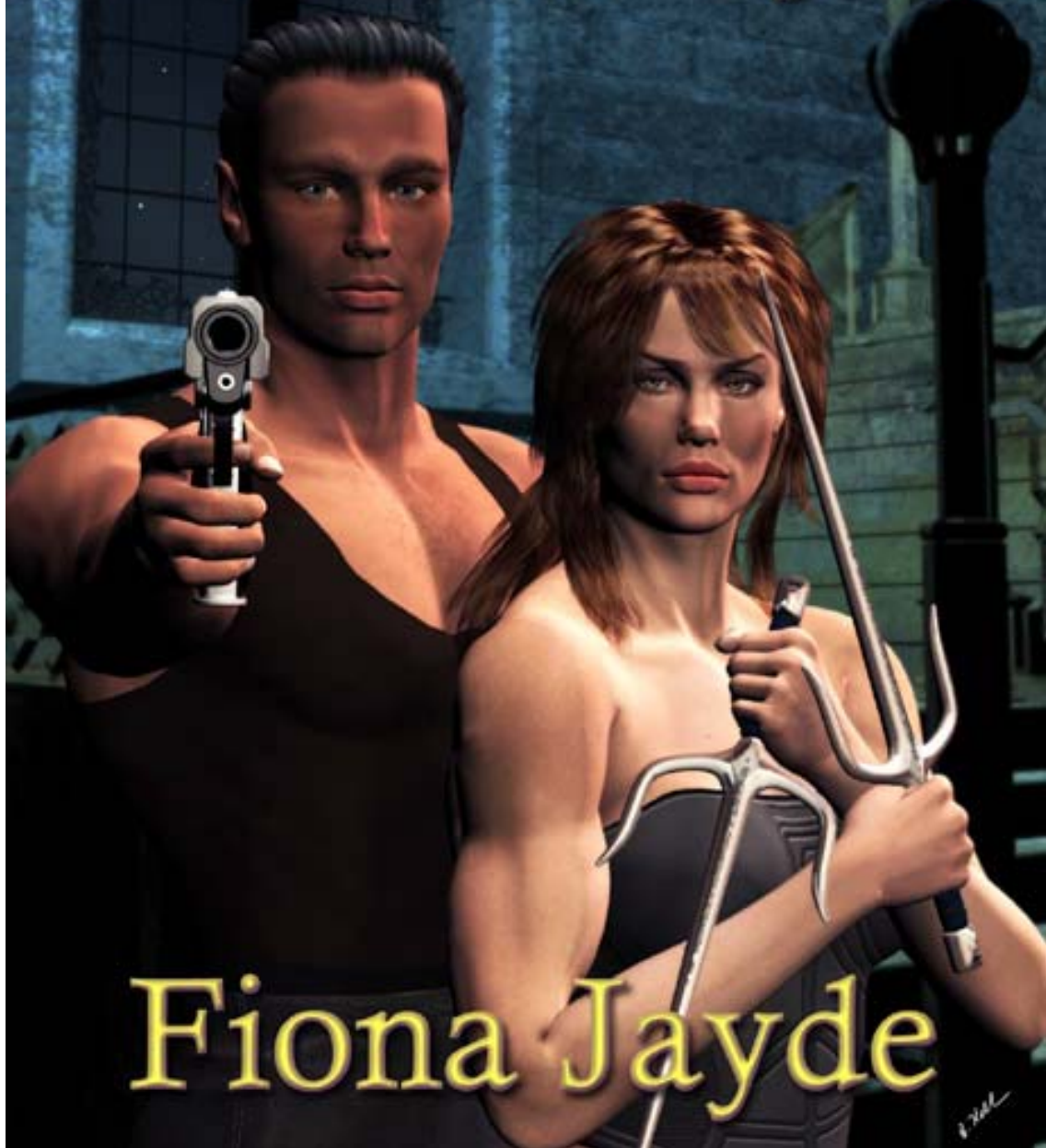


Changeling Press

Urban Myth



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Fiona Jayde

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Urban Myth

Fiona Jayde

As peace between humans and vampyre crumbles, Taina Bates trains to become one of the Hunters. Her strength increases with each day, the scrapes and bruises like badges of courage. The drive to fight rages inside her.

Rayan Slade, half sympath, full vampyre and certified assassin for the Alliance of Human Protection Services, is called to train the new blood -- SEALs, Green Berets and one lone female Hunter. Except the female is the only woman he has ever loved, the one he'd left years ago when the cravings became unbearable, when he feared draining her in his need for the energy that fed him.

From: Senator Wipstrom

To: Alliance of Protection Services/Jakob Grey

As we have feared, those we call vampyre are rapidly increasing. Those who adhere to the Agreement peacefully interact with our citizens, causing no harm or damage. However, our analysts are seeing increased cases of violence, death and possible conversions, suggesting an organized movement.

It appears the vaccine is no longer effective in stopping vampyre DNA from turning human blood into its own.

Our peace has held for centuries. Fascination with the myth has been propagated by media and literature, positioning us into a favorable time to publicly embrace the facts. Of those already aware, many seek to find strength and immortality, accepting an often needless death. The few who change join the subculture of the newest generation: arrogant, violent and hungry.

While we wish no harm to vampyre living peacefully among us, we cannot allow a regression to the age where humans lived in fear, and strength was measured in blood. The newly-turned seek blood as they would an exotic street drug, the need for it overrules reason and compassion.

It is with regret I urge you to re-call your taskforce to duty. I cannot say I have much faith in your search for natural-born Hunters. Highly trained humans with extraordinary strength are taught, not bred. Enclosed is a list of those who have been recommended.

I trust your judgment and I urge you to caution.

With respect,
Bill Wipstrom, Senator

Prologue

Angel's blood burned her.

The myth was true. Vampyres existed. The thing she'd killed had Angel's face -- the leering grin, the bone-white features. Fangs stained with blood.

Guilt threatened to burst through along with tears -- a burning, bitter ball somewhere in the back of Taina's throat. She and Angel had ridden together for years, cleaning the streets of the drugged-up and the dead.

She should have been there when the obsession started; when the goth clubs became more habit than curiosity, when Joey left strange mumbling messages about blood-laced snow and syringes of liquefied silver. Poor, sweet Joey, drained by the thing Angel had turned into.

The blade of her knife was still in Tai's fingers, the metal edge delicately slicing at her palm. She watched LA plunge into purple dawn and wondered if the mix of blood would change her. That's what they said at least -- that the mixing of blood would turn a human into one of them. If that was true, she'd die as soon as the first rays of sunlight ripped their way through the morning air.

Angel had been left in her own apartment, her body by the window, waiting to be dust in the sun. Tai had killed tonight. Even after ten years on the force, the sight of that dead, pale, bloodied face was more than she could handle.

The first burst of daylight glinted off the metal *sai* -- Oda Sensei's deathbed gift. The three-pronged weapons rested on their stand, the long middle blades touching as they crossed. Sunlight warmed her face as Tai slid her hands over the smooth leather-wrapped handles and lifted them. Metal sang as they crossed. The knife she'd used now lay on the windowsill, sparkling as the sun turned blood to ash.

Vampyre. The man said that's what they were called. Tai didn't know how or why he'd found her as she clawed her way from under Angel's lifeless body. His scarred face was solemn as he looked at her -- his eyes darkly, intensely still. He was a Hunter.

She could be the same.

Chapter One

Morning light stung Rayan's skin, burning his eyes behind the wraparound sunglasses. The pain reminded him he lived, even as a part of him wondered if someday sunscreen wouldn't be enough and he'd lose an arm instead of gaining a nasty sunburn.

He glanced at the list of cadets as they marched -- good little soldiers stomping on grass and dirt. Keys trained them the same way he'd trained cops at the academy -- march forth and ask no questions. Green Berets, Rangers, SEALs -- they all marched, and Keys was happy. And someone had to show these guys that all they knew wasn't worth a fuck.

Jakob would burn in the sun, and Cain would break numerous cadet bones going through demonstrations. Which left Rayan -- or rather Deadshot -- certified assassin for the Alliance, training America's best in vampyre combat. Ironic, really.

He looked up when Keys blocked the sun, bringing a small moment of relief for him. Shouting commands with enough force to have spit flying, old Sarge was in his element -- insulting, demanding and cussing -- a stereotypical asshole in full camo, pilot sunshades and pink Trident. He didn't bother to be inventive. The sweet sugary smell of his gum mixed with Brute, and Rayan wondered who the hell Keys was trying to impress.

"Come on, pussies! Straighten up! Bates, stop wiggling your ass! Olson --"

A tiny and unpleasant tingle fluttered at his neck, and squinting, Rayan glanced back at the list. Bates. Taina. His former wife. *Shit*. "Female?"

He said it softly enough, yet through a string of spit-accented cussing, Keys heard him. "Couldn't shake her. Tough little piece of ass. Ex-cop or some shit like that."

His grin and the accompanying glance had nothing to do with the toughness he'd just praised.

Rayan ignored the leer, filed it away for later, just as he'd filed the ex-cop reference. Technically a female would be an asset. Nothing a vamp liked more than soft and fragrant neck for dinner. The thought had him shuddering.

Eyes hurting in the sun, he watched them run, smelled them sweat. Couldn't distinguish her amidst the camo-wrapped bodies. Then she turned, as if feeling him searching for her, and his mouth went to dust.

Still small, still pretty. Completely out of place between bulky Marines and sweaty SEALs. Why he couldn't spot her moments ago, Rayan didn't know, because now his gaze couldn't unglue itself from her.

He couldn't see much of her under the camo Keyes insisted on. Judging by her face she had lost weight -- a lot of it. Her curves had been a man's wet dream. Her hair was tucked under her hat, but he remembered it long and luxurious, the soft, brown waves silky in his palm when he cupped her thrashing head, riding her deep and slow.

Disgusted with himself, Rayan trashed the image even as his cock lengthened. She shouldn't be here. Cop or not, trained or not, this was no place for her. He hadn't broken both their hearts to see her bleeding, dead, or worse.

Keyes had them line up. She was at the end, being the shortest. Rayan walked by them, studying every face, prolonging the moment until he reached her. Her gasp was soft and sharp.

Hello, little one. Get the fuck out of here.

* * *

Tai still pictured his face hours later as she prepared for the night. Damn him, he was still gorgeous as hell, strong angular features offset by eyes of gray-blue, ringed with lashes that would look ridiculous on any other man. On him, they added sensuality to a tough and weathered face. His mouth looked different -- she couldn't quite discern what it was, but it had a slightly different shape to it. His build was wider

than she remembered -- huge and solid, muscles rippling with every movement. His dark hair was still military short.

Bastard.

She left the light on dim, allowing her eyes to get used to the darkness. Her vision was at a hundred percent now. She didn't question it, just as she didn't question the bruises and scrapes that healed overnight, the muscles that ached constantly and yet were somehow stronger. Maybe this rage, this newly developed bloodlust, had something to do with it. If so, she was grateful.

The quarters she'd been assigned rivaled her own apartment. Washer, dryer, enough space for three of her. Nothing like she'd be able to afford on a cop's salary. Then again, this wasn't the academy. The academy didn't train you to kill.

She wondered briefly if Rayan knew about the weapons she'd ordered -- ninja throwing stars, sharpened metal darts, containers of carefully measured chemicals. The polish for her *sai*.

The same *sai* she'd almost used when he left.

She wondered what part he played in this game of politics and blood. He'd given his little speech and looked right through her as if she meant nothing. After months of struggling, months of chilling distance, he'd ended their marriage, cool and calm and perfectly logical. *Sign on the dotted line and dust two years down the toilet.*

Jerking her mind to the present, Tai dry swallowed painkillers. The soreness in her muscles was worse -- the additional sparring and rolling had her abs clenching in protest.

Get over it.

Staring at herself in the mirror, she followed up with a cocktail of minerals and vitamins and god knows what else, feeling it warm its way into her blood, soothing the aches, fortifying and rebuilding. She'd paid a fortune for it. It was worth every dime.

Fuck Rayan Slade. She could see through him clear as crystal -- he would test her, drain her, try to drive her out. It wasn't for love, it wasn't for her protection. He simply thought women were weaker -- and had all but said so during training.

She smirked at her own reflection in the mirror. Cop academy taught a girl a lot in terms of assholes and pigs.

Looking at herself, Tai adjusted the vee of her wraparound. The weight loss had caused her boobs to shrink, just when she needed their fullness to distract attention from her face. She lifted her shoulders in a shrug. Cleavage was secondary when she had a neck and was willing to tilt it.

Weapons check was done with quick, practiced movement. The *sai* were strapped to her thighs, under her loose black pants, the pockets of which were cut away to enable access. The eight-point throwing stars the Japanese called *shiruken* were in the folds of her wraparound, easily reachable, the cool metal comforting against her skin. The thin, ridiculously expensive bulletproof vest didn't reach past her belly button, and the *shiruken* hung lower. She hoped no one would bump into her enough for them to slice her skin, although the scent of blood would be an asset. The metal darts -- again for throwing -- were just under them. She hadn't had the chance to use any of them, but they were available should the need arise. At her sides she felt for baggies of measured chemicals and last resort poison.

If those fuckers ended up biting her, she would take her own life before risking her blood changing. She wasn't sure why some died while some turned -- but she just wasn't going to take the chance.

Shoes were last. Soft, black ballet slippers -- not the toughest of choices but the best under the circumstances. Cop boots were heavy and could leave prints, and climbing with them was torture. She slipped more blades under the straps as she tied them to her ankles. The mask was already in place, a soft strip of black that would loop over her face or settle around her neck as if a collar.

Almost time.

Tai closed her eyes and again saw Rayan.

After everything she'd been through, after everything she'd seen, this ridiculous craving for him both warmed and disgusted her. Clearly he didn't want her. He'd fight

her, test and break her; because she was a female and apparently having a dick made him the strong one.

Fuck that shit. She was at war and didn't have time for lust or love or this stupid obsession with who was stronger. War meant death. She didn't expect to live through it.

The woman in the mirror looked flat-eyed and terrifying. *If you crave death, end it and stop torturing me.*

* * *

Determined to avoid her, Rayan left the compound. Speeding on the 10 he nearly ran over a dark Kawasaki Ninja racing downtown with headlights off. He didn't know why, but his gut had him tailing it, watching it park in the alley by Tit4Tat. The rider took off the helmet and became Taina. Wondering what the hell she was playing at, he followed her into a knot of noise and humans.

His long leather coat wrapped around him in a suffocating embrace as he watched Tai weave through the grind and bump of sweating bodies. Rage boiling inside him was tempered down -- he forced himself to assess the situation coolly. She could be one of the junkies, lapping up blood and god knows what else a vamp or clever human shoved at her. She could be one of their informants -- that would explain the leaks on raids.

Or she could just be out to blow off steam with sleazy men and sweaty drinks. Dressed in loose black amidst sparkling lace and real and fake leather, Tai looked tiny, lost and brittle. The hair he couldn't see earlier was short, pulled back into a stubby ponytail.

She probably thought she was some hot shit Hunter capable of defending herself against anything the night could conjure up. At that, he clenched his fists and swore to disabuse her of the notion as bodies moved around him, and lights flashed murder-red. The weight of his sword was calming against his back as Rayan muscled his way through gyrating bodies and scents of sex, sweat and blood.

It was easy to dissolve amidst young and ample bodies -- even if she sensed him watching, he doubted she would zero in on him. His coat was long, protecting both

body and weapons. The fedora hat covered his features and hid the bonus of a razor edge along the rim.

Music throbbing his eardrums, he sidestepped dancers, shoved through flesh, stepped over alcohol and puke. For a second he thought he saw Jakob, his scar dark against the pulsing lights. That second was gone.

At the bar, Taina had picked up an admirer. Clenching his teeth, Rayan shoved his way through, squeezed himself to the mirrored bar between magnificently breasted blondes in red straps and leather. Keeping his hands in his pockets for weapon access, Rayan watched her reflection, her smile soft as she winked at the nose-pierced Romeo. Her chuckle -- smooth and low -- drifted over the noise and grated his patience. Amidst the smell of bodies he could pick up her scent -- light and clean with a metallic bloody undertone.

She'd scented herself with blood. The rage that whipped through him was contained immediately. Even so, the blondes clunked away on impossibly high heels, cheap perfumes spiced with fear.

Taina, his wife, his first love, had scented herself with blood to attract vampyres. Did she hope for immortality, eternal strength? He could tell her it meant nothing.

Still unaware of being watched, she let Romeo tug her deeper into the club, past the dancers, past the smokers, through the back door. Slicing through bodies, Rayan followed. Focused on Tai, he hadn't concentrated on the man, couldn't tell if he was vamp or wannabe. He didn't curse himself, didn't waste time on it. If she died tonight, he would kill the vamp. If she turned tonight, he would kill them both.

He ignored the ice chilling his skin. The steel of guns was a comfort against his hips and thighs, with two 9mm tucked into ankle holsters. The ones on the right were for humans. On the left, the bullets were metal spikes charged with radiation from the sun. Pierce a vampyre enough and they'd die, the next sunrise disposing of the body. Hit the right place in the heart and vamp would burst into dust. Faster and cleaner that way.

The sword was really backup, in case the spikes didn't pierce the heart enough. Hidden by his coat, it rested against his back, the leather wrapped hilt covered by the turned up collar.

His breath was white in the cool night air when he saw Taina. She leaned against the wall of the bar, Romeo whispering something too close to her neck for comfort. Tit4Tat painted their skin nightmarish glowing green as Romeo's hands were at her shoulders while she nodded. Fangs glistened.

Heart pounding, Rayan leapt, guns heating in his hands, just as the woman he knew as his wife pierced the vampyre with a long thin blade. She staggered under his weight as he shuddered in death, the metal poking through him, glinting obscenely in the neon light -- a sticky, sickly wet.

Rayan crouched as he landed, vamp and human guns pointed at her. Under the scent of vampyre blood, he smelled a reckless dangerous thrill. Her face -- as she watched him, not moving a muscle -- confirmed it.

She was out killing them.

Her voice was breathy with suppressed excitement as Tai threw the body off her. It would turn to ash in sunlight unless... He shot, made his target as usual. Saw her eyes widen as the vamp dusted.

"A bit late with the white knight routine."

Heart hammering, he wondered if she recognized him. He kept his voice a mere whisper. "This fight isn't for you."

A swatch of black silk materialized in her hand. What he thought was a blade was a three-pronged *sai* -- she caressed it like a woman stroking her lover's cock. He felt his own harden as she slowly wiped its metal length before sliding it into the material on her thighs.

"This fight," she said slowly, in a low mocking tone that had his gut clenching, "I started this fight."

Both guns pointed at her, he came forward, keeping his chin low so the hat shielded his features on the chance she hadn't recognized him. He sensed no fear,

smelled no nerves. Instead he breathed the clean, shiny scent of her hair, the musk of her skin. The soap she'd used was the same as before -- though at the time his senses weren't strong enough to appreciate it.

He breathed in her excitement and sensed that dark turn from bloodlust to sexual arousal, the same arousal that was a pulsating halo above her. He clenched his insides to keep from feeding on it. "A woman has no strength to fight them."

In the dark he saw her roll her eyes. "If I waited for rescue, I would be dead or wanting your throat."

He flinched but otherwise ignored the barb. "You have no business here."

She stepped away from the wall, her scent incredibly potent, mixed with that false sense of power after a kill. "You have no business ordering me around."

He refused to think of her doing this alone, picking off vamps one at a time. "I could be one of them." He took a step forward, crowding her. "I could feast at your neck for hours. Worse, I'd make you like it." He flashed back to his own days of feedings and murder, pushed it away. Right now, he needed her fear.

He got it.

Tai's hands slapped at her hips, her eyes narrowed. Another step; his guns were back in their holsters, his hands taking her shoulders in effortless strength. When she looked up, he finally sensed nerves.

"You aren't one of them." Her voice was rough as if her throat went dry.

The mixture of her scents was slicing through him, under his gut, into his balls. The excitement pumping out of her fueled his own lust. The animal, long suppressed, growled. He was surprised to hear it ripping through his throat. "You're that sure?"

Her breathing was faster, her pulse like a tiny hammer in her neck. "You don't have a mark."

Unable to help himself, Rayan dipped his face to her neck, sniffed, and gloried in the scent of strength and woman. "You sure?" She hadn't moved. He waited for a knee at his crotch or her forehead cracking against his nose with a sickening thud. Nothing. Perhaps she recognized him after all.

The door behind them opened, vomiting people and stench. Rayan fitted himself against her, let her feel the bulge in his pants, and took dark satisfaction in hearing her gasp. To anyone else, they would look like lovers. Those with sharper eyes would see a vampyre warming up supper.

He pressed his lips to her neck, felt the tiny pulse beat there. There were more nerves now, red and spicy. Lacing through them was arousal, dangerously deliciously hot. He dragged her arms up, cuffed her wrists in his palms as he pressed her harder into the wall. Her lips were open as she gasped for air. Her eyes were pools of black.

He couldn't handle it and told himself it was only this one time. "I'm not one of them." Pressing his ex-wife against the wall, the assassin known as Deadshot crushed his mouth to hers.

His lips weren't gentle, neither was his grip. It fueled her, turned lust for combat into something different, something darkly human. Tai let him kiss her and only when she moaned deep in her throat did she realize she kissed him back, his taste both new and familiar... and scorching.

His hands held hers against the wall, his body pressing into her, his erection grinding at her belly. Fleeting she thought of Rayan, the old Rayan, the one who couldn't get enough of her, before he became the cold son of a bitch who'd left her.

Reality sliced back.

She stared up at him, trying to see his face, unable to make out his features beneath the stupid hat. If he wasn't holding her hands, she would have already gotten rid of it.

"Go away, little one." The words struck a warning in her, a tingle she couldn't quite place. "They are stronger, they are faster and unlike me they have no qualms about taking you." He whispered it against her mouth, his breath warm and sweet on her lips. "If you turn into one of them, I'd have to kill you."

"I'll kill myself first." Sharp edges of the *shiruken* dug into her hip. The slice of pain kept her focused.

"Go away, little one." He let go of her hands. "You have no business here."

The condescending, almost tender tone grated on her nerves. She dug out a *sai*, pointed it at his throat. He simply chuckled as the cool metal of a gun pressed against her chin. "Never take a knife to a fire fight," he said before she blinded them both.

White smoke surrounded her, clung to her eyes, dug into her mouth. Instinctively he stepped back and she used the space to get around him. A sword sang as it was freed, she saw it flashing white and neon. The *sai* crossed around his blade, scraped as he pulled out. Judging his distance to be about three steps she threw another smoke bomb before leaping, the sting of her own weapons slicing into her skin as she got away.

Chapter Two

Tai had seen movies about slayers, TV shows about demon hunters. None of them told her about the bruises, the body aches, the mechanics of cleaning blood and dirt from skin and weapons.

Body screaming for a shower, Tai forced herself to throw her black clothes into a washer. She dumped the vest on the blue tiles of the bathroom and sighed when she finally stepped into the spray. Icy cold water beat at her head, cleansing and sharp. She let it sting for a few seconds before she turned up the heat and let it soothe over her body. As she slicked bath gel over her skin, the pain of bruises and scrapes was somehow satisfying. Marks of fights won.

Foam slid over her breasts, and again she thought of the man in leather with guns kissing her. Rayan's face flashed before her just then, and she closed her eyes against it, lifting her face to the water. She needed to get laid. God knew it'd been a while.

A drift of air caused the shower curtain to billow into her face. She turned, pulled back a fist just as the curtain was pushed to the side with a vicious swipe -- Rayan's face furious, his body draped in leather and weapons.

She didn't scream, though it was hard to keep the sound in her mouth. Instead, she arched an eyebrow and willed her heart to slow its pounding. He'd seen her naked - nothing to be excited about. She searched his face and thought she saw his eyes widen a bit as his gaze swept over her body. She wondered what he thought. Did she look good? Too skinny? *Shit.*

"You mind? It's cold." Her stabbing nipples proved it, though she doubted it had anything to do with the cool licks of air caressing her skin.

"I mind." His voice was a low rasp and made her think of the man kissing her earlier, as if he couldn't get enough, the way she always wanted. Except it was him -- Rayan -- kissing her and she narrowed her eyes in confusion.

"You want pointers on RPG? Not my thing, sorry." She stuck her head under the spray only to find the water gone. When she opened her eyes a towel was shoved at her.

"Out. Now."

She was too tired to fight, too embarrassed by the lust curling in her belly at the sight of him. The bastard acted as if he felt nothing, as cold as the metal of her *sai*. As if they hadn't just played tonsil hockey.

Dignity trampled, Tai wrapped the towel around herself before stepping out of the tub -- except Fate laughed and tripped her. She felt herself go down, felt a rough hand curl around her biceps. She hissed in pain when he pressed into a bruise, then she was lifted, towel and all, and carried out with effortless strength that long ago made her knees weak and her heart swell.

He dumped her on the bed, not terribly gentle. Stupidly, Tai held the towel covering her breasts. *A bit late*, she thought, and mentally shrugged.

"You're hurt." His voice was gruff.

She wanted to laugh, long and hard. At least it was better than tears. "I'm fine."

"You are sore, you have bruises and --" He jerked at the towel, looked at her hips, the scrapes raw and tender. Tomorrow, she knew, they would be gone. She didn't stop him as his hands probed her ribs, her belly, her arms. Clinical and cool, as if the man who'd kissed her was a different being. Despite it, she felt herself creaming and wished this constant need for him would go to hell. "Why are you trolling blood clubs?" His hands were gentle. His voice was rough.

"I don't believe it's your concern."

"That's where you're wrong." He loomed above her, big and dangerous. "You're under the jurisdiction of the Alliance. Therefore -- my concern."

His hands left her skin and took warmth with them. She felt coolly, vulnerably exposed -- ridiculous really, since he wasn't touching her now, and she hadn't exactly protested in the first place. She snagged the towel around her once again and sat up, hoping for something resembling dignity.

"You're in the field long before you're ready for sign off." He crossed his arms across that wide chest, his eyes steely blue. "What the hell are you supposed to be? *Sai* carrying ninja?"

"Ninjagirl." She cursed herself as she said it, but it was too late. She didn't owe him explanations and she certainly didn't need him smirking about the name she chose. "And you're what? Punisher? Won't someone sue?"

He snorted, the sound old and familiar. "Deadshot. We both know the guns are more effective."

She *hated* that. "Bullshit. Anyone can point and squeeze a trigger. Hand-to-hand is cleaner."

"Blade versus bullet. Right."

Tai watched his lips as he spoke, remembering those full firm lips on hers. His mouth *was* different. And she was staring at him again. "You mind? I'd like to get dressed." She needed some sort of barrier. Nerves and lust, excitement and uncertainty, all tormented her belly with spiked jagged edges.

"I've seen you naked." He shrugged out of his coat and she raised an eyebrow at the arsenal on his hips. With practiced movements he unclipped the utility belt, laid it by his sword. His hat was on the floor. The guns on his waist and thighs glinted dully in the single lamp light.

"If you're showing off toys, I assure you I'm not interested."

"You don't know what you're dealing with." His voice was back to being grim -- the old Rayan with his teasing tone was gone.

"I can handle myself."

"You think?" He advanced again -- it took all her willpower not to shrink back, but her stupid body reacted instantly, her belly clenching in arousal, her pussy

creaming more at the sight of him, hard, rough and dangerous, looming over her. "You think you can stop them? What can you do with your *sai* if a vamp holds you down and goes for your throat?"

She showed her teeth, gripped his wrists as he made a move to grip hers. His weight pushed her down on the bed, his mouth fused to hers, hot and dangerous and exciting as hell. Shocked, she let him kiss her, even as he pulled her wrists up, braceleting them in one huge fist. His thighs were between her legs, the material of his pants rasping against her cunt, his guns pushing at the skin of her thighs. Shell-shocked, confused, she couldn't understand the change at him, couldn't see how he switched from ice to heat. Then he was at her side, holding her wrists as she held his gaze.

His eyes were strange, hot and brilliantly blue. "Fight, little one." His breath was hot against her ear. "Handle yourself."

She should have clocked him. She'd had the opportunity. Instead, she gasped at the thickening air, willed him to put his hands on her, now. He shifted, tore at the towel covering her breasts. Didn't touch her, even as the tips hardened to burning nubs.

"You can't do anything to stop me."

She breathed harshly, couldn't form the words to tell him to go to hell, couldn't will her muscles to push him off, to take him down. The arousal spearing her was sharp and wicked.

"Make me stop, little one." His palm closed over one breast, his skin erotically rough on her bared flesh, on her budding nipple. "Make me stop," he whispered, kneading and lifting her breast, rolling the tip between two fingers, shooting sparks of fire into her creaming cunt. "Make me stop," he muttered again, desperate somehow, just before claiming her lips as his hand pressed on the patch of hair over her sex.

She whispered for him to stop even as she opened for him. Hard, blunt fingers pressed between her swollen lips, and she pushed her legs apart even as her mind sent him to hell. His skin was sensuous and rough, rubbing, caressing her pussy, dipping inside her in a slow delicious burn.

Her clit was aching, swollen. The tip of his fingers moved in maddening firm circles, making her moan and scream into his mouth. She couldn't move, couldn't think, just clenched and reached for a climax that was so close, so insanely close.

Rayan slipped two fingers inside her, pumped faster. Gasping for air she arched up, saw him watching her, his eyes the color of steel. His knuckle pressed against her clit, his fingers pumped inside her, harder, faster. His mouth dropped quick stinging kisses on her lips and in between she fought for air.

Without warning Tai crested. With a long thin yell she arched off her bed and rode the waves of a hot, shuddering climax, feeling his gaze on her, his eyes narrowing and changing. Then he was inside her head, drinking her pleasure as it shattered her, pumping his hand to give her more, taking her orgasm into himself. The final gasp for air had her drifting into sleep, warm and numb, as he gathered her into his arms and she briefly wondered about the erection pressed against her thigh before letting darkness take her.

* * *

"Judging from the sunny mood, you either got fed or fucked."

The vampyre sat in darkness, the comp screen illuminating a hard grim face. Jakob Grey, his savior, his blood brother. Without Jake, Rayan would still be high on blood and essence, draining every human dumb and weak enough to let him. He still couldn't stand the smell of blood. At least the energy was different. It didn't have to be human and he didn't take much.

He fed off the vamps he fought -- their fear, their hatred, their greed. It wasn't good, it wasn't pleasant, but it sustained him. Because of Jakob, he was Deadshot, assassin for the Alliance, half sympath, a day-walking vampyre, helping the same humans he had once preyed on, to atone for the few he'd drained.

Balls throbbing, his cock already limp from guilt and revulsion at his own damned self, Rayan didn't bother answering. Jakob could smell her, just as he himself inhaled the musk of her arousal still lingering on his skin.

He wished he could swear to never touch her. Seeing her naked, her body both tough and vulnerable with bruises and scrapes over well-defined muscles, seeing the patch of curls between her thighs whereas before she'd kept her pussy bare and smooth -- all of it was more than he could handle. Her scent, the mix of soap and sex was like a drug; he'd lost control and fed on her, just like that first time during their marriage, when she'd seduced him into a rough, hot fuck, when he'd fed on her orgasm for the first time. When he'd realized his sympathy blood was roaring for her energy and couldn't stop himself, feeding even after she lost consciousness. Almost killing her. Almost.

He pushed it away. "News?"

Silence was long before Jake answered. "The hit on the clinic was interesting. Names on the blood samples matched names of the turned."

"Too much room for coincidence."

"It runs on Church's dime. A free AIDS clinic, a smattering of blood-clubs, a meat-canning warehouse on the docks... And yet we can't tie in to a visual ID." Money trails were Jakob's issues. Connecting databases and getting ID was Cain's -- with his comp skills and his lack of patience. Matters of tactics and brute force belonged to Deadshot.

"Were you out tonight?"

Jake shrugged. By the light of the computer screen, Rayan saw the dark scar on his cheek twitching. If the vampyre had been there tonight, he already knew about Taina's little escapade. At some point it would have to be discussed, but not now, not when her scent was on him, not when his body needed some semblance of release.

"I'm going to the gym." The guilt was a physical ache just under his ribs. After everything he'd done to protect her, after wrecking apart both their lives to get her away from him, he'd fucking lost control and fed from her anyway. And if he was honest, he couldn't promise either of them it wouldn't happen again -- because under his guilt was the driving desire to get back into her room and bury himself in her.

"Deadshot." Jake turned to face him. "She's strong. If you fed from her, she'll handle it."

Which meant absolutely nothing. "Come spar with me, Dr. Phil."

The vampyre's grin was cold and humorless. "I don't spill blood I don't intend to eat."

"Fuck you." There was no heat behind the words.

"Meet you on the mat in five." The voice from the loudspeakers was low and guttural. Cain. The bastard had ears everywhere. Strong for a human, and mean as a newly-turned vamp. He'd do.

* * *

In the dark, Robert Keys moaned in ecstasy as life was drained from him. The female vampyre straddled his thighs, her hair fragrant silver as she lapped at his neck, biting and licking his vein, pleasure and terror combined. When she came up for air and smiled at him, Keys gripped her hips, opening his mouth to catch a drop of precious liquid as his blood dripped from her mouth into his. The blade she lifted caught the moonlight on its edge. He fought then, self-preservation winning over lust. She gripped his thighs between hers, effortlessly holding him down. With the tip of the blade, she carved her mark on his cheek, licked at the welling blood.

"Beautiful, my angel."

A man approached, silent and dark as the trees whispering secrets of the dead. The female lifted her head to lick full, shiny lips before stretching them into a smile. "I've been practicing." Keys saw her fangs and thought them lovely.

The man settled on his side and somehow it seemed right. The moon revealed his face, pale, lined and hairless, watery blue eyes exotically slanted. Thin cruel lips.

"The rest of the money is in." Keys watched the man even as the vampyre drew more of his blood, shuddering in ecstasy as she slowly killed him. "You said half."

"Yes," the man murmured, his voice clipped and foreign. "You've been most helpful." He gripped Keys by the hair, the pain only heightening the pleasure as the

female sucked him. Keys let his throat arch more, offering more of his life to her. Feeling teeth scrape against skin doubled his pleasure even as his vision faded.

Through a whitening haze he watched the female lean over to fuse bloody lips with the man. They both stared down at him, their eyes hungry.

"You're sure I'll turn?" Tongue thickening, Keys barely forced the words from his throat.

The man swiped his tongue over the female's mouth, bit her so her blood welled on her lip; vampyre mixing with human. With his hands in her pale hair, the man guided her back down as he lowered his head. The resumed sucking was a series of small shuddering orgasms. Keys felt them at his neck, helpless but enthralled with the nipping teeth, the warm lips, the licking and the nibbling as blood slid on his skin and was lapped up like the finest wine. He saw the woman as she leaned over his face, pressed her lips into his. The warm metallic liquid on her mouth was somehow both bitter and sweet.

"Taste your blood." The male's voice pierced the haze. "Taste the sweetness of it. You will live. After you die."

The female went back to his throat, eagerly Keys turned his neck to give her better access. He had a fleeting thought about needing a turtleneck to cover up the bruise, then almost laughed at the absurdity of it. He'd worked his ass off all his life. His reward would be eternity. As his vision faded he saw blood on her pale face, red lips stretching into a smile.

He watched the man pull her away, rip at her clothing. Pale breasts were bared to his fading gaze, high and beautiful and scarred. The man raked the blade across them then put his mouth on the gash, feasting on the bleeding cut.

Keys opened his mouth, strained to lift his head even as it refused to obey. He felt the woman's weight shift; once more her lips were on his neck, sucking, shoving him closer to death even as he moaned in ecstasy for it.

Chapter Three

At least they'd had the decency to start at nine.

Colbert was grunting on the sixty-seventh pushup, Nonnenberg again was staring. Tai ignored them both as they stood in the morning breeze waiting for Keys to start another day of drills. Doyle sucked down coffee as if it were mother's milk. Trenner -- like her -- was stretching. Judging by the grunts, he wasn't having a fine time with it.

Her own muscles were loose, limber. She didn't need the pills this morning -- there was no aching in her joints. Instead, she felt rested. She'd managed to sleep and sleep well, although she should have tossed and turned and cursed trying to figure out how the whole thing last night had happened in the first place.

He'd touched her and she'd allowed it. Fuck, she'd welcomed it after swearing she'd never let him near her again. And here he was, strolling toward her, long limbed and gorgeous, dark stubble and sunshades adding a touch of danger to a grim face.

"Bates." She snapped her gaze up as he spoke, his voice coolly crisp. "Training officer -- attention." She stood up swiftly, unsure of what he was playing at. Nonnenberg -- at attention -- was smirking. Colbert sprang up.

She watched Rayan walk by them as they stood in line. She waited for... something. Instead, he briefly glanced in her direction before coolly dismissing her and Tai felt something in her stomach resembling pain.

"We'll spend the day in combat tactics. Report to the dojo after your standard run. Go!"

She took off because it was expected. The rest of the team pounded next to her, steady and measured. She felt Rayan's gaze drilling into her back and refused to turn around to look.

Her muscles warmed, her body loosened. Tai relaxed into the run, idly wondering if he'd use last night as an excuse to get rid of her. A weak, defenseless female shouldn't be out fighting vamps. He'd proved his point -- she'd let him touch her. Weak. And stupid. But that was her own shit, that wasn't training. She would be better, faster, smarter. She'd fight and kill the ones who preyed on blood. And fuck Rayan Slade for thinking different.

* * *

His plan was brilliant and simple. He would tire her out to the point of exhaustion, until she'd have no energy or motivation for extra curricular activities. Embarrassment would be a bonus. A couple of falls on that excellent ass in front of the team would do wonders for her ego. A few more of them would have her quitting. Easy as pie.

Except Rayan grudgingly had to admit that she was good. Amazing, really. Whatever she'd done after he'd left, whatever she'd learned to supplement her cop training had left her a cool and skillful fighter. The first attempt to drop her failed when he attempted to kick at her knees with a whirling dragon kick, only to have her leap over his foot.

He'd sparred her and was left breathless, both from the act and from keeping back the urge to knock her back and fuck the fight out of her. Then he'd watched the other guys spar her and had to swallow the insane thought to beat every one of them senseless.

She was no longer his.

Her skills were exceptional, the stamina solid, her instincts sharp as ice. He wondered how and when that had changed, for certainly that blank cold look in her eyes wasn't there when they'd mock sparred before -- continuing with much more pleasurable activities -- so long ago that he should have forgotten.

"Keys' dead?"

Her voice was behind him, her scent a mix of musk and woman. When he turned, her face was flushed with exhaustion, and he had a flash of throwing her over

his shoulder to continue training in private. Instead, he willed his blood to slow. "What makes you ask?" He kept his voice deliberately disinterested.

"I saw him once. At the clubs."

She didn't elaborate but Rayan read between the lines. Blood clubs. Potentially, Keys -- one of their main instructors -- was a leak. Which would explain the raids that had proved useless, the absence of anyone with intel. "I want your word you won't leave the compound at night." He needed to have Cain access the PD database. And he needed to ensure she would stay put.

She raised her eyebrows, her face mocking and red.

"Don't fuck with me, Tai. I'm not in the mood for it." If possible her face flushed deeper. He couldn't tell if it was embarrassment or anger.

"Let's get one little thing clear." She stepped forward, almost touching him, the scent of anger pumping through her. Mixed in was arousal. It haloed around her, brilliantly dark, begging for him to taste. He nearly snarled at her, barely kept himself from pressing her to the nearest wall and taking her mouth as he would take her essence.

"After six o'clock, you stuff your jurisdiction up your ass." Her hair was damp with sweat, the short stubby ponytail sticking out at the back of her neck. Her face was shiny, her lips moist. The only time she'd looked more beautiful was when she'd married his sorry ass.

"I won't repeat myself." He fought to keep his voice cool even as he stifled the urge to lean in and take a nip.

She didn't move back. "Neither will I."

"Fine. Nonnenberg!" he bellowed almost in her face, watching her flinch a bit. If she wouldn't play nice, he would make sure she wouldn't play at all. Nonnenberg sauntered closer. "Bates will complete three hours of additional training. You will ensure it."

He saw Tai's face tighten, saw Nonnenberg move closer to her. It was done.

* * *

The thing about men was that they were predictable. Tai thrilled him by showing off her boobs squished in a sports bra and Nonnenberg walked away a happy creep after two hours of pushups and hell.

Time for pain pills. She popped them dry, chased them with a multi before settling cross-legged on the floor to meditate. It helped, strange as it sounded. She never believed this crap, certainly didn't have much use for it. After she'd killed Angel, when the rage inside her had bloomed, meditation kept the worst of it at bay. Forty-five minutes of silence, letting her mind drift in peace -- no guilt, no blood, no fighting. Just cool, empty darkness.

Today she couldn't concentrate. Rayan's face filled her mind, cold and empty as he told her it wasn't working, that it was over, they were done. She willed the image away, only to have it replaced by him kissing her, except it wasn't him, it was Deadshot, and he couldn't get enough of her and she came in screaming heavy waves as he touched her, tormented her, loved her.

She forced her mind to go blank and instead remembered the last time she'd seduced him; the hot and mindless sex, the disgust in his face when she woke soft and satisfied, when he told her they were finished.

She snapped her eyes open, kicked the memory back. Meditation was done.

Tai dressed for the night, carefully packing weapons and poison. If Keys was an informant, no doubt they knew her face, knew her presence there. In a way, it was a good thing. Less wasted time.

She slipped on a white tee shirt over the wraparound top. *Just going for a walk.* She didn't have to justify anything. But time could be wasted if someone had instructions not to let her out. Tai didn't like waste.

The smooth metal of her *sai* was cool against her legs, the contact soothing. She felt the familiar craving start its churning; the pre-fight anxiety, the niggling fear of doubt and death. She expelled a breath, and forced herself to take one last look in the mirror. Ninjagirl stared back at her, calm and ready. Tai bowed to her. The night was on.

* * *

Text blurred in front of him, and Rayan had to blink to bring it back into focus. Most monitors were off, both Jakob and Cain away from headquarters for once.

Screen one showed the vic, his sprawled body in Ekeshire Park, cold and lifeless. Screen two cropped into his face, scarred in the shape of Japanese Kanji --angel or saint or something. Jakob would know. He'd seen vampyres' mark on a body before. If turned, the mark would be the sign of sire. Since most of them didn't turn, it was evidence, though local PD considered it a cult.

Which led back to Tai. He'd married another cop, and as much as he hated it, he understood her drive. Didn't agree, but understood it. He knew she'd taken every martial arts class she could find. Angry, he supposed. Angry and empty and broken. The same as he'd been when Nina found him. Or rather, when he'd stumbled drunk on her and figured she was as good a candidate as any for a feed. She'd marked him on the shoulder before she sucked him dry, a testament to her should he turn.

He had turned. He didn't know how or why, didn't understand how one of sympath blood would turn into a full vampyre. In his hunger, he'd killed Nina, fucked out her life force while sucking out her blood, tossing her away when he was done. Since she'd marked him when he was still human -- or sympath rather -- the scar on his shoulder stayed. Had his blood turned by the time she'd marked him, the scar would have been gone within two days. Sometimes he didn't know which one he preferred more.

If he hadn't left Tai...

He punched in the key for the cameras and noticed the blinking perimeter breach notification. More than one. There were no alarms as the camera zoomed on a figure in white amidst bodies of much larger proportions just inside the gates. Temp cam displayed human, metal, and vamp. Thirteen of them.

Swearing, Rayan punched in alert keys before grabbing his sword, feeling for extra clips on his belt, and racing out.

* * *

Tonight she would die.

The thought was a cool brief kiss as Tai kicked a vamp in the neck, grunting with the force of a blow into her abdomen. Luckily the thin metal vest under her wraparound softened the blow from crushing to merely painful.

The damned tee shirt wouldn't let her get to the darts. She'd barely had the time to grip her *sai*. They flashed in her hands in the moonlight, slicing and stabbing. Vampyre blood was acrid and bitter in her throat.

If she would die, she would die fighting.

Another sidestep, another kick, high and swift. It connected painfully with a bony jaw, she grunted even as the vamp staggered back. Another one gripped her from behind as she kicked into the knees of the third one. His cheek was marked -- she could see it in the moonlight -- some sort of scar, intricately shaped. He impaled himself on her *sai* before she could get a good look. The one holding her arms pulled back and rolled her, his weight crushing as she fought to kick him off, keeping her chin down to cover her throat.

Poison, she needed to get to the poison. She'd die before they turned her.

The vamp grunted as she fisted the dark slimy threads of his hair in her hand and pulled with enough force for his neck to snap. Metal pierced his throat. His blood spilled on her just as another claimed his place. She rolled with him; managed to keep her throat away from his fangs, managed to rip through her tee shirt and wraparound so the black material hung open, the poison pellets sewn into the tatters close enough, if she could just reach down.

The vamp was on her. She couldn't buck off his leering grin and crushing weight. This was it. She ripped at a pellet with one hand, her other arm weakening by the second from holding off his face from hers. His weight pressed between her legs in a sick parody of sex, his eyes dark and -- There. The poison was in her hand as her arm gripping a *sai* was pressed between their bodies, useless now. She shoved the pill into her mouth and watched his fangs descend onto her.

Then he was limp as something wet spilled on her belly. Above him, she saw a sword and Rayan. Death was in her mouth. She looked at him, pissed and dangerous, as he pushed the dead vampyre off her. Vamp blood soaking her clothes, she spat out the poison before launching herself at Rayan, plastering her mouth to his, kissing him. She couldn't stop kissing him.

He tasted like smoke, heat and man and she couldn't get close enough. Still, she squirmed against his body, wrapped her legs around him as he hoisted her up. Through the tatters of her clothing, his hands were on her flesh, gripping, squeezing and she needed more and --

"Excuse us."

Tai wouldn't have registered the interruption, except she was set back on the ground, Rayan's arm on her back. She took her time righting her clothes before looking up into Jakob's impassive face. Cain stood next to him, his special made Berettas in both hands. Behind them, cadets in various stages of dress and armor stared grim-eyed at the bodies. Trenner was bleeding from both lip and neck and she wondered if he'd turn, and what Jakob was prepared to do.

She raised her chin... and gasped as her hands were pulled behind her to be clasped into metal. She was handcuffed. "What the fuck is this?"

"You were warned." Rayan's voice was soft and dangerous. He held a gun in his hand. There was a muffled pop, and the vampyre that had almost had her was dust.

Jakob simply shook his head. "Let me guess. You were taking a walk."

"Yes."

"And this?" He knelt, picked up the pill she'd spat out. Tai watched as he sniffed it. "Ricin. Interesting choice."

She felt Rayan tense more behind her. Her back met his chest as she avoided Jakob's approach. His face was pale in the moonlight, the hollows in his cheeks deep. For a long moment he was silent. "You're no good to me dead." He flicked the pellet away. She heard it bounce on concrete. "You would have been faster with a gun." He addressed Rayan, clearly dismissing her.

“I couldn’t risk missing.”

A strange smile bloomed on his face before Jakob wiped it. “Deadshot,” he said and shook his head. “Have her back in one piece.” He flung the phrase over his shoulder as he walked away.

Chapter Four

Rayan's grip bit into her arm, the metal of the cuffs hot on her skin. She was turned so fast she stumbled again. His face, furious and hot was a surprise. "You took poison." She wasn't in the mood to deal with him. The grip on her arm tightened. "Damn you, answer me."

Tai shrugged -- though it was difficult with her hands cuffed at her back. The breeze caressed her skin exposed by the torn tee shirt and wraparound. Under her vest her nipples tightened further. She was as hot as she was sad, aroused, wired and beat and she was in no mood to deal with him.

The last thing she expected was Rayan to lift her like a fucking doll and hoist her over his shoulder, his hand in a close proximity to her ass.

"What the fuck are you doing?" She was carried inside without an answer, watching Nonnenberg's face twist into disgust as he shot her a look before following the others.

Tai didn't struggle, wouldn't give Rayan the satisfaction. She needed release, now, needed to purge all this energy bursting inside her. Her body was dropped -- to her surprise it was on the firm surface of a dojo mat. Not the bed she was expecting.

"What the fuck are you doing?" she repeated, scrambling up, clumsy and heavy, unable to use her hands for balance. There was no pain now, adrenaline took care of that. The only pain she felt was the low twisting in her stomach, the clenching in her pussy from the post fight lust. With clipped methodic movements Rayan stripped off his weapons. Tai watched him approach, jutting her chin up even as nerves twisted her belly. She didn't know what he was about to do, but she was certain it wasn't meant for her to like.

Hard, blunt fingers caressed the line of her throat. Convulsively she swallowed, keeping her gaze on his. Then his palm closed around her neck, roughly enough to have her eyes widening. She swallowed a gasp, forced herself not to scream. His eyes were cold steel as he studied her face. She refused to show fear. "I am not into kinky." Except she felt her pussy creaming.

"Good to know." His face was inches from hers. "Though kinky isn't what I had in mind."

"No?" Was she idiotic to feel disappointment?

"Your fighting skills are good. You are strong and fast. And you're stupid and you're arrogant and you will kill yourself because of it."

"And you're what, Yoda?"

His hand tightened on her throat, briefly, just enough for her to realize the extreme vulnerability of her position. "You were warned not to leave the compound."

"I was --" Another squeeze had her shutting up.

"I can't make you respect your damned life. I can't kick you out of the program just because I can't stand to see you hurt. But I can tire you out enough so that doing this ninja thing will be the last thing you'll want."

"And you intend to do that how?" She felt her cheeks blush immediately as she said it. His hand forced her back, then farther back until she stumbled, crashing to the floor, instincts causing her to turn slightly on her side so she could roll over her back onto her feet.

He smiled, then tilted his head before stepping in the classic combat stance. Feet apart, knees bent, body shifted forward. He kept his hands down, deliberately insulting. As if saying her feet could do no damage. "Let's go."

She held her ground. "I'm not fighting you like this."

He shrugged. "You can keep rolling." A step forward.

Wearily, Tai backed away from him, shoulders straining against the cuffs, short strands of her hair tickling her nose and mouth. This side of him, this dangerously

exciting side of him, was new and wild and just a bit nerve-wracking. She needed to distract him. "I was hoping for another type of rolling."

"You just said you weren't into kink." His voice was matter-of-fact, his eyes all but glowing, his big body stalking her. She scrambled back, excitement of the chase mixing with weariness.

"I could make an exception."

"I'll keep that in mind." His leg snaked out for a dragon kick. She managed to leap over it, barely keeping herself upright. His grim, sexy smile was a straight punch in the gut.

"You want a good fight? Uncuff me. I'll be happy to kick your ass."

"Kick my ass while you're cuffed. You're that good, aren't you?"

Her skin was damp, the fucking vest clamping around her. She sidestepped another attempt to push her over, skidded, almost lost her balance. Barely managed to keep her feet. When he came at her again, she swung her leg and kicked him squarely in the gut. She had to lean forward a bit to compensate her balance, but she managed it. Satisfaction bloomed darkly as her ankle met flesh -- except his hands closed over her foot, and she would have cart wheeled away, yet her hands were cuffed and...

She crashed hard to the floor, the air knocked out of her lungs. He stood and watched, his face cool and impassive, as she struggled to get up. His eyes were hot. She bared her teeth. Cuffs or no cuffs, she was taking him down. Crouching, Tai circled around him, used her feet to fake him, used her flexibility to dance around his defenses and his attempts at holds. She pulled her kick at his ribs, letting it go full force into his abs. Her foot met with solid steel.

He spun around her, grabbed her cuffs from behind, and sent her sprawling back. If he hadn't caught her, her butt would have hit the mat. Cursing him, panting for breath, Tai squirmed out of his hold, but he kept moving back, unbalancing her, forcing her to use his hands for support.

She heard him hit the wall, her ass was pressed against his cock, already hard, already jutting. She growled, turned. And before she changed her mind, before she

could place a solid kick that would send his stomach into the throat because she had too much fucking honor to knee his balls, she found herself pressed against him, straining up, seeking the heat of his mouth.

His hands clamped on her ass. His lips were mere moments away, his breath warm and spicy. One taste, just a bit, then he pulled away, teasing her, damn it. She nearly growled again, and was surprised to hear the sound rumbling her throat. Then his mouth was on her, hot and demanding, his hands lifting her toward him, pulling her closer, like he couldn't get enough, fusing her to him, and all she could do was trust him to hold her as she kissed him like she was starved for him.

Something crashed. Tai realized it was them when she found herself sprawled on his chest. The steel bands of his arms were around her, rolling her under, tearing away the tatters and the vest, the brutality of it as dark as it was exciting. Struggling to touch him she strained against the cuffs again, only to freeze as he tore away her sports bra and bared her breasts.

Time slowed into liquid air.

She licked her lips in anticipation as he stared hungrily at the hardened tips of her nipples. His gaze met hers, a silent, final question. In response, she arched her back.

He placed stinging short kisses on her neck, her collarbone, over and under her breasts. She writhed under him, needing more, demanding more, straining against the handcuffs shredding her wrists. Finally his lips closed over a jutting peak, sucked harder with each moan that tore out of her throat. His weight was heavy and wonderful between her thighs and she ground herself against him, mindless and wanting.

His lips closed over the other nipple, his hands massaging the peaking tip of breast he'd just left. To hell with foreplay. "Fuck me, damn you." Her voice, the primal gutter of it was foreign to her own ears. His chuckle was a gasp as he tugged at her pants, palmed her sex. His fingers drove inside her, rough, hot and so good she screamed from it as he drove her toward that first climax. Blindly she reached for it, tensed for it, except he stopped, swallowing her protesting cry into his mouth.

She opened her eyes to see his cock, beautiful, thick and ready, extending toward her. His chuckle was a sexy gasp as she licked her lips. "You want it, little one?"

"You know I do." She squirmed up, already anticipating that hot slide into her mouth. His large palm on her neck helped her up. She sat up between his spread knees and took him hot and slick into her mouth, his sexy grunt loud in her ears.

She couldn't hold him with her hands, couldn't squeeze his thickness. Instead, she sucked him hard and deep, swallowed around him, milked him. His scent surrounded her, sweat and male, his taste familiar and exotic. With each deep breath she took his essence inside her.

He groaned again, pushed her away, his eyes intense on hers, his breathing ragged. Wordless, she stared up at him. He didn't move, just watched her, his gaze harsh and somehow painful. The move was hers. She lay back onto her bound hands, keeping her eyes on his. His thighs were on either side of her -- she had just enough room to bend her knees, sliding her feet from under him. With years of flexibility, she spread her thighs, so wide her feet almost touched the floor, opening her pussy for him, ready and wet and swollen.

Still he waited, and she almost screamed from it.

"You're sure."

She couldn't speak without air. Instead, she lifted her hips. His cock rubbed against her clit before he slowly pushed inside her, his face beading with sweat and tension.

Unused muscles burst to life, gripping him with vicious need as Rayan pressed his cock into her cream slicked pussy. She wasn't sure if it was pain or pleasure. She just knew she needed him, all of him, now. His groan matched hers as he pulled out, pushed back in, deeper this time, hotter. His hands gripped her thighs, she felt them tremble on her skin. His eyes never left hers.

Again out. Again in. Harder and deeper and more. He gripped her hips now, drew her fast and full onto his cock, made her take him, all of him, despite the tightening of her muscles, the glorious pain-pleasure of it.

The slurping sounds of her juices accompanied both their grunts as he hammered into her, desperately greedy, gripping her hips, slamming her against his pelvis. She felt the heavy sway of his balls at her ass, the rhythmic grind of his flesh against hers. The pressure in her cunt was near bursting when his jaw clenched and he pulled out and away from her.

She wasn't going to dignify him with a protest. *She wasn't.*

The only sound in the dojo was their harsh breathing. He flipped her onto her stomach, bent over her so his body covered hers. His arms looped around her, cushioning her head as he positioned himself against the swollen, quivering opening of her cunt and drove in.

The force of it had her screaming. Instantly he stopped. "Did I hurt you?" His voice was a rough, breathless gasp.

She didn't know if he had. She just knew if he didn't keep fucking her she would die, just curl up and die from the need burning through her belly. As if reading her mind, his large palm curved around her hip to caress her stomach. "Just do it." She muttered it with lips pressed against Rayan's damp, muscled forearm.

He made a tiny forward movement before he stopped again. "Did I hurt you?"

"If you don't fuck me right now, I'm going to hurt you."

He chuckled softly in her ear as he pulled out slow, doubtless to torture her. Then once again he slid into her, one long, smooth motion that had her gasping with the pleasure of it. She was pushed lower, his arm under her lips, her ass lifted so his strokes beat against the hidden spot behind her clitoris, fast and hard and furious. She felt him shuddering, heard his heart thudding as he slowed down. "I'm close and --"

"Don't stop!"

"No, I --"

She sank her teeth into his forearm, felt him shudder inside her as he increased the speed of his strokes, plunging inside her, slamming into her pussy before freezing in a long drawn-out gasp as his orgasm gripped him, as he spilled his seed into her body before collapsing over her, his arms damp and tight around her.

"I'm sorry, little one. I'm sorry." He kept whispering it into her ear, his weight crushing her to the mat. She felt his come on her thighs and for a moment wondered what it would be like if it took hold and life bloomed inside her. She chased the thought away, felt reality's cool brush over her skin. His weight was gone.

Awkwardly, she rolled, her muscles stiff now. Did he just leave? Fucking asshole. Although it was probably for the best...

She felt his presence behind her just as she managed to get onto her knees. The cuffs snapped open, and his hands closed briefly around her wrists before moving them forward, circling the tension in her shoulders. His lips pressed into her back. She seriously contemplated decking him, at least on principle if nothing else. Before she could do it, she was urged back on the mat, Rayan's body once again above her as he knelt by her and said a single word.

"Spread."

She raised an eyebrow, determined not to let relief show. "Pardon?"

He chuckled, and she realized he was fully clothed while somehow she was laying naked on the blue portion of the gridded rubber mat where she'd kicked and spun and fought hours ago. Great. Just fucking great.

"Open up, little one."

He'd used the endearment before. Tai wondered if it was simply an old habit coming back. He used to call her that -- long, long ago. She gave him a look, but as she was sprawled on the floor it was pointless to argue. A warm, damp cloth pressed against her pussy, gently and carefully caressing her.

Leaning on her elbows, through narrowed eyes Tai watched him, his face thoughtful as he cleansed her, as if by accident brushing her clit with his finger, once, twice, three times, flaring the flames back into fury.

Softly, she sighed. The cloth went flying. His eyes hot, his hands rough, Rayan pushed her thighs apart and used his mouth on her. Slow teasing licks alternated with firm delicious strokes. He tongued her clit, circled around it, nipped at the hood that hid it. With stabbing motions he fucked her with his tongue, drawing gasps and cries

from her ravaged throat. She clenched as his thumb probed inside her, her pussy swollen and slick, his finger rasping against her sensitized walls with sparks of pleasure.

Rhythmically, torturously slow, he fucked her with his thumb as he tormented her clit, lapping at it with his tongue, drawing it into his mouth. She nearly came when his teeth scraped against the swollen lips of her pussy. Instead, he drew away, just slightly and she arched farther up, pressing herself into his face, silently begging because she didn't have the breath to plead.

"More?" His hands were driving her crazy. The thumb that replaced his tongue on her clit was rough and fast and wonderful. "More, little one?" She couldn't breathe to answer him.

His mouth was on her once more, and she felt his breath against her sensitive skin. Three fingers now, slowly pumping, stretching her delicate inner walls, his tongue faster, rougher, coiling around her clit, flicking it with delicious shocks of pain, soothing it with long, gentle licks, faster and rougher and harder until she shattered into mindless screaming pieces, trembling with every breath as the waves of pleasure tore her apart.

The glow of his eyes was the last thing she saw before sleep claimed her.

Chapter Five

Scotch in hand, Rayan tapped keys, setting alerts to beep his room if that crazy woman even thought about leaving the compound after nightfall. He would keep her occupied if had to fuck her night and day.

Like that would be a grand sacrifice.

His head pounded, even as he forced his muscles to relax. The need to feed was still clenched between his jaws ever since she'd orgasmed beautifully into his mouth, her energy taunting him with its shimmering sweetness. He fed on her, just a small taste, and he was honest enough to admit it was more because he couldn't stop himself than from his intent of knocking her out.

After putting her to bed and barely resisting staying there with her, he'd scrubbed his skin until most of her scent was gone. If he hadn't, he was afraid of losing what was left of his control and going back to wake her, to make her come until dawn, to feed on each glorious orgasm she would give him.

He wondered how her scent managed to stay with him, its sweetness driving him crazy. He brought his wrist to his nose, inhaled, and pulled back swiftly when he saw Jakob enter, silent as the night. By monitor light, his eyes were dark against pale blue tinted skin. For once he looked tired. After a moment, Rayan remembered why. One of their own had been bled by a vampyre. "Trenner?"

"Too early to tell. Confined in either case."

Scotch was set down with a nasty splash. He remembered too well -- the shakes, the sweats. The need for blood, the urge, the thirst for it. Human, animal, vampyre. Any variation of that sticky sweet substance. "Keys' code was used to get inside."

The vampyre nodded, and sprawled into a chair. "Looks like we got someone's attention." He lifted a wineglass of dark, thick liquid, probably defrosted blood. To Rayan, it was both fascinating and disgusting.

"Stupid to send vamps into an enemy camp."

A thoughtful sip. "I think it was more of an acknowledgement."

At the moment, Rayan didn't care. "I want Bates out."

Another sip, accompanied by a small grimace. Animal blood just wasn't the same. "I want her in."

"After tonight?"

"Yes."

Fists clenched, Rayan abandoned his chair and paced restlessly. "She's reckless. She'll end up dead." The thought burned his stomach with icy shards.

A pensive sip prolonged the silence. "Perhaps. Unless she has a reason not to."

"What the hell are you getting at?"

A shrug. "Either way, it's her own choice." Jake set the glass down -- close enough to the keyboard to have Cain bitching if he saw it. "She is a Hunter. She's proven herself."

"She's a cadet. If I had been moments later..." The thought was fast and vicious. *She would have killed herself with poison.* And he had been too much of a pussy to fire, risking precious seconds to reach her before using his sword.

Jakob's voice was soft and cold. "She is of Hunter blood."

The pacing stopped. Slowly, forcing his heart to slow, Rayan turned toward the vampyre. "You know this how?"

"I just know." A flat emotionless voice.

He used all his strength to resist launching himself at the man who'd saved him. "You motherfucking son of a bitch."

"I didn't drink from her." The bitter sneer was worth a fist, yet Rayan forced himself to hold it. "She fought a newly-turned. And lived."

"How the fuck do you know all this?"

"I was fucking intel from the newly-turned." The self-deprecating smile was sharp and thin on his face. "We were to meet that night. When I got there Taina had fought her. And survived."

"She trained for years after I --" He shut up.

"You finally admit that?" Another sip, the wineglass delicate in a long-fingered hand. "You're as good at hiding records as Cain is at uncovering them."

"Fine." So he hadn't managed to keep her name out of his data. "As I was saying, she trained for years."

"She had. But a newly-turned is the most dangerous of all of --" Jacob paused and again that bitter smile flashed in monitor light, "us. She fought. And she survived."

The image of Tai struggling with the two vamps was replaced by a nameless newly-turned, greedily desperate for blood, high on its power, insanely, impossibly strong. "If she stays, she remains in the compound."

"Deadshot." His name was as a sigh. "She has nothing to learn here. The fight keeps her from burning up. The burn is her need to fight. That cycle is in her blood."

"She'll die." The words were hoarse and bitter in his mouth.

"As did her predecessors. As will we."

"She is done here." It came out before he even registered it. "I'll see to it."

Impervious to the tension, Cain muscled his way between them. "Found something."

More monitors lit up, photos of victim and blood, garish and bright. Keys had his face to the camera, his eyes open and lifeless. The scars on his cheek curved into thickly drawn lines. Japanese Kanji. "Half a mil donated to the City of Angels Clinic." Cain crossed bulging arms over a steroid enhanced chest. His body -- large, abused and deeply muscled -- was a result of brutal training and the latest chemistry. Rayan often wondered what urged the man to fry his blood.

"Half a mill to sell a remote," Jakob muttered. "Doesn't add up."

Pushing Tai to the back of his mind, Rayan leaned over Cain's shoulder. Accounts for the Armand Church foundation took up three monitors -- donations and

write-offs. To his right, Jakob leaned into the monitor, studying the scar on Keys' cheek. "I've seen this mark before. It's --"

"Angel." The name was on the monitor. Cain looked at them like they were idiots before leaning over to study the data.

* * *

Tai didn't know where Rayan was. She told herself she didn't care. She had woken alone this morning, in her own bed, the scrapes on her wrists already healing. Her *sai* were on the nightstand, gleaming and cold.

The bastard had put her to bed and left. No scenes, no explanations. And speaking of explanations, she had none for what had exactly happened or why she'd shaved her sex bare again this morning -- as if hoping whatever it was would happen again.

Her body ached yet there was no pain. Her muscles strained with the simplest of exercises -- not hurt, just dull and weakened. Nonnenberg's sneer and Cain's nonchalant gaze kept her upright when she would have stumbled. Again.

"You're being a pussy, Bates." Why Nonnenberg kept choosing her as a partner, she had no clue. His sick look of pleasure as he took her down again had Tai rolling back onto her feet, dizzy or not. His sweep was sidestepped the same way as his next attempt at a hold, his motion redirected forward and down. He crashed hard on the mat, and the strain in her shoulders and back was worth it.

Face fuming red, he charged up, attacking her with brute strength that had nothing to do with technique. Luckily she'd trained for it. On aching legs she circled around him, should have avoided him except a beefy shoulder caught her side on its way down, and she stumbled again, folded onto her knees even as her mind screamed for her to get up. The word slowly spun around.

"Come on, cunt-bitch." Nonnenberg was at her side, his arm hooked around her neck. "Show off those ninja moves." She smelled his sweat as his palm pressed hard onto the bridge of her nose, tears blinding her as pain shot behind her eyes, sharp and sweet.

Her knees were trapped under the weight of her own body. Her arms were useless. She almost slapped the mat in defeat as he forced her forward, her muscles aching in protest. But through tearing eyes she saw Rayan coming toward her and muscles and weakness were damned.

Ignoring the twisting in her gut, Tai went with the forward motion, curling down, using her full weight on the beefy arm that gripped her. She didn't know how her knee ended up in his throat, her hand on his forehead, his eyes bulging with hate and lack of oxygen. She looked for him to tap out. He didn't and she couldn't wait. Tai let go swiftly, backed away, tired, sore, and for some reason, weepy.

A thousand needles stabbed her throat. She swiped at the moisture at her eyes only to focus on her wrist, still slightly bruised from last night. As if she'd called him, Rayan was right there, snapping his cell phone shut. "Upstairs." The buzzing in her head made it difficult to hear him. She looked at him quizzically until he repeated it. "Upstairs."

"Typical." Nonnenberg was up, still red, still furious. "Get your little fuck toy out of here. God fucking forbid she actually trains."

She turned, slowly. Not for effect, but because the room would have spun out if she hadn't. Her voice was low as she pushed it past the needles in her throat. "Which bone would you like me to break?"

"Enough!" Rayan was between them, eyes hot in fury. "Report upstairs now. And you --" he turned to Nonnenberg with a grim little smile, "I'd think since she didn't take your balls, you'd owe her some respect."

The red face turned maroon. Spitting profanities, Nonnenberg leapt, landing heavily on Rayan with the intent of knocking him down. Instead, he simply bounced off, landing on his back with a sickening thud that had the walls shaking. Conversation and practice stopped.

Rayan's smile was small, bright and lethal. His gaze swept the cadets around him. "As you were." Turning to Tai, he simply raised an eyebrow. "Upstairs."

Well, fuck.

* * *

Following her to headquarters, Rayan frowned at her scent. There was no excitement from the fight, just like there hadn't been satisfaction on her face when she floored that idiot. Her scent was strong but bitter, jarring and somehow sickly.

"Hey." Catching up with her, he took her arm, holding it gently. There was no softness in her eyes as she spun around. She looked pointedly at where he circled her wrist, an eyebrow raised in challenge even as her mouth was soft with... something. He couldn't quite make it out. "Are you all right?"

She tried to tug her hand away, but he firmed his grip over the camo sleeve, making sure he didn't touch the bruises. "I'm fine."

Except she wasn't.

She was probably confused about him and them and all the shit that was happening between them. Hell, so was he. They'd need to talk, she would be told the truth. Keeping his gaze on her, Rayan took the first step. Slow and firm, he brought her wrist to his mouth and trailed soft gentling kisses on the healing bruises. Mentally he called himself a thousand names. He'd hurt her. His mind had screamed for him to be gentle even as his body screamed for more. "I'm sorry," he started. "I didn't want to --"

"Forget it." The sheen of tears in her eyes confused him. Before he could speak, she yanked her wrist away. "Consider it adrenaline. Consider it whatever you want." She shrugged, rubbed at her wrist and turned away to make her way into the headquarters.

Rayan frowned after her, but this wasn't the time for explanations.

She was fine. She walked in front of him, head high, her scent slightly different, probably because she was tired and nervous about the consequences from last night. She shouldn't have been out, she shouldn't have fought alone, she shouldn't even be a part of this war, Hunter or not.

Jakob, in his usual black clothes, already waited for her. He didn't smile when she approached -- human pleasantries were always a mockery. Rayan wondered if Tai knew the man who led this little op was fighting his own kind.

Shoulders back, Tai stood even as she was gestured to sit. Leaning on the doorjamb, he couldn't help but admire her spunk. She thought she was getting her teeth kicked in and lifted her chin for it. *That's my girl.*

The thought startled him, yet Rayan didn't have the luxury to dwell on it. With two stabbing fingers -- the vamp never did get completely used to modern tech -- Jake keyed in the monitors. As they lit up, Rayan watched Tai focus on the face that bore the same mark as Keys, before she wrapped her arms around herself and slowly sank into a chair. The room was silent except for her harsh breathing. "Joey."

A lover? Boyfriend? Stupid to be jealous.

"This is the man you found." Jake's voice was cool, impassive.

"Yes." Her own tone was a whispered rasp.

"He was killed by the vampyre you fought?"

"Yes."

More tapping keys. Monitor three zoomed onto Keys' face, maroon blood caking over a blue-tinted cheek. "The mark is the same." Jake's voice was as cool as it was merciless. "Do you know why?"

"Angel." Tai choked on it.

Rayan fought the urge to wrap his arms around her. She'd kick him in the teeth first. "She turned, didn't she? Angel?"

The sheen of tears in her eyes almost floored him when Tai glanced back to him and nodded. As it was, he pasted on a mask, simply walked over to the comp to study the marks.

It was barely a whisper when she said it. "I killed her."

"Apparently not."

Her head snapped back as if Jakob had physically punched her. "I killed her." Tai's voice was strong with grief and guilt. "I staked a knife through her heart." She scrubbed her hands over a pale, tired face. "Sometimes I wish it was the other way around." His heart simply broke for her. Wordless, Rayan watched Tai straighten her

shoulders, attempting to pull herself together. "If someone carved her mark into Keys it was probably as tribute. She died. I killed her." Almost, almost composed.

"Did you watch her turn to ash in sunlight?" Jake's question wasn't gentle. The way her shoulders tensed, Rayan could see the answer was no.

"I stabbed her," Tai repeated.

The vampyre was unmoved. Five hundred years of shit had left him numb to human drama.

"A mark of a sire is the most intimate of bonds." Rayan didn't realize he'd spoken out loud. Absently he rubbed his shoulder. "No one would do it as a tribute. It must have been her."

Her eyes were pools of despair and pain. "How?" It came as a ragged whisper.

Jakob answered that one. "Blood. Human."

Through a sheen of tears, Tai frowned. "That would mean someone would have found her after you --" She didn't finish. *After Jake moved her to be burned by the sun.*

Jakob shrugged, a movement so human Rayan nearly smiled. "The point is, she's alive. We have a lead."

A newly-turned would lead them to the source. Rayan ran the probabilities, composed the scenarios -- and barely caught Tai as she staggered. Her skin was hot and clammy under his hands as he finally identified the scent.

Fever.

Chapter Six

Low murmured words drifted into her consciousness, some jarring her out of sleep, some lulling her into it. Tai figured she was drugged -- she must have overdone it with the pain pills. Her muscles didn't ache as she lay in bed. Somehow it wasn't strange there were people talking in her room.

She heard Rayan. That was comforting. He would take care of her. His words weren't making sense, but he was there and that was all she needed. "I fed from her. Maybe too much. Damn it." There was a low thud of flesh hitting something solid.

"You forget the poison." Jake's voice. Low, clipped and exotic. "You don't know how much she absorbed."

"I fed from her."

"Would you get the fuck over it?" The viciousness in that tone had her flinching. Jake must have noticed for his next words were softer, yet no less harsh and no less confusing. "I told you, she's a Hunter."

"So the fuck what?"

There was a soft growl. She fluttered her lashes open to see Jake touch the scar on his cheek. Since the light hurt, she closed her eyes again and floated.

"So you're an idiot. Hunters burn up fast unless they can release the energy that makes them. Blood or *ki*. If you did feed, you eased the pain in her."

He knew about the pain? It was just soreness from overuse. The pills were helping. She wished they would stop talking.

"Who the fuck made you an expert?"

There was a soft and bitter laugh. "The Hunter who killed me."

Brief, sweet moment of silence. "Fine. What the hell am I to do?"

There was a shuffle and a new presence over her. Tai blinked at Nick Cain, his blond short-cropped head close to her face. For once his eyes weren't cold as they studied her.

That's right, he'd had medical training. EMT or something -- Tai couldn't remember now. His hands were cool and gentle as they held her wrist, searching for a pulse. "Her vitals are fine. If the poison was disrupting her vitals it would show."

She heard more shuffling, felt the bed shift as someone sat next to her, placing a blessedly cool hand on her cheek. Rayan. She turned into him, needing his touch.

"Let her rest." Cain's voice was both taut and gentle, as if it was hard for him to shed the asshole mask. "She may have pain when she wakes up. Don't give her meds -- I don't know how she'll react with everything else inside her. These herbs will knock her out. If it gets bad, try massage."

"I don't know if I can control myself touching her."

Jakob spoke. "It's not about you."

* * *

She was out for hours. Maybe days. He watched the bruises fade from her body, the scrapes lighten until they disappeared. This Hunter theory Jakob had cooked up apparently was on target.

Not knowing how much poison was in her system, he didn't give her painkillers. Instead he made her sip the herbs Cain brought her -- when had that ass become an expert? When she tossed and couldn't find comfort, he drew the sick energy into himself so she could rest. It didn't feed him -- there wasn't much of it and the taste of it was bitter, but as he took her essence into himself Jakob's words echoed in his head.

If you did feed, you'd ease the pain in her.

If that was true, life was truly one hell of a fucked-up bitch. He thought of Tai's stricken eyes when he'd told her it wasn't working, when he'd distanced himself because his need for her scared the shit out of him.

Half sympath, he didn't come into the thirst until his late twenties. By then he was married and his sympath mother was dead.

The cravings came and he'd pushed Taina away, afraid to take too much, afraid of raping her mind. When their marriage ended he chose prostitutes. And found Nina. He rubbed the scar on his shoulder even as he checked Tai's skin again for fever. Her scent was normal, the bitterness gone. He inhaled deeply, letting her scent linger inside him. Her gaze, brown and clear, met his.

She frowned. Cleared her throat before she spoke. "What the hell happened?" Then she must have realized she was naked because the bed sheet was pulled up to her chin in a quick nervous motion.

That irritated the hell out of him. "I don't intend to rape you."

She frowned again. "I didn't mean to imply --"

He sighed, shoved bottled water at her. Her fingers brushed his as she took it and drank deeply. "Thanks." She handed the bottle back, and studied him with wide confused eyes as he took a gulp himself. "Was I sick?"

"Yeah. Fever."

Another frown. Third one. "I never get sick."

He saw her eyes shift, as if she was searching for something. He had a good idea what it was. "No more pills."

Her gaze flew to his, startled and wide. Her chin was already up -- always a good sign. "I need them."

"Why?"

"If you must know, my back hurts."

Now was the time to step up. "Don't you need the bathroom?" The flush that spread over her cheeks was answer enough. He kept his tone matter-of-fact, knowing if he laughed, she'd try to deck him. Which would be fine under different circumstances, but now he needed her to rest. "I've seen it all before. You won't be shocking me if you go naked."

Muttering, she swung out of bed, only to sway once she stood up. Cursing his own damn self Rayan caught her. The look she threw him was quick and uncertain. "Sorry. I'm fine."

He dropped a kiss on her head as he led her to the restroom despite the obvious protest in her eyes. "Yeah. You're fine."

She frowned yet again before the door closed cutting off his view of that lusciously muscled ass. Time to step up, he told himself and folded back the covers before stripping off his clothes and weapons.

* * *

Tai figured he would be gone. The shower she took was long, hot and leisurely, soothing some of the aches, clearing some of the fog. She wasn't sure how long she'd been out, but it must have been bad. The poison, probably. She hadn't been herself since she'd sucked on that damned pill. Speaking of pills, she needed pain meds. Her joints were stiff, her muscles aching with each movement. Probably leftover goodness from whatever shit went on with her system.

Well, Rayan's gallantry only ran so far. She didn't know where it came from, but people didn't change. He'd left because he didn't love her -- he'd told her this in his cool and logical Rayan way. This was just... He just felt responsible for her. And chalk up the amazingly kinky sex to a simple case of adrenaline.

He would be gone when she came out; she'd take the pills and if she could get back to bed without eating carpet, she would sleep until tomorrow. She remembered something from earlier, something foggy. Something about hunters, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it.

It took most of her energy to wash her hair. Ridiculous really, since she felt fine. Just dizzy and achy. The pain was normal. The dizziness was new.

Rayan suddenly surprised her by knocking on the bathroom door. "Everything okay in there?"

She threw her strength into her voice. "Yep. Just fine."

Tai was pulling a comb through tangles when she stepped out of the bathroom and saw him sitting on her bed, big, buff and gorgeously naked. The comb stopped. Her mouth worked for a moment before a sound could be pushed out. "I'm not in the mood."

The hell of it was, the mood was there. She wasn't sure how, since she'd just woken up from some crazy fever, and her body was wrung out, but it was fact. She felt the edges of arousal flutter in her stomach, which was insane -- she was sick and she was tired and he shouldn't have been here.

Watching him, Tai realized she'd fucked him and yet she hadn't seen him naked until now. His chest was sprinkled with fine black hair, narrowing into a line leading to his cock. With his legs crossed she couldn't see if it was hard, and she was damned if he'd catch her looking.

His smile was sinfully innocent. "Not in the mood for a massage?"

She drew her brows together, looked at him with a frown before continuing to work the comb through her hair. Sitting on the bed, the dim lights caressing bulging muscles and deliciously tan skin, he simply watched her. The silence grew thick before Tai finally answered. "Massage? That's it?"

"You want something more?"

"No." It wasn't a lie, really. The timing wasn't right. That's all.

With the smooth grace of a stalking panther he uncoiled from the bed, walked past her into the bathroom, didn't miss an opportunity to brush against her. Heat flared in her belly as the fluttering grew stronger. He came out with a tube of lotion. "Not as good as oil, but it'll do."

How she came to be face down on her own bed with him straddling her, Tai didn't know. Rayan's hands worked slow magic on her skin, starting gently, soothing with large relaxing circles. Thumbs pressed into the cords of her neck, she moved her head, brushed at her hair to give him better access. The pressure was firm and perfect.

Slow, rhythmic presses. Gentle sweeps. The hot, roughened skin of his palms gliding over hers. Every muscle in her back was pushed at, followed, pressed and soothed. The harder press of his fingers against her lower back was heaven. She tensed a bit as his palms covered her buttocks, but then he started kneading, squeezing out aches and Tai nearly moaned with the pleasure of it.

She didn't of course. This wasn't sexual.

He moved to her legs, long sweeps over her thighs, squeezes over her calves, her arches, her toes. Then, starting at her feet, he slid his palms firmly over her skin, over her legs, her buttocks, her back, her neck, and the moan that was held back fluttered over her lips.

He jerked a bit, as if the sound startled him. She was turned -- gently -- and his jutting cock told her this wasn't anything but sexual. Tai watched his face, wouldn't have told him no. His hands covered her shoulders, pressed and pushed into her joints, working her biceps, her elbows, her wrists. He straddled her thighs, his cock high and thick and he didn't do anything but touch her. His face was thoughtful as she watched him, the dim lights adding shadows and danger to that lean face. When his hand closed over hers, fingers linking, the gesture was so intently intimate she wanted to weep.

He was taking care of her. Just like he used to.

Her other arm received the same ministrations before he touched the skin above her breasts. Tai gasped, couldn't keep herself from it. Feeling her nipples harden, she watched him, willed him to make a move. His hands traveled in the valley between her breasts, slowly caressing, igniting the lust that had been banked earlier.

Slick with lotion, his fingers circled her breasts, lightly pressing, moving inward until finally, finally, he grazed the tips, caressing them with light teasing touches before covering both mounds with his palms to softly knead.

She didn't bother containing the protesting groan when he left her breasts and swept over her belly, subtly pressing, skimming her belly button with delicious circles. Her muscles were hot pools of wax as he moved to her side to sweep his palms over the outside of her hips. Would he touch her cunt? Her eyelids fluttered open, and she met his gaze.

Lotion-slicked fingers massaged the outside of her legs, pressing into her knees. As if testing, his fingers touched her inner thigh. As if answering, she spread them just a bit wider.

As if questioning, his hands moved higher, and fuck it, she gave up. Her muscles were fluid as she opened her thighs; his eyes were hot on hers when she gave silent

permission. His hand cupped her as he leaned to capture her mouth, leisurely soft. He took his time kissing her, moving his hand over her pussy, drawing purrs of pleasure from her lips into his.

His hair was silk. She gripped it when he kissed his way onto her jaw, her neck, and probed the shell of her ear with a teasing tip of her tongue. More kisses, lower now, on her shoulder, her collarbone, lower still over the swell of her breast, over her nipple. Gentle, so excruciatingly soft.

His mouth closed over a hardening peak, lightly sucking, laving it with his tongue. Hot openmouthed kisses were his path to her other breast and she could only gasp at the thickly liquid air as he pleasured her with hands and mouth.

Teasing soft licks over her stomach were sparks of fire. A quick probe into her belly button had her rearing up, only to have him push her down with an insistent hand over her chest. Then his head was between her thighs, his eyes intent on hers as he took a long deep inhale before licking at the seam of her pussy lips. On her elbows, she watched him, unable to tear her gaze away. Taking his time, he tongued her pussy, unhurriedly caressed her clit, pleasuring her with long sweeping strokes.

She held tight onto control because if she lost it, everything would be over. His gaze was hot and blue on hers, his head bobbing over her body, his heartbeat somehow loud in her ears. She felt him inside her, had the strangest sensation that he was in her head, drinking her pleasure as he drank at her pussy. She didn't fight him, simply let him have all of her as he pleasured her into a rolling, shimmering climax; watched her, felt her as she shuddered with his tongue over her clit, his eyes on her, his mind inside hers.

Chapter Seven

Pain woke him. It wasn't bad, just nagging enough to needle him awake. His joints ached, his head was cotton, but Tai was in his arms, soft and smooth, and he hugged her tight before realizing it would wake her.

Too late. Brown eyes met his, her gaze clear and warm, her smile soft and sleepy. Then the wheels started churning. He could almost hear them in her head, feel them in the tension that traveled over her body. "Good morning." It was closer to afternoon, but what the hell. He kissed her, morning breath and all, just like old times, just like when they were married.

That confused frown was back -- Rayan smoothed it with a fingertip. She made a move as if to get up, but he held on despite aching muscles. "I still love you, you know." It came out before he was ready to say it. The hell of it was, he couldn't take it back and wasn't sure he wanted to.

Her eyes rounded in shock. She opened her mouth to speak but he figured he'd better come out with all of it. A gentle fingertip on her smooth lips was enough to keep her quiet. He shifted in bed so he could look at her face, his arms still around that smooth-skinned, tension-filled body. Her hand came to rest on his shoulder, fingers delicately tracing at his scar.

That's when he smelled a sticky sick scent of disgust and fear. She leapt from bed, teeth bared, naked and furious, snatching his sword from the table and pointing it at his throat.

"You're one of them. Bastard!" She spat it out, the flush on her body spreading as her scent swirled around him; disgust, fear, hatred. Sword in hand, she walked backward, groping for the curtains. He hissed as she pulled them back, the sun mercilessly licking fire over his skin.

The pain in his joints was nothing compared to the ache under his ribs. "You've seen me in daylight." His voice was quiet.

"Fucker," The scent of fury was mixed with desperation. "You're one of them. I see the mark. They either kill you or turn you."

"And you would rather they killed me? Look around you, little one. Who the hell do you think runs this op?"

Rage vibrated through her. "Did you feed on me? Did Jakob?" Her empty hand clawed at her throat searching for scars.

The disgust, the fear in her voice was more than he could take. Rayan reared up, his chest meeting the lethal tip of sharpened metal. "Go ahead." He pressed forward a bit so blood welled around the tip. "Be merciful. One strike through the heart."

It was fitting that he die from his own fucking sword. The disgust in her eyes was unbearable. Moments stretched like hours. "I'm half sympath," he said, his blood slowly trickling down his body. It would stain her sheets in mere moments. "I need human energy, not blood."

"You fed from me." Her voice was flat, shaking.

He didn't bother lying. "I couldn't keep myself from it." She remained silent, moved neither forward nor back. The sword, however, moved to his shoulder, pointing like an accusing finger. "I was turned by a whore... after I left you." It flooded out of him, his love for her, his guilt for her, as she stood over him with his own sword. "I was half sympath," he repeated. "I could've killed you. I would have sucked you dry because I couldn't stop."

Her eyes were flat, her mouth hard. "You left to protect me." Somehow it didn't sound flattering. "And then you whored around until some vampyre bitch changed you."

Regret swamped over him. "Yeah."

"So this 'I want to protect you from myself' shit doesn't apply anymore. You fed from me. Blood, energy, whatever the fuck, you still did."

It was a nail in his coffin. "I did. I couldn't stop."

"You're a vampyre." Her voice was still low, still vicious. "Why fight them?"

"I kill them," he said softly. "I was one of them once."

His cell rang, the ringtone Jakob's. Keeping his eyes on hers, the sword pointing at his sire scar, Rayan took the call.

"Shipment at the meat warehouse." Jake's voice was calm and soft with suppressed urgency. "Looks human."

At least seven hours before sunset. Maybe enough time. "Get Cain. Nonnenberg, Colbert. Trenner if he's available. See if you can scrounge up a few lower level cadets. We go in before sundown, we should be fine." He raised a questioning eyebrow at Tai, standing in front of him, motionless, save for the sword trembling in her hand.

Tears glistened in her eyes. Her voice was sandpaper when she spoke. "I'm going to the bathroom. When I come out, I don't want you here."

He nodded, then watched her stagger into the bathroom, his sword still clutched in white fingers. So much for truth and love.

* * *

Tai spent the day in her old apartment, surrounded by her old life. No one said anything as she left the compound in full gear. Nonnenberg sneered at her, but that was almost a comfort. Tears were locked in a thick ball somewhere in her throat and every time she swallowed, it moved farther down. She wouldn't cry she promised herself. Not for that bastard. Not for anyone.

A vampyre. She'd fucked a fucking vampyre.

She wasn't sure why but she tugged a box of pictures out of her closet. Her childhood. Her college. Her wedding. Angel, Rayan and her, smiling happily into the camera. She tore the picture into shreds, and let them drift down to the carpet like fat snowflakes.

Motherfucking bastard had played her since the wedding. The conversations floated back, things seen in a different light now. Both Rayan and Jake... vampyre. Fighting their own kind? She shrugged. It didn't matter. She had nothing to do with them.

More photo shreds floated to the floor, a piece of Rayan's smile turned up as it landed on her foot. She kicked it, stared at it as the ball in her throat broke and she knelt over his smile and wept bitterly -- for herself, for her marriage, for everything.

Jakob's presence was a surprise. He simply waited until she'd wiped her face, and raised black eyebrows as she gripped the sword. "I didn't invite you in."

"You've watched too much Buffy."

She shrugged when she got it. "So it's not true? No invitation necessary? You can go anywhere you damned well please?"

He studied the shredded pictures on the floor, knelt and picked up the one with Rayan's smile. "Pretty damned much."

"If you come near me, I'll dust you."

He flicked the smile back on the floor, his face annoyed as he sat down on her bed. "I'll never get used to modern human melodrama."

Her sword -- damn it, Rayan's sword -- was still gripped in her hand. There was enough time to raise it if he came to kill her. "He can stand the sun. Why?"

"Your husband?"

"Ex."

She caught the small roll of his eyes before he answered. "He was half sympath before he was turned. His blood doesn't burn in the sun." He paused for a short moment. "Unlike mine."

"You aren't like them."

Jake stroked the scar on his cheek before answering. "Blood is a drug. It gives them --" his laugh was bitter, "us -- power, strength. Immortality. One can be weaned off it. Your husband was."

"He still fed off me."

"He brought you no harm and beat himself up for it for days."

She didn't want to hear it. Instead, Tai raised the sword. "Why are you here?"

There was no preamble. "I've lost contact with the team."

Her heart stopped. She willed it back, heard it pounding in her head. "I don't give a fuck."

"My mistake then," he murmured, and stood to leave.

She blocked his way, sword in hand, ignoring the narrowing of his eyes. "Why the hell are you telling me this? Why the hell aren't you with them?"

"Because you are an idiot apparently." His voice changed from cool to fierce. "And unlike your husband -- sorry, ex -- I can't waltz in there during daylight. But I forget, you don't give a fuck."

"I don't."

He was on her, his hands on her wrists, pressing painfully until she dropped the sword. His strength was brutal, his grip iron. Yet she felt no fear. "You think I trained you for your pathetic cause?" His face was close to hers, fangs gleaming. It was the first time she'd noticed them. "Your revenge, your hatred are too human and of no use to me. But you are. You are of Hunter blood."

She didn't struggle. Somehow she knew he meant no harm, somehow she knew the loss of his control was rare and yet he would do nothing to her. Still, she couldn't keep the bitterness out of her voice. "You gonna feed from me? Like he did?"

He shook his head, as if labeling her a complete moron, and dropped his hands but didn't move back. He spoke slowly. "You're of Hunter blood. It builds in you -- the more you train, the more you fight. I know the pain you feel, the rage you can't contain." She stared at him, wordless. "You're fucking lucky. Your sympath can drain the excess energy. Circle of fucking life."

"How the fuck you know all this?"

He moved too swiftly for her to see. Before she could feel the sting and burn on her wrist, he'd slashed both their skins. Where blood mixed, it hissed and burned. His eyes were distant and again he touched his scar. "A vampyre always knows a Hunter."

The open pain on his face shook her, but she couldn't dwell on it. "We don't have time for soul searching." She knelt to lift up Rayan's sword. Jake's eyes were cool as he followed her movements. "Let's go."

Chapter Eight

He didn't know how long he'd been out.

Restrained on some sort of a tipped back chair, Rayan willed his mind to focus even as his strength drained. He remembered the high-pitched sound, watched cadets fall with their hands pressed against their ears. Then there was darkness. The burning throb in the back of his head indicated blunt force trauma. Classic, because it worked.

As his eyes focused he saw it was heavy cables restraining him. The buzzing in his ears wasn't his own. A leach machine was sucking out his blood, one vial at a time. As he looked further, he saw humans and vamps struggling on the floor in a sick parody of lovemaking.

The one fighting the most, the one who wasn't screaming, he recognized as Cain. He rolled with a female vampyre on top of him, bucking her off as she held him down with thighs and fangs.

Nonnenberg moaned as a male vamp sucked at his neck, Trenner was no longer moving. There were more humans -- restrained, shocked or drugged -- unmoving as they waited to be supper. Something cold and delicate sliced into his flesh, a tongue rough and slimy lapped up welling blood. Rayan looked down, focused on a head with tousled, shimmering blonde hair. Angel.

She licked the bloody patterns on his arms, moaning lustily as he made more. His clothes were in tatters where she'd cut them, and she hadn't been particularly careful to avoid cutting his flesh with it.

The pain at least kept him alert. He tested the cables around him, couldn't break through to get to his weapons carelessly thrown only a few feet away. He heard the sound of liquid being poured and raised his head. The man in front of him took a lingering tasting sip before setting an empty vial back into its slot. "A man's blood just

doesn't taste the same," he said, and as he licked his teeth, Rayan saw that Armand Church was human. "Female on the other hand..." As if on cue, Angel sliced the knife across her chest -- right through the intricate scar that looked like Kanji. She offered blood and breasts to the pale-faced man. The slurping sounds mixed with the hum of the leech machine.

"Tell me, Mr. Slade -- or should I call you Deadshot? -- do you know why you turned?"

Rayan remained silent, even as Angel turned back and slapped him with enough force to rattle his teeth.

"Would you prefer I tell you? There are two ways to change a human, as we've discovered. Like Angel here, one should have never been exposed to the vaccine. Something to be said about 'natural living,' don't you agree?" The smile that accompanied the phrase was small and bloody. "Alternatively, if one already has the DNA, the vaccine simply doesn't matter. Which one applies to you, I wonder?"

Angel lapped at the blood trickling on Rayan's chin with greedy, small licks. Disgusted, he turned his face, only to have her grip his hair in a painful fist. That's when he saw Tai, her eyes wide with rage, her *sai* in hand, his sword on her back. Another slap had his world spinning.

Rage howling through her, Taina made her way forward, stepping over bodies and puddles of blood. Jakob was somewhere in the warehouse, fighting off vamps. The ones feeding completely ignored her. She should have killed them, should have freed the humans, except she only looked at Rayan, pale and bloody, losing more strength with each flex of his muscles as Angel -- alive and pale and grinning -- licked at the blood on his face.

The man with Angel simply drank red liquid, studying her, not moving. It took a moment before Tai realized he was sipping Rayan's blood. Her vision darkened, her muscles tensed. She was thrown hard on the floor, Angel's knee on her throat, leering fangs dripping Rayan's blood into her mouth.

Tai reared up and managed to get the vampyre's weight off her. She refused to think of it as Angel -- she was strong, inhumanly strong as Tai fought her, absorbing blows, avoiding fangs and nails curved into claws.

The *sai* were hot against Tai's palms as she sliced through Angel's lip, from mouth to ear. Then she was on the floor again, ears ringing from an inhuman shriek, that ruined mouth on her, the fangs slicing into her skin, delicate in their sharpness and she couldn't move with two bodies holding her down, two bodies feeding from her, draining her.

The man sucking at her neck was human. She saw no fangs when he licked his lips. "Women just taste sweeter," he said and backhanded her, the motion dislodging Angel off her for a small moment. She crawled back only to snarl as the human stopped her.

"Not quite yet, my angel. I want her hurting." He knelt down, brutal fingers pressing onto Tai's chin to turn her head to face him. She stared up at those exotically tilted eyes and saw something colder than death in the flat pools of pale, pale blue. "You've cost me a lot of money. The least you can do is pay up."

She was dragged, Angel gripping her hair in a painful fist.

"I killed you." The words rasped Tai's throat.

"You did, bitch. Lucky for me I have a human lover."

The pale man spoke behind her. "Luck all around. A bit of human blood and a vampyre is good as new." Rayan's hat was in his hand, the bladed edge against the vulnerable column of Rayan's throat. "My dead friend Keys said this one was your husband?"

Tai scrambled up, instincts screaming to jump him, to push the blade away. Her strength drained as blood streamed from her neck. She locked her knees to keep from stumbling. She needed to get Jakob here. Now.

"I was at their wedding," Angel sneered at her, her cheek and lip coming together as skin started to bond. "It was bright and fucking perfect."

"Then this would be the perfect payment. Lucky again."

"Payment for what?" *Keep him talking.* She needed a moment to regain her strength, to unblur her vision.

"You cost me business. I turn them -- one million a pop. They can't advertise if you kill them."

"This is about money?" Church, she realized. This was Armand Church -- she'd heard his name from the vamps she'd gotten rid of. The human who liked blood, the human who could give eternal strength.

The man saluted her with another vial of blood. "This is about power. They come to me for strength, for immortality. The ones worthy are turned. The ones not are feed."

"And these?" She tilted her head at the humans she'd been desperately trying to ignore. They would survive a few more moments. Vamps liked to play with their food. She made herself believe that.

The pale man shrugged. "Circular business logic. Demand for fresh blood is high."

"You don't know how to turn them." Rayan's voice, the painful rasp of it was music to her ears. "You just suck blood and money either way."

"You're still with us?" Another bloody sip was followed by a chuckle. The blade pressed closer into Rayan's neck as Church finished his vial. "You're right. I cannot choose who I turn. Ironical, isn't it? A human carrying the gift of vampyre. I can give life and --" the blade slashed across defenseless skin, ripping Rayan's throat, bathing him in his own blood, "I can take it."

Tai wasn't sure who screamed, the hoarseness of her voice was foreign. She leaped on Church only to have Angel grab her, bite painfully into her neck, and suck hard. Her life drained as she watched Rayan die, and she gathered everything she had and sent her energy to him hoping he'd somehow feed and heal on it --

She heard a burst of fire as she slumped in the arms of the one who'd sworn to guard her back. Then she was on the floor, Angel motionless beside her, and Church's screams of profanities died in a short gasp as Jakob knocked him down with the butt of a modified Beretta.

On hands and knees, she crawled to Rayan. *Human blood*, she thought. Jake was with her, a knife in his hand, her wrist in his other, a question in his eyes. She nodded. Gulped a breath. Then she squeezed her muscles so her blood flowed into Rayan's open throat when Jakob slit her wrist.

Church moaned, and scrambled to get up. Tai saw Jakob's gaze narrow before he leapt, grabbing the pale man by the hair. Fangs bared, Jakob exposed Church's neck, and pressed the knife against the taut, stretched skin. "Ochai," he snarled, "Stay dead this time."

The knife blade flashed. Her scream high-pitched and harsh, Angel snatched one of Rayan's guns into her bloodied hand. "Let him go!" The bullet missed Jake's head by millimeters.

Jaw clenched, Jake froze, fangs and knife gleaming.

Tai clenched her fist, saw Rayan's skin regenerating. With her other hand, she felt his ankles and thanked whatever god was in charge when she found his 9mm. It was on his left side. She hoped it was the one charged with bullets meant for vamps.

"Let him go!" Angel was closer, her cheek bloodied yet whole. "I'll kill this bitch." She pointed the gun at Tai, squeezing the trigger with a pale-skinned hand...

The shot was like a muffled pop. Tai didn't know when she managed to get the gun out; she simply watched the hole in Angel's breast get bigger, darker, until dust exploded with its acrid ash and smell of burnt flesh.

The other vamps had already scrambled, leaving the humans bloodied and torn and some still moving. Church was still in Jakob's grip, the vampyre's eyes dark and haunted. He made no move to kill him.

Her *sai* were useless when it came to cutting. Tai reached for Rayan's sword and started hacking at the cables that held him. When she heard his ragged breath she simply hugged his legs and cried.

* * *

It had taken twenty-four hours for her to gain back her feet. Twenty-three really, since the last hour had been spent scrubbing herself in the shower until her skin was

pink and raw. Yet still, even three days later, she couldn't get rid of the sticky, sweet scent of blood clinging to her. The compound was quiet, the surviving cadets still in quarantine as Jakob waited to see if they would turn. The night before, Nonnenburg had used the remote codes he'd somehow swiped months earlier. He was now missing, and with him Armand Church. Keys hadn't been the only one seduced by strength and immortality.

Rayan was fine. A vamp healed quickly. And she... Tai didn't know where it left her. He refused to let her near him.

To quiet the welling rage, she spent her days beating up herself and others. Yesterday it was Nick Cain, who had apparently survived a previous attack and didn't turn. She'd bloodied his nose before she realized he was punishing himself for letting another vamp overtake him. His eyes were dark with rage when he'd sparred her, his big body gleaming with sweat as he fought more his own weakness, his own demons, rather than her. She didn't know what it was like to be held down and forced to give up blood. She sure as hell didn't want to try.

Jakob flatly refused to fight her. Instead, he'd holed up at headquarters, following Nonnenberg's credit card trail, certain Church was nearby. It would explain the advanced knowledge of the raid and the nightmare that followed.

Today, Tai had chosen the sparring woodman. She'd scraped her hands and feet against the boards leaving sickly, pink stains on them. The sight of it had her stomach churning even as she could clearly see herself breaking every board, because she could, because she was strong enough. Too strong.

She ran into Rayan's room before she could talk herself out of it. The door slammed shut just as he came out of the shower, a towel slung low on his hips, his hair wet and slicked back from a hollowed face. He simply looked at her as she leaned against the door. "You're a sympath."

"We've already established that."

"I need you." She said it before she lost her nerve.

"Pardon?"

Tai took a step toward him, nerves and lust and something even deeper churning in her core. "You're a sympath. I'm a Hunter. You can help me."

He didn't pretend to misunderstand her. "I'm not feeding on you."

"I saved your ass."

His face was still, his body hard and solid. "I'm sorry."

"I'm not," she muttered. "The blood kept you alive. My blood."

"Stop saying it!" He shoved a hand through his hair. "Don't you think it disgusts me as well? I fucking hate it. I can't stand the smell of it." His breathing was short and shallow.

"I hurt." She wanted to walk over and bury her face in his chest, blot out the nightmare with his shoulders. "The meds only work so much. You can help me."

"That's all I am? Your substitute for meds?"

"You know that's not true." Her exhale was a shuddered whisper.

His face was unreadable. "Do I?"

"You left me because you were scared." She gulped a breath and hurried on. "Your nature is to feed. I understand that. Hell, I need that." And then she blurted it out before she could change her mind. "I still love you."

"I fed off you. Both ways. And you still..." He didn't finish it. He didn't need to because the words were lost and Tai simply nodded. His eyes lost the ice as he came toward her, trembling hands brushing a lock of hair off her face. "I... love you."

His exhale shimmered in the air as she pressed her lips against his palm. "I won't quit the Alliance. I won't stop hunting." She placed a finger on his mouth before he could speak. "But I won't take unnecessary risks."

He sat on the bed and drew her next to him. "You know I don't want you fighting." She shrugged even as her heart pounded in her throat. If he told her to leave the Alliance, she wouldn't. If he told her to leave now -- "I don't want you fighting," he repeated. "But you're of Hunter blood. If that's your way, then I accept it."

She frowned at him as their palms linked. "What are you saying?"

"You won't go alone. I'll hunt with you." She tried to pull away, he held on fast. "I don't want you risking --"

"Tough shit."

She saw his cock budding to life as he smiled at her, and she finally figured out what was wrong with his mouth. His incisors were longer, not long enough to be fangs but longer still. She brushed her finger against his lips. "Don't argue with a Hunter."

Scooting down, she unwrapped the towel and took him into her mouth, relearning the shape and taste of him as he engorged, until she couldn't close her fingers around his thick length. He groaned, pumped his hips upward as she pulled away to look up at him. Lips parted, Rayan watched her, his eyes an intense brilliant blue.

"Know what I'm thinking?" His chuckle was strained as his hands tangled in her hair. "That you can't talk with things in your mouth."

Playfully light, Tai smacked the top of his thigh, and gave it a friendly apologetic lick to make up for it. "I'm thinking it's your turn to be tied up."

The fingers in her hair stilled. He pulled her up to gaze into her eyes. "I don't think so."

She raised an eyebrow, watching the flush that spread over his face. "It's only fair. Where are the cuffs?"

His eyes narrowed. So did hers. She leaned down and lightly raked her teeth over his shaft. His body jerked, the hands at his sides fisted. Tai spied the corners of his mouth trying to smile before he wiped it off.

"The cuffs," she said, and swirled her tongue over the sensitive head of his cock.

"By my work belt," he muttered, and she felt his gaze on her as she went to find them.

They were smooth and warm as she unclipped them and held them up in front of Rayan's face. "Next time, use padded. I'm not some fucking vampyre."

"I am." His voice was gruff, his cock was jutting.

“Exactly.” Tai stepped closer, felt his cock press into her belly. Keeping her gaze on his, she brought his hands behind him and slipped the cuffs onto his wrists. They clicked in place and he was bound.

He was naked and helpless and all hers. Slowly Tai sank on her knees in front of him, used her tongue on his cock to trace a bulging vein. Cupping his balls, she took him into her mouth, just the tip. Then more. More. She couldn’t take all of him, but the tip of his cock pressed against the back of her throat and when she swallowed his groan was harsh and dark.

She pulled away again, and smiled. Her pants flew to the floor, her underwear with it. One push against that strong shoulder had him sitting on the bed. Another push had him lying down onto his bound hands, his eyes an intense blue, his cock thick and hot and reaching. And then she was above him, ready, the tip of his cock poised at her entrance, hot and smooth and thick.

“Do me a favor.” His chuckle was strained as she gripped his thick length to guide him inside. Breath hitching, she raised an eyebrow. “Grow the curls back on your pussy.”

She sank onto him hard, took his gasp into her mouth. “You got yourself a deal.”

Fiona Jayde

Fiona Jayde is a pilot, a ninth degree black belt in three styles of martial arts, a computer hacker, a mountain climber, a jazz singer, a weight lifter, a superspy with a talent for languages, and an evil genius.

All in her own head.

In life, she is an author of sci-fi and action/adventure romances, insists she is a good driver even though various loved ones refuse to let her drive, possesses a brown belt in Tae Kwon Do and blue belt in Aikido, a web developer, scared to death of heights, loves jazz piano, can bench-press about 20 pounds -- with effort, speaks English and Russian fluently, and when not plotting murder and mayhem enjoys steamy romance novels, sexy spy thrillers, murky mysteries and violent movies where things frequently blow up.

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