looked at him long enough she could see the flaws he carried too. His powerful neck was a bit too wide for his face and his mouth appeared small in it. Yet there were times she dreamt about kissing that mouth or holding on to that neck when he... And there she went again. Damn it.

Sierida stalked over to the car and Arias looked up and his scowl returned. She was used to it by now and ignored it as she walked to the passenger side and slid in. Yeah this would be just an awesome day.

## TWO

It didn't take Arias long to get into the city and get them to the Enforcers Headquarters. The tall building loomed up in front of them and even though they treated her like crap she loved going to work. Not everyone got in, especially not if you were human. No the humans really didn't have anything to say anymore, not since two-thousand sixteen, some forty years ago, when one powerful Warlock changed the world and gave the supernatural beings the upper hand, almost wiping out the entire human population in the process.

Ever since then, the humans were herded together in the bigger cities across the world or new cities were created for them. Like Eathyrst, the city she called home, was a fairly new city created in the United Kingdom. It was why all the buildings still looked so new and high-tech. And Enforcer Central even had this classical look that made it stand out from all the other buildings. After all they were the Enforcers, the elite police force of Eathyrst and they needed to be noticed.

After Arias parked the car in the garage below the building they walked towards the elevator. He hadn't spoken a word since they left the manor, brooding all the way over. It was getting on her nerves. But what else was new?

They rode the elevator up in silence to the fourth floor where they were supposed to get briefed. She had read the message from dispatch and it had left a dreadful feeling. In the ten years she had been working for the Enforcers they never had put out a call to everyone. And it would be something very bad to even include the Runners.

The door pinged as they reached the fourth floor and it started to slide open, Arias however stopped her from moving forward by putting up his hand against the doorway and blocking her path.

“I told them calling you in would be a mistake.” He growled at her. Sierida looked up at him frowning. “What do you mean? I’m part of this, as much as you are.” She glared back at him.

“You’re nothing, a nuisance. Don’t get in our way.” He lifted his arm and stalked off. She took in a deep breath, knowing it wasn’t her place and would put her in serious trouble but she deeply wanted to run after him and smack him over the head. Instead she just followed him silently towards the briefing room.

Voices already reached her and it sounded like the room was at full capacity, which meant that all ten Enforcer teams were in. Each team had four Enforcers and one Runner. Lucky for Sierida the Enforcers on her team didn’t put her through hell, except for one of course. She had only been allowed to join the Enforcers in Arias’s team. At the time she had gladly accepted, getting into the Enforcers wasn’t easy.

Slipping into the room she silently walked towards the third table on the right where the rest of her team was already seated. She tried her best to ignore the stares and whispers coming from the other tables as she passed them. She would not make them see that it bothered her. So blank face, straight back and selective deafness was the way to go.

The fact that she could focus on Tane’s smiling face was helping a lot too. The moment she had set foot inside that room he had swung his head towards

her and a big grin spread on his face. She wasn't surprised that he had noticed her, he was a werewolf after all. Their sense of smell was uncanny. So was their hearing. Tane was fairly young though and over the years his senses would advance more and more. He was also their newest member on the team. He was replacing Typhany who had moved on to Alpha Four who were in need of a Telepath. There were six Alpha teams and four Beta teams. Each alpha team had their own speciality, Alpha Four was good at interrogating so having a Telepath was a smart move on their end. The Beta teams were used for covert missions and back up where needed.

Sierida belonged to Alpha Six and they were good at investigating. So getting Tane Beaumont with his good but slightly crooked nose, like it had been broken a couple of times, and hearing was a good addition to their team. Not to mention that despite the crooked nose he was a six foot five tall hunk with the most edible body she had seen around. Besides tall he had a broad chest, a fine pair of glutes in those jeans of his, a nice tan going and his dark brown coloured hair always looked like he had just rolled out of bed.

Whenever he turned those hazelnut coloured eyes on her though she wasn't sure what to think. One moment he was just smiling at her and the next she was sure he was undressing her in his mind. Which shouldn't be a problem since she basically did the same to him.

Reaching the table she felt a slender pale hand touch her shoulder as she slid into her seat. Looking at the owner of the hand she gave a small smile. "Good morning, Elora."

"And to you, Sierida. It is good to see you again." The other woman said to her with a knowing look. Sierida couldn't help but grimace. Here was another one who had witnessed her moment of shame at Arias's hand.

Elora gave her a regal nod, understanding that this was not a subject to be touched. Sierida liked that about the Álf, they were discreet but when needed direct to the point. She smiled at Elora again, this time not without gratitude.

Where Sierida had black straight hair and a tan, the other woman had black straight hair and a skin so light in complexion it was almost luminescent. The most interesting aspect about Elora was her gentle silver eyes. She once explained that all members of the royal family had silver eyes. Or well the ones who were a direct descendant to the throne.

Elora never explained how that worked but then again the Álfar weren't that big on sharing with the rest of the world. She was also the most soft spoken of their team, which was to be expected from the Álf. They were the only supernatural group who didn't regard humans as life bait on first sight. Ever since the doorway to Álfheimr was opened forty years ago by that Warlock they had wandered into the world and had declared themselves advocates of humankind.

The humans had no clue what to think of the tall, pale beings who appeared out of nowhere but they also knew not to look a gift horse in the mouth. They made an end to the needless prosecution of humankind and came up with the herding into cities to keep an eye on them. They even provided the technology to erect new cities from scratch.

That was forty years ago though, this was now. Not that the Supernatural community had adopted a different look on humankind in the meantime. Maybe the supernatural beings were more tolerant towards single humans but as a group, the humans still weren't allowed to do much.

The fourth Enforcer on the team was the British Warlock, Chauncy. He was always looking at Sierida like she was the most beautiful thing on the planet. Then again he looked at every woman like that and Sierida even caught him looking at men like that too. He was an odd duck but since he was a level four Warlock with dominion over earth, water, air and spirit, he was considered very powerful since there were only three level four's and only one level five in the whole wide world.

That level five had been the one to open that portal and thus turned the

humans into a minority. Sierida, much like most humans, was a little on the fence regarding Warlocks. As if privy to her thoughts, Chauncy gave her a brilliant smile in greeting and then went back to whatever he was doing on his phone.

Last but not least, there was Arias. He was ignoring her as usual and he would continue to do so until he came up with something to make her feel like the smallest person in the world yet again.

But instead of that happening, silence suddenly struck the room as a large, broad man walked inside. He had a dark beard and short cropped hair, military style. His aura struck every single person in the room and she could hear Tane grind his teeth together in an effort to not respond to it. Captain Andrew Beaumont, an alpha werewolf, their commanding officer and Tane's uncle. The Captain was the youngest of three brothers. Tane's father was the eldest and the pack's Alpha.

Tane was an alpha, too, and he wasn't reacting as a wolf to an alpha higher in rank, no he was trying to keep himself from challenging the Captain.

Sierida placed a hand on his forearm and kept it there. "Killing the Captain who is also your uncle does not look good on your record." she whispered at him. Tane clenched his hands into fists and she saw his lips curl into a half smile. Good, so while Tane still looked like he was ready to jump at the man's throat he had enough control to not do it.

The Captain came to a halt, facing the room. The look on his face made everyone remain quiet. They were curious but they could all feel a heaviness settle around them. Something was up and it wasn't good.

"Listen up." Captain Beaumont boomed out with a voice that sounded like he had been smoking all his life. "At three in the morning I received a call from the Council office." You could still hear a needle drop. Nobody was moving. Hell, it looked like they weren't even breathing. "Councillor Trebeck has been murdered."

Gasps and murmurs went through the room and the Captain cleared his throat to get the room quiet. "We are to drop any other cases we have and devote our resources to the Council office. Here's a list, consider yourself assigned. Read it, do it and make sure we have this bastard in custody before the end of the week." He growled with anger. "Dismissed."

Dropping the list on the table next to him he walked out of the room without another word.

Elora got up to go look at the list and Tane whistled under his breath. "Who in hell would want to murder Trebeck?" He asked with surprise. "Isn't she like the pacifist on the Council?" he continued and he made a good point there.

The council consisted of six people to represent each group of Supernatural beings. Well, technically there were seven Councillors if you counted the human faction as well but they all knew he was on it just for show. Trebeck had been voted to represent the Witches on the council, since the Warlocks wanted their own representative they got their own seat. Trebeck had been a good natured earth witch who had tried her best to keep the discussions on track and make sure the other Councillors didn't fight amongst themselves.

Chauncy looked up from his phone and for a moment he had this strange look on his face, like the words had just reached his brain but it was gone in a flash and Sierida wasn't sure if she had seen it right. "Did you know her?" She asked the Warlock.

"Never met the chit. She wasn't my choice for getting that seat." He replied, putting his phone away as Elora returned with a grim look on her face.

"We are to report at the Councillor's home. We have crime scene duty." She said her silvery eyes traveling to Sierida.

"I'll get the van ready." She murmured.

"I'll help you." Tane offered up.

"That is not your job. She can do it alone." Arias finally spoke up and looked at the werewolf sitting next to him.

“I don’t give a shit. She’s not prepping the van alone.” Tane practically snarled at the dhampir. If she didn’t stop this right now, they would come to blows right in front of the other Enforcers and she didn’t want to be the reason for them to get a disciplinary mark on their records.

“It’s okay, Tane. I can do it faster alone anyway.” Her face was a blank slate but on the inside she was seething. “I’ll see you guys in fifteen minutes.” She got up from her seat and stalked away from the table. Once she was out of the room she stopped and took a deep breath to calm herself down. Freaking Arias and his freaking issues. She wondered how much longer she could take his crap before she actually exploded.

“Thunor get your ass in my office.” The booming voice of the Captain reached her and made her snap out of her anger instantly. The guy had that effect on you. Instead of going left to the elevators she turned right and marched her butt over to the Captain’s office.

“Yes, sir?” She said, standing in his doorway.

“I have a special assignment for you.” He waved her inside and motioned for her to sit down. She heard a soft whoosh behind her the moment she stepped inside. Silence shield falling into place. She was intrigued but she knew better than to show that.

“Councillor Trebeck’s death is highly suspicious. I don’t have to tell you that but there are things that don’t add up.” He rumbled, finally looking up from his paperwork.

“Don’t add up, sir?” She asked being the nice little human she was.

“Nobody could have entered that house without tripping an alarm and notifying us.” He stared at her for a short moment before continuing. What was he saying? “That alarm was personally set to get my attention if the Councillor was in any sort of trouble.”

Sierida looked at him, his words sinking in and her eyes widened slightly in response. “So either she knew her attacker or the attacker knew about the