

Waking the Witch
Otherworld book 11
Sneak Peek

Prologue

For the first time since Claire Kennedy died, there wasn't a deputy guarding the site of her murder.

Kayla peered out from behind the boarded up beauty salon. Seeing no one, she hoisted her backpack and set out, kicking stones, her gaze fixed on the ground. She was careful to walk slowly. If you ran, grown-ups paid attention. Kayla hated it when they paid attention. She liked being invisible.

Until her mom died, murdered with her best friend in this same building, Kayla had always been invisible. But now it wasn't just the other kids who whispered behind her back, calling her weird or, in grown-up language "an odd little thing." Grown-ups did, too. It wouldn't help if they found her sneaking into the place where her mom had died.

Kayla knew the rear door would be locked. Kayla had lock picks from her Junior Detective kit, but they were just toys. Kayla didn't need toys. She knew a way in, though. A boarded up

window on the first floor with a gap big enough to for a nine-year-old to squeeze through. Concrete blocks scattered behind the building made a good stepladder.

She pushed her backpack in first. It hit the floor with thump.

As she hoisted herself through the window, she avoided the broken glass she'd cut herself on last time. Grandma had flipped out and taken her to the clinic. Grandma was like that. She worried a lot. After Mom died, Kayla thought Grandma would have less to worry about. No such luck.

She dropped to the floor and rummaged in her backpack for her flashlight. Plastic, of course. She'd considered asking Grandma for a real one for her birthday, but hadn't figured out yet how to explain why she needed it.

Kayla shone the flashlight around. Empty. No, that was the wrong word. The building was only empty of *people*. Abandoned.

There was tons of crap here, all of it dirty and old and broken, but Kayla barely needed the flashlight to get where she was going. She'd been here five times since her mom had died. She'd recorded every visit in her notebook. There hadn't been much to see, though. By the time she thought of coming, the police had cleared the place out.

This time it would be different. If Claire Kennedy had been killed here, there had to be a connection to her mother's murder. There just had to be.

She opened the basement door and shone her light down into blackness. She went down one step, then stopped, working up her nerve as she always did before shutting the door and letting the darkness of the basement envelope her, her plastic flashlight barely strong enough to cast a distant circle of light.

Halfway down the stairs she heard the thump of a door shutting above. A deputy back on duty? That was okay. He'd peek inside the main floor, assure himself all was clear, then go back to sit outside in his pickup. Kayla knew the routine.

Still she listened for a minute. When no more noises came, so she resumed her descent. Down into the basement, where the chill was enough to make her wish she'd brought her jacket. Lissa would say it was the chill of death.

Lissa talked like that. When Kayla confided that she came here, her friend's eyes had gone round and she'd said, "Are you trying to contact her ghost?"

"Whose ghost?"

"Your mother's, dummy. If you could talk to her, she could tell you who killed her."

Kayla thought that was dumb, but she didn't say so. Lissa was the only friend she had.

It was just a dark, cold, smelly basement. Where her mom had died. And no one knew who'd done it or why. That's why Kayla kept coming back. To find out what had happened to her mom. And to Brandi, though really she didn't much care what had happened to Brandi, though she knew Grandma would say she shouldn't think like that. She did want to find out what happened to Claire Kennedy, though. She hadn't really known Claire—she was one of the girls from the cookie place—but she'd seen her around town a few times, and she'd seemed nice, always smiling and waving, even though they'd never met.

From the bottom of the basement, she picked her way around piles of junk until she saw the yellow crime scene tape wrapped around a pillar, the broken end trailing across the floor.

She stopped. It was exactly the same spot where her mother's and Brandi's bodies had been found. She shivered and maybe it wasn't the cold this time, but she told herself it was.

She crept forward. There was blood on the cement floor. The spot wasn't very big, not like the big stains she could still see, almost hidden under a layer of dust.

She shone the flashlight on those old blood stains and, for a second, she could see her mother lying there, her eyes open, her—

Kayla shook her head sharply and swung the beam away. She wasn't here to think about her mother. She was here to find out who killed her. And she didn't need ghosts for that. She needed science.

She took her backpack off and unzipped it. Inside was her Junior Detective kit. She had a camera, too. A real one. It was on her mom's old cell phone, which Grandma let her keep for emergencies. She took it out to take a picture of the blood. Blood stains were important. They could tell you—

A creak overhead. Kayla froze. Then she shook her head. Just a noisy old building. She aimed the flashlight with one hand, holding the cell with the other—

This time footsteps sounded above her, crossing the first floor, the distinct *thump-thump* of someone walking.

She swallowed.

Just the deputy. Or maybe the sheriff, come back to check something. Or someone from town, also trying to sneak a peek at the crime scene.

But what if it was someone else?

Kayla had read every book in the library on murder investigations. One line came back to her now. *The killer may return to the scene of the crime.*

It seemed crazy to come back after you'd gotten away, but Kayla trusted the books, and listening to those footsteps, her heart hammered.

Then it hit her. If this *was* the killer, maybe she really could solve her mother's death. All she had to do was hide and see who showed up.

A click from upstairs—the basement door opening.

Kayla turned off her flashlight and tucked herself into the shadows beside the old furnace.

One

For five years, I'd toiled as executive assistant slave to Lucas and Paige and now, finally, I was in charge. For the next week anyway.

The plaque still read Cortez Winterbourne Investigations, but that could be easily changed with the deft use of an energy bolt spell. Levine Investigations rolled off the tongue so much more easily. At one time, I would have done it, if only as a joke, but there are things you can get away with at sixteen that just don't fly at twenty-one.

I used my keycard, then crept through the lobby, trying to squelch the click of my heels.

"Savannah!" a voice chirped behind me. "I thought I heard you come in."

I started a cover spell, but Tina had already spotted me. I considered a knock back—make her trip and give me time to escape, but that would, sadly, not be a good way to launch my week playing a responsible adult.

When Paige said we were getting an accountant for a tenant, I'd thought "Great, someone nice and quiet." That was the stereotype, but apparently, no one had told Tina.

"I'm so glad I caught you," she said. "It's almost ten and no one's in the office yet."

It was 9:14.

“There was a man here looking for Lucas,” she continued. “I called upstairs and the phone rang and rang. Did he and Paige leave on vacation already? I know Adam is at a conference. In Spokane, isn’t he?”

I made a noncommittal noise. Tina might be human, but she had a supernatural sense for snooping. Adam said we should hire her. I threatened to give her his home address and that shut him up.

“I hate to tell you kids how to run your business, but you really need to have someone up there during business hours. It’s no wonder you hardly have any clients. You need a full-time receptionist.” She patted my arm. “Yes, I know, dear, you’re the receptionist, but you’re always flitting off, doing god-knows-what. I could—”

“Oh, my cell phone’s vibrating,” I lied. “Could be a client. I’ll talk to Paige about drop-ins.”

“It’s no bother, dear. I wanted to talk to you anyway. I think I have a job for you.” Tina lowered her voice, though we were the only ones in the lobby. “I started dating this man. A widower I met online.”

“And you want me to run a background check? Good idea.”

“Oh, no. A man has the right to his privacy. It’s just . . . Well, I was watching this show on private investigators, about a firm of women hired by other women to test their mate’s loyalty.”

It took me a second to catch her drift. “You want me to try to seduce your boyfriend?”

Her lips pursed. “Certainly not. Just get dolled up, talk to him, flirt with him and see whether he’ll flirt back.”

“I’m less than half his age. I’d be worried if he *didn’t* flirt back.”

A muffled snort made me glance down the hall. A guy a couple of years older than me leaned out of the stairwell doorway. Light hair just past his collar, denim jacket, boots and a pair of snug-fitting worn blue jeans. He lifted a finger to his lips, shushing me, and I tried not to stare even if he was, definitely, stare-worthy.

I turned back to Tina. “That guy who wanted to speak to Lucas. Did you let him in?”

“Certainly not.” She lowered her voice. “He looked a little dodgy.”

“Was he in his mid-twenties? Dark blond hair? Looks like he lost contact with his razor a few days ago?”

The guy arched his brows, mock-indignant.

“Yes, that’s him,” Tina said. “Now about my job offer . . .”

“Spend the money on a shopping spree at Victoria’s Secret and make sure he’s too tired to look at twenty-year-olds.”

Before she recovered from that suggestion, I took off.

The guy waited until she was safely in her office, then strolled to meet me.

“Dodgy?” he said. “I’m not the one wanting a hot chick to try seducing my new boyfriend.”

He extended his hand. “Jesse Aanes.”

I’d heard of him. A half-demon PI out of Seattle who’d worked with Lucas a few times.

Lucas said he was a good guy, which was the only seal of approval I needed.

“What brings you to Portland?” I asked.

“Cases. One that I’m working now and a new one I wanted to run past Lucas. Two birds, one stone. I left Lucas a message, but he hasn’t returned it, which isn’t like him.”

“He’s on vacation with Paige. I confiscated their cell phones and the only messages I’m passing on to them are well wishes and death notices.”

He laughed. “Good idea. They can use the break. Did that woman say Adam isn’t around either?”

“He’s at a conference. It’s just me for the rest of the week.”

Jesse hesitated and I knew what he was thinking—he needed help, but I wasn’t what he had in mind.

“Why don’t you come up to the office,” I said. “Tell me what you’ve got.”

I used my keycard to unlock the stairwell door. Yes, we have keycard entry everywhere, plus a shitload of protective spells for the second floor, which I undid under my breath.

As Tina said, we don’t get a lot of drop-in clients. We don’t want to. While we don’t turn away paying human customers, our clientele is almost exclusively supernatural and they don’t need an ad in the Yellow Pages to find us. Given that Lucas is heir to the Cortez Cabal, though, not everyone who finds us wants to hire us. Hence the heavy security.

Jesse followed me up the stairs. “I guess the daughter of Eve Levine and Kristof Nast doesn’t need to worry about strangers attacking her in an empty office.”

“If they do, I can always use them for my next ritual sacrifice. Volunteers are so hard to come by.”

It’s not the sort of crack you should make when you have a notorious dark witch for a mother and an equally notorious cutthroat sorcerer for a father. It was a test of sorts, and Jesse passed, just laughing and saying, “I’ll watch my step then.”

“So what’s your power? I know you’re a half-demon.”

“Agito.”

Telekinesis, then. Agito was the second of the three levels, meaning he had only mediocre abilities. Having dealt with a high-level Volo before, I was much more comfortable with an Agito.

That explained how he'd snuck past Tina. Using telekinesis, he'd caught the door before it closed. I'd have to talk to Lucas about that. Yet another argument against human tenants.

I led Jesse into the meeting room. He didn't sit down—didn't even take off his jacket—just strode straight to the table and pulled files from his satchel.

He set a crime scene photo on the table. "Six months ago, two young women were murdered in Columbus, Washington, about an hour over the Oregon border. I doubt it made the Portland news. Nothing all that hinky about the killings. No sign of a serial killer or sexual sadism. Just the shooting death of two twenty-four-year-olds who led the kind of lives where you sort of figure, sooner or later"—he gestured at the photo of the two women—"this is how they're going to end up."

"Hookers?"

He shook his head. "Just not exactly sterling members of society."

"Drugs? I said. "Booze? Petty crime? All of the above?"

"You got it. Nothing you haven't seen a million times before. I was on that path myself until Lucas got me out of some trouble and persuaded me there were legal ways to use my skills. Anyway, these girls didn't run into a Lucas. They were high school dropouts. Never held a job more than few months. One had a kid at sixteen. Both had short rap sheets, and a string of boyfriends with longer ones."

I lifted the photo to take a closer look. The two bodies lay on a floor. Both were fully dressed, T-shirts covered in blood, each bearing a hole. Single gunshot wounds to the chest.

One was on her back, eyes open, arms akimbo, legs twisted, a pool of blood under her. The other was stretched out, arms and legs only slightly bent, eyes closed. The blood under her was smeared.

“Both shot, as you see,” Jesse said. “A through-and-through for the first, the bullet apparently lodging in the wall over there.” He pointed to the edge of the photo. “They recovered another bullet from inside the second victim. The first one died immediately. The second didn’t.”

“Doesn’t look like she tried to get away, though. Drugged?”

“I don’t have tox screens.”

“No sign of rape or torture, like you said. Looks execution style. A classic case of ‘Hey, bitch, you gonna pay for that dope or what?’ The answer, apparently, being ‘or what.’”

“Yep, that’s what it looks like.”

When he didn’t go on, I glanced at him. “So what’s your interest? Is one of these girls a supernatural?”

“Not as far as I know.”

He set a second photo on the table. It was another murdered young woman, also early twenties, though one glance told me *this* girl didn’t sell herself for dime bags.

I put the two photos side by side. All three bodies had been left in the same place.

“Basement?” I asked.

“Of an abandoned building.”

I could hear Lucas’s voice. *The fact that the deceased are found in a common location may speak less to a connection than a simple matter of convenience.* Yes, Lucas really did talk that

way. Drove me nuts, especially when I found myself slipping into the same speech patterns. On the plus side, I may not be an A student, but I sure as hell can sound like one.

When I told Jesse my theory—small town, not a lot of places to put a body, someone had already used this one, so the second killer followed suit—he shrugged. “Possible, but in this particular small town, there are no shortage of abandoned buildings.”

“What’s the local murder rate?”

“You’re looking at it. This double killing last fall, then the single one ten days ago. Before that, the last homicide was a domestic incident in 1999.”

“Lot of drug activity in town?”

“It has its share, maybe a little more. You can blame that on a depressed economy, though. It’s not exactly a hotbed of gangsta activity. Mostly kids selling pot from their lockers, the laid-off guy down the road dealing out of his garage, that sort of thing.”

“Do the police think it’s the same killer for all three?”

“Yep, but only because, otherwise, they’d need to catch two murderers, and that’s more work than they care to contemplate.”

“You’re going to make me guess what the supernatural connection is, aren’t you?”

“I was just seeing if you’d pick it up. It’s—”

I lifted a hand to cut him off. “Is the answer here?” I asked, pointing at the photos.

He nodded.

“Give me a minute.”

Two

I studied the victims for some sign they'd been killed by a supernatural—puncture wounds, gnaw marks, weird burn patterns. But the only sign of trauma was the bullet holes.

Next I looked at the background for evidence that the victims had been used ritualistically. If so, then we probably *weren't* dealing with a supernatural killer. There were black art rituals involving human sacrifice—usually high-level protection spells that required a life in forfeit for a life protected—but that's a lot more rare among witches and sorcerers than Hollywood would have people believe.

If these were indeed ritual murders, then the most likely culprit was Hollywood itself, for suggesting that it's possible to harness the forces of darkness through sacrifice. As if a demon really gives a rat's ass about a dead human or two.

When humans ritually kill, though, they're rarely subtle. Pentacles in blood are a particular favorite. Apparently, if you're going to the trouble of proving what a badass occultist you are, you want to make sure the whole world gets it.

However, even if the killer was human, that was a concern for us. The agency takes a few calls a year from supernaturals freaked out because some lowlife in their city drained a victim's blood or left occult paraphernalia at a crime scene. I tell them to chill—most humans are smart enough to know vampires and witches and demons are the products of over-active imaginations and the police will quickly turn their attention to more plausible explanations.

Sometimes, though, exposure threats do bear investigating. We can never be too—

I stopped. I lifted the photos, and squinted at them. Was that a faint line under each body?

Part of a circle drawn in chalk and hastily erased?

“Do you have a better picture of this?” I asked, pointing at the line.

Jesse shook his head.

“What does the police report say about it?”

“As far as I know, nothing. I haven’t seen it myself, but my contact says it wasn’t mentioned. We aren’t dealing with an expert crime scene team here.”

“Okay. But since it’s in a covered, unused area, the marks under the latest victim should still be there.”

“That’s what I’m hoping.”

All the magical races—witch, sorcerer, shaman, necromancer—had rituals that used chalk circles. The important part was the symbol presumably underneath these bodies. Once I’d noticed those chalk lines, I started picking up other very discreet signs of a true dark art ritual—flakes on the concrete that looked like dried herbs, a black smudge on the wall that I recognized as smoke from a burning brazier, an edge of silver, almost hidden in the latest victim’s clenched hand. A coin? An amulet?

“The cops must have seen that,” I said, pointing to the silver. “Or the coroner did.”

“I’m guessing yes, and I’m really hoping they’ll tell me what it is, but they may hold onto the information to weed out the killer from the cranks.”

I looked at the two earlier victims. One had her left hand fisted and the other’s right hand was palm down on the ground. Either could have been holding something.

“Who’s the client?” I asked.

“Me.”

When I glanced up, he looked faintly embarrassed. “See, that’s the problem with knowing Lucas. You get this urge to do pro bono work.”

“It’s called guilt.”

“No kidding, huh? I’m not a crusader, but every now and then something like this crosses my radar. A necromancer buddy with the Washington state police recognized signs of what looked like a real ritual. He can’t jump in without raising eyebrows, so he passed it to me.”

I took out my iPhone and logged into our database, tapping the virtual keypad as he continued.

“Officially, though, the mother of the last victim hired me. I tracked her down and offered to investigate in return for her confirming that to anyone who asks.”

“A free PI. Bet she was happy.”

“I wouldn’t say *happy*. It took a lot of fast-talking to persuade her I wasn’t running a con. Even made me sign a waiver.”

“Did she seem reluctant? Maybe for a reason?”

“Nah, just a legal secretary who thinks she’s been at the job long enough to practice law herself.”

I turned around the phone to show him a list. “I plugged in what we know, and this is what I get. Eight possible rituals, more if whatever she has in her hand isn’t significant.”

“Whoa, and I’m still working from paper files.”

“Paige kludged together an app and hacked it into the proprietary software.”

“Whatever that means . . .”

“No idea. To me it means we have database access on the road. Of course, I could just walk twenty feet and pull this up on a computer, but that wouldn’t be nearly as impressive. Would you like the list texted to you, e-mailed or sent to our printer?”

“Okay, now you’re just showing off. Text it.” He handed me a card with his cell number and I punched it in.

“So I’m guessing this is what you need from us—you supply the details and we’ll access our resources to figure out which ritual you’re dealing with. If we’re lucky, what she has in her hand will answer all our questions. Well, except whodunit. That’s your job.”

“See, now this is why I asked to talk to Lucas,” he said. “If I showed him this, he’d be all ‘Hmm, this bears investigation. I take it you’re on the case?’ And I’d be, like, ‘Well, I will be, right after I finish a job.’ Then he’d ask if I minded if he looked into it himself, and say he’d hate to take a job from me and I’d joke that it’s not a paying one anyway and if he wants to take a look . . .”

“So you actually brought this to us to hoping we’d investigate it for you?”

His cheeks colored. “Shit. Could you just channel Lucas for a minute? Please? Make me feel like a generous colleague?”

“If you were truly generous, you’d be passing us a paying case. Being the accountant for this place, I’m all about the bills.”

As I picked up the photos, my heart beat a little faster. I could take this case. My first solo investigation. I’d been asking for one since I turned eighteen. By the time I reached twenty, I realized I had to stop bugging for a case and start working my ass off to prove I could handle it.

I had a hell of a reputation to overcome, though. I’d made more mistakes as a teen than most people do in a lifetime. Paige and Lucas knew that better than anyone. They weren’t just

my bosses—they were my guardians. I'd been twelve when my mother died, and Paige had taken me in, and she'd gone through hell because of it.

So I didn't blame them for only letting me assist in investigations. Here, though, was a case I could handle, working under the supervision of a guy Lucas trusted.

So I said, as casually as I could, "My schedule is clear this week. I'll look into it."

Jesse looked over. Sizing me up. I knew that and I could feel my hackles rising, but I kept my mouth shut because I've come to understand that I can't blame people for underestimating me. Twenty-one might feel terribly grown up to me, but to others I'm still a kid, and insisting I can handle it sounds defensive, not mature.

"Lucas says you've been doing some investigative work," he finally said.

"I've been part of the team since we opened. I've done research and legwork for the past five years. I've assisted on investigations for three. I'd even done a few small local ones myself. Yes, triple homicide isn't small, but you're looking for someone to do some legwork, presumably under your supervision."

He nodded. "If you can help me, I'd appreciate that. Normally, I'd suggest you run it past Lucas and Paige but . . ."

"Under the circumstances, they're better off not worrying about me. I'll tell Adam."

"Okay. Thanks. I'm not dumping this case on you. I *will* jump back in as soon as I can. But this latest murder is already cooling. I hoped to get out there two days ago, and got side-tracked with this case I'm on. It's a guy I've been chasing for two years now and he finally turned up in Portland. It's just child support, but, well, the client really needs the money . . ."

"And if you wait, he might bolt again."

"Exactly."

Frankly, I didn't care what his motivation was. I just wanted the job.

If it was a ritual, it was magic, probably witch or sorcerer and I was both. Add in some demon blood on mom's side, and I was a damned amazing spell-caster. More importantly for this case, I had contacts in the black market and dark arts.

So I told Jesse I'd take his case. I made it clear, though, that although I'd welcome his help when he was done, I wasn't doing the legwork and dropping the case. It was mine. He agreed and left me with the file.

The second Jesse was gone, I pulled up his photo file on the computer. Everything he'd said fit with what I'd heard about the guy, but double-checking is standard procedure around here, where we have to deal with everything from unstable clients to pissed-off targets to Cabal assassins. So I checked the photo. There was no question that the guy I'd talked to was Jesse Aanes.

Next I looked the murders up on the Internet and downloaded everything I could find, which wasn't much. Ditto for the victims. I got a few hits on the latest one--Claire Kennedy--but nothing on the first two, Ginny Thompson and Brandi Degas. Yep, Gin and Brandi. Call me crazy, but naming your daughters after alcoholic beverages is just asking for trouble.

Next I worked on identifying the ritual. I'd just finished plugging in ideas for the silver object in Claire's hand—coin, amulet, key—when I glanced at the clock. It was almost eleven. If I planned to get to Columbus today and start investigating, I had to get going.

I grabbed my helmet from the backroom and wheeled my bike into the alley. Not a bicycle, a motorcycle. I might live in the green belt, but I'd never quite embraced the lifestyle. I drove a

1950 Triumph Thunderbird that Lucas and I had restored together. It was a sweet ride, and a lot more fuel-efficient than a car, so I could feel virtuous without sacrificing the cool factor.

I zipped home, then called Adam. No answer. That was fine—I wasn't calling to get his approval, just to let him know. Adam wouldn't stop me anyway. He was my biggest supporter when I argued for getting out in the field more.

Paige had baked me cookies before she left, and I was filling a box to take with me when my cell rang. The Doors' *Light My Fire*. Adam's picture popped up, a god-awful one of him snapped before his first coffee on a ski trip last winter.

I'd been in love with Adam since I was twelve. I'd grown up secure in the knowledge that, while other girls dreamed about their ideal partner, I'd already found mine. I just needed to wait until I was old enough for him to realize I wasn't just his friends' ward; I was his soul mate.

Sixteen sounded about right. By the time I actually reached sixteen, though, I realized it was too young. No decent twenty-six-year-old should be interested in a kid that age. Eighteen then. When eighteen passed, I told myself I was still too young, the gap too wide. Twenty? Nope. Twenty-one. It had to be twenty-one.

We went out for my twenty-first birthday, just the two of us. That wasn't a sign of anything—we've always been good friends. When he asked where I wanted to go, I said the most expensive place in town, just to give him a hard time. Then I bought a knockout dress, got my hair done, even had a manicure. I was sure that night Adam would finally realize the smart-ass, irresponsible Savannah was gone for good. I was a woman now.

If he did notice that, it didn't seem to make any difference. I *wasn't* his friends' ward anymore. I was his coworker and pal, and that was all I was ever going to be. Take it or leave it.

I'd decided to take it. That didn't mean, though, that my heart didn't flutter every time I heard his ring tone.

"Let me guess?" he said when I answered. "You're bored and lonely already."

"Nope. Got a triple homicide with possible ritualistic overtones already."

I gave him a quick rundown.

"Jesse's a good guy," he said when I finished. "You could use the experience. As the senior employee in Paige and Lucas's absence, I'm making an executive decision."

"You like that, don't you?"

"Anything that gives me the upper hand over you. I promise not to lord it over you when I get there, though."

"You're at a conference. As boring as it might be, you're stuck."

"The last seminar I want to sit in on is Wednesday, so I'll leave early, and come give you a hand. Jesse's fine, but better to work with someone you know, right? We make a good team."

True. But as much as I loved working with Adam, I really wanted this to be my first solo case. As solo as I could make it, anyway. So I said we'd talk. He was fine with that.

"Now, you're going to stay there, right? Not commute back and forth."

"It's only an hour away. I have to come back or Paige and Lucas will know something's up."

"I'll say I sent you out to do legwork for me."

"But the office—"

"—will run just fine without you. Yes, I know you'd rather come home every night, but if you really want field experience, you need to get out in the field and stay there. It's a small

town. You have to meld in, become part of the community. It'll be good for you, getting out, mingling, trying to fit in . . .”

Mingling with *humans*. Trying to fit into *human* society. That's what he meant. Damn.

I reluctantly agreed. He made me promise to call him with an update tomorrow.