

OLD CLUB SCENE

FROM AWAKEN THE DAWN

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DELETED SCENES: AWAKEN THE DAWN

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Scene: Old Club Scene

“**W**here’s this club?” I asked.
He nodded toward a dark, decayed three-story warehouse down the street. If not for the stream of people coming and going through there, I would’ve thought the building was condemned, with most of its windows busted out or boarded up. Music pulsed from that direction.

We reached the door as two girls stumbled outside, their mini-skirts extra short, their eyes extra glazed. A wave of bass-driven techno followed them out. Maksim held the door for me. One of the girls staggered up to him, her Romanian slurred, and pawed at his arm. He dusted her off and stepped inside, letting the door fall shut behind us.

“This way.” He led me through a dark room lit only by a sparse few ultraviolet lights. The music grew louder the deeper we ventured into the building.

Clubbers lounged on tattered couches, the tips of their cigarettes

catching fire each time they took a puff. The hazy purple light irradiated everyone's teeth and eyes. Maksim glanced back at me. His eyeballs looked like a nuclear fallout zone, glowing in a brilliant, radioactive white.

We stopped in front of a staircase leading to a lower level. He reached for my hand, and an electric shock traveled into my palm, sending a rush of tingles up my arm and a flutter into my belly.

I yanked my hand away. "What are you doing?"

"Helping you."

"I-I don't need help." The rotted-out staircase glowered up at me. In reality, I probably did need help, but not if it meant touching Maksim. I could still feel the tingles from where he'd touched me, like a phantom limb after an amputation.

He halved a concerned look between the stairs and me. "Are you certain?"

"Yeah." I clenched a fist, stilling the tremor in my hand. "I'll be fine."

We started the descent, the stairs creaking and bowing beneath us. One stair had caved in entirely. I tried to step where Maksim stepped, but the smoke and purple light played tricks on my eyes. I grabbed his arm.

His radioactive gaze landed on me. "Are you sure you're all right?"

"Fine," I squeaked, trying to ignore his bicep flexing against my fingers. *Oh, please let Andrei be here. Don't let all of this be for nothing.*

As soon as we reached the bottom of the staircase, I unhooked myself from Maksim. He opened a door, and body-jarring bass bulldozed into me. He nudged me through, and my already saggy jaw sagged a little more.

Long strips of potent UV light poured off the ceiling, bathing the club in an amethyst glow. Strobe lights flashed. Cage dancers gyrated to super-fast, bass-heavy techno.

Maksim scanned the club while I stood there, rendered stupid. "Andrei comes to places like this?" I asked.

Maksim swung a look at me. "You have no idea."

"I don't think I wanna know."

"What was that?" he shouted, tilting his ear toward me.

“Nothing. Never mind.”

“One more time?”

“I said never mind! Do you see Andrei?”

Maksim walked a few paces one way and then the other. I used my hand as a visor, trying to see past the *blitzkrieg* of strobe lights. I spotted a bartender manning the bar and a waitress with a serving tray talking to him. People sat at tables scattered across the club.

Maksim pointed at a corner booth. “There. Do you see him?”

I sure did, and—wow. I shook my head and started backing up.

Maksim caught my wrist. “Where are you going?”

“I thought, maybe, you could go get him.” My eyes flicked to the booth. “I’ll wait by the door.”

Maksim guffawed. “No, Kat. I vowed I would never return to this place—”

“So?”

“*So*? That vow meant a lot to me. But I came here tonight because I believed helping you was the right thing to do.”

I tilted my head. If his vow was so important, why had it mattered that I needed help?

Maksim was saying something. I leaned in to hear him. “. . . Andrei is right over there, and we are *both* going over there to talk to him.”

I didn’t resist as he led me to the booth. Andrei had company—that Émilien guy, a blonde, and a brunette. Émilien and the brunette had their hands all over each other. I felt like a Peeping Tom as we approached their table.

Andrei sat beside the blonde, enthralled in their conversation. Her eyes shifted to me, and his followed. He smiled and waved. “Hey-hey. Kat.”

I smiled back...until I noticed the array of pints and shots on the table. A harsh, bitter odor, something reminiscent of barley mixed with turpentine, assaulted my nose. The stench thickened as Maksim and I neared the booth—like stepping through an invisible, alcohol-laced curtain.

“What are you guys doing here?” Andrei offered a half-empty pint to Maksim.

Maksim waved it away. “Kat needs to speak with you.”

"She does?" Andrei gave me a quizzical look.

Maksim nudged me, nodding toward the open seat beside Émilien and his—um, date. My eyes bulged. *No. Please*, I mouthed to Maksim.

He steered me into the booth and sat beside me.

"Kat, this is Émilien." Andrei gestured at the Frenchman. "He works for Ștefan, too."

Émilien held a shot to his lips, about to slam it. He set it down. "You told her about Ștefan?" If he'd had an icepick, he probably would've stabbed Andrei with it.

"Don't pay attention to him." Andrei faced me. "He's been—you know." He made a drinking motion with his hand. I didn't dare look at Émilien to see what he thought.

"Andrei, Kat needs your help," Maksim said. "It's something she spoke with you about last night."

"N-not exactly what we talked about last night," I said, backtracking from what I'd said earlier. Maksim furrowed his brow. "I mean, we talked about a lot of stuff. This is—well—Andrei, is there someplace we could talk in private?"

"Sure, why? Did you remember your email?" Andrei twisted up a lopsided grin.

I fidgeted with a book of matches lying on the table. When I looked up, I mouthed, *Sorry*.

He laughed. "Kat, it's okay. Don't be so serious all the time. Listen, what kind of help do you need?"

"I'd rather talk about it in private." I wrinkled my nose at the lovebirds. "It won't take long."

Andrei tilted his head. "It's what?"

I leaned forward. "I said it won't take long."

"What won't take long?"

Guess he hadn't heard me.

I was about to take it from the top when Maksim interrupted. "I've been searching for you all day, Andrei. Where've you been?"

"Oh, you know. Around." Andrei sounded casual, but it looked like every fiber of his being had tensed.

Maksim tapped his index finger to the table. "I happened across a

friend of yours earlier. She said you were planning to hide out for a few days. Is that true?"

Andrei squirmed.

"That's what I thought." Maksim stood and motioned for Andrei to do the same. I started to join them, but Maksim held up his hand. "I need to speak with him alone."

"*You?* I'm the one—"

"Please. Give us a moment." Maksim veered toward the bar and disappeared into an adjacent room.

Andrei scooted out of the booth. "I'll be back," he told the blonde.

I huffed and folded my arms. Maksim had endless amounts of time to talk to his friend. I didn't.

My gaze circled the club before wandering back to the booth. Andrei's date sipped on a fruity drink across from me. To my right, Émilien and the brunette spit-swapped like champs. Gross.

Émilien opened his eyes mid-kiss. He pulled away from the girl and fired warning shots at me. "Would you like to film us, too?"

I whipped my head the other way. Seriously, Maksim could *not* have picked a worse time to take off.

"Where are you from?"

My head pivoted toward the sugary sweet voice. Andrei's date, the blonde.

"Are you from USA?" she asked.

"Uh, yeah."

She squealed, scooting forward in her seat. I think she must've bumped into Émilien's legs, because he scowled at her.

"I want to travel to USA," the girl said. "I wish to be exchange student. My university has programs for overseas study."

"Which university?" I asked.

"University Lucian Blaga of Sibiu. I am visiting in Bucharest for summer only, working two jobs to save money."

Her answer jarred my insides. My dad had grown up in Sibiu.

"How close is Sibiu to Braşov?" I asked. "Is it easy to travel between the two cities?"

"Rapid train is the fastest at two-and-one-half hours. Other trains are slower, three to four hours."

I'd thought about taking a daytrip to Sibiu, but I wasn't sure I'd have the time even if I took a rapid train. My pathetic excuse for a budget was a problem, too.

"Why do you wish to know?" the girl asked. "Will you be visiting Transylvania?"

"I'm supposed to go to Braşov. I'm not sure about Sibiu yet."

Émilien halted his make-out session. "We are done for the night," I heard him say to his date.

"You will love Braşov." The blonde pushed her drink aside. "It is a magical city, very beautiful."

"What's so magical about it?"

"I cannot—" She waved a finger at the overhead speakers. "Is very loud. I cannot hear you."

The DJ had switched tracks. This song was even rowdier than the last one, the bass pounding in my throat. I raised my voice. "I asked what's so magical—"

"*Enough!*" Émilien slammed his hand on the table, rattling the glasses. "I SAID WE ARE DONE FOR THE NIGHT."

The blonde and I gaped at each other. He'd been talking to *us*?

"We are done." He waved a furious finger at the girl. "Aaaalllll done. Do you understand? *Imbécile*. And you." He pointed at me. "I have had enough of you, as well. *Vulgaire prostituée*."

I didn't know French, but I had a pretty good idea what he'd said. People had yelled at me, kicked me out of a university, and now this guy had the nerve to call me *that*? My blood pressure shot through the roof and out of the atmosphere. I skimmed a glance at the table. Amber beer with a frothy head filled Frenchy's pint glass.

The pint was within arm's reach of me.

He sat back, cocky, one arm stretched along the back of the booth. Ultraviolet light revealed lint on his dark shirt and freckles on his sharp nose. His eyes looked electric under the purple light. "Aww. Did I hurt her feelings?" He waved me away with a snarky, dismissive flip of the wrist. "The stupid American does not know what to do," he said to his date. She smirked.

"Oh, I know exactly what I'm going to do." I waved my hand in the air, mocking him, and then slammed my hand into the pint glass.

The beer crashed into his chest and poured onto his lap. His date shrieked, scooting away, but not before malty, amber liquid splattered her dress.

Émilien rose from his seat, beer dripping down his chin and chest. His eyes ripped into me like chainsaws. He let out a vicious scream, flung his arms out, and swiped every drink off the table. I flinched as the glasses crashed to the floor. The blonde scrambled out of the booth. The brunette gawked at the mess.

Panic struck me, spreading up my legs like a flashfire. I took one more look at the Frenchman—our eyes connected—and I bolted out of the booth. He stampeded after me. Adrenaline gushed, my lungs aching. I focused on the exit. *Think, Kat. What's beyond that door?* The rotted-out staircase. The upper room. The smokers sitting on those ratty couches.

A waitress carrying a tray full of drinks crossed my path. She screamed as we collided. Pint glasses toppled off the tray, dumping beer everywhere. The woman fell. I rammed into an empty table.

Émilien gripped my shoulders and slammed me to the floor. My back hit, and the impact crushed the air from my lungs. Beer soaked into my shirt as tears climbed into my eyes.

I rolled over, trying to crawl away. He grabbed my arm and yanked me around. Strobes flashed overhead, and I didn't see his fist coming 'til it connected with the side of my face. Searing pain shot through my cheekbone, into my teeth and head. A burst of pinpricks lit up my eyes. Black patches seeped into my vision.

He straddled me, raising his fist—and then he was gone, as if he'd dissolved into the flashing strobes. I heard grunting. A table toppling over. More glass breaking. I blinked away the patches and lifted my head. Maksim held Émilien down, not ten feet away, as he unleashed blow after blow on the Frenchman's head and face.

"Cool it, Maks!" Andrei jumped between his friends, arms locked in front of him, and forced Maksim back. Maksim let him, shaking out his fist.

The Frenchman hunched over, holding his nose. When he pulled his hand away, he saw blood and screamed like a maniac.

Andrei whipped something out of his back pocket. Light glinted off

the shiny object. He gripped it and hurtled his fist into the Frenchman's face. Émilien collapsed in a puddle of beer.

A crowd gathered around the messy scene. Maksim turned around, searching for someone. Me, apparently.

"Let me see your face." He helped me into a sitting position and knelt beside me. As he fingered my cheek, pain shot through my cheekbone. I yelped and shoved his hands away. Tears spilled in hot, salty streams.

Maksim's eyes ignited. He left me there and stood over Émilien. Andrei jumped in front of him again. "What were you *thinking?*" Maksim shouted, leaning around Andrei. "Have you lost your mind?"

Émilien pushed himself up and gave a hard shake of his head. Beer soaked the front of his shirt, the fabric plastered to his chest. "You have the audacity to defend *her?*" Émilien slapped the floor. "After what she did to *me?*"

Maksim shot me a questioning look, likely wondering what Émilien meant. I diverted my eyes.

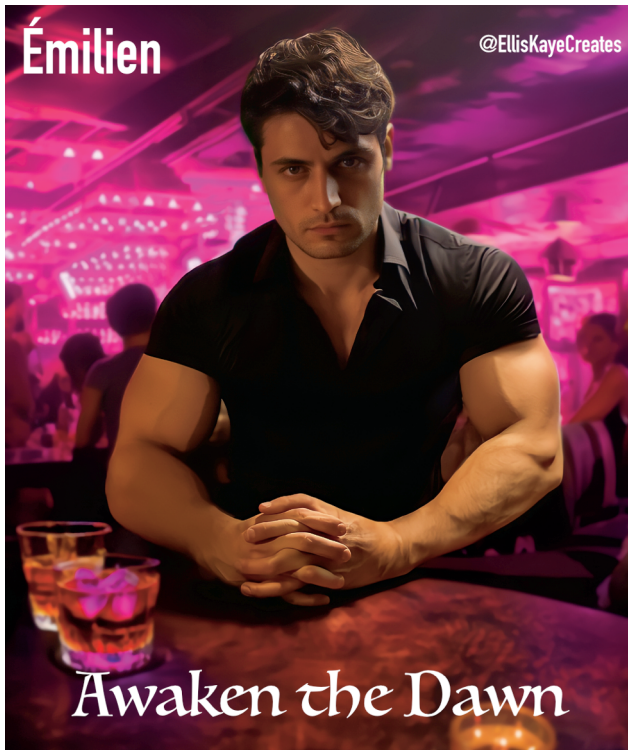
The Frenchman staggered to his feet. Maksim stepped in front of me, wrapping his hands into fists. Émilien divided a confused look between us. His expression turned sly. "Are you trying to bed her?" A slimy, dirtbag kinda smile slinked across his smug face. "Oh, Maksim. Have you lowered your standards so much since *bonne* Marie?"

Maksim tensed.

Émilien laughed and said something in French. More goading, if I had to guess. Maksim had his back to me. He didn't move, but I noticed a tremor in his right arm.

The Frenchman lunged, tearing through Andrei. Everyone gasped. A waitress screamed. No way was I sticking around for Round Two.

I pushed myself up, shouldered through the crowd, and stumbled to the exit.



NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR:

This wasn't a "deleted scene," per se, but a heavily revised one. In my last round of revisions, I caught a clearer vision of the club and even named it Club Envy.

I could see the place so clearly, and as I edited and rewrote the scene, focusing on what was needed to drive the story forward, it changed pretty dramatically.

Some things are still the same, but most of it has been completely revised.

What do you think? Do you like the current club scene more or less than this version? I'd love to hear from you...

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