



Nyte's Fall

Reese Gabriel

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DEDICATION:

This and all my other work I dedicate to my Blue
Rose, my one true love and inspiration, my muse and
best 'fren-fren'.

CHAPTER ONE

Nyte was trapped. The two men had her cornered. Frigging gorillas, and worse still, there was no calling on the club's bouncers for help, because they were the bouncers.

One of them was a hairless, slightly over-the-hill walking steroid in a white tank top. "First time here?" he quipped as he and his buddy intercepted her outside the restrooms.

"None of your goddamn business," she informed them, trying to push her way past.

The second one, a hawk-nosed, beady-eyed man in a chintzy magenta suit and slicked down ponytail, had her by the arm. "We have kind of a tradition here. Call it an initiation rite." He steered her to the end of the corridor, as far away from the dance floor as possible.

"The new girls have to blow us," the bald one said bluntly, obviously lacking the vocabulary of his partner.

"You're a fine little fox," the magenta-suited man reached for Nyte's flushed cheek. "Where you been hiding yourself?"

"She probably just turned legal. Isn't that right, little bird?" The bald man's accent was British and it was sort of funny how he said 'liht-ul'. Except there was nothing amusing about his beefy fingers trying to pull her leather bomber jacket down over her shoulders.

"Get your fucking hands off me," she threatened. "That's my father's jacket. He's in the Air Force."

Never mind he'd died twelve years ago in a training accident; Nyte needed his power and prestige now.

The bald Brit wheeled her about and took the beloved coat off her like she was a Barbie doll. "Just curb that smart mouth of yours, do a good job on our wankers, love, and you'll get it back."

"Holy Christ, get a load of the outfit!" The magenta suited man was practically slobbering at the white blouse tied at her midriff, a wickedly suggestive match to the tartan skirt. She was supposed to be a little schoolgirl gone bad. To top it off, she wore black leather high-heeled boots and of course there was her little butterfly tattoo, high on her right hip.

"You definitely came dressed to play, didn't you?" The bald Brit declared. "I believe I may have to fuck that tight pussy of yours, too."

"You lay one finger on me and I'll scream rape!"

The magenta suited man silenced her with a kiss, squashing her eighteen-year-old mouth with his punishing lips. Shit, it was going to be hard to hold out. Nyte liked to be kissed, especially by strong men. Still, she wasn't into gangbangs. At least without her permission.

"You're a little sex pistol," he breathed, his hand riding up under the hem of the tiny skirt. "Why the fuck are you here alone?"

"None of your fucking business, just get off me!"

"Hey, there'll be no swearing from little girls in this establishment," the magenta-suited man glommed onto the top of her head, seizing her loosely piled, clipped up black curls. "Now you say you're sorry."

Tears pooled in her eyes as he bent back her head. "I—I'm sorry," she told her malevolently grinning abuser.

"Let's hear you beg for it," he taunted, his hand rubbing over the crotch of his pants. "Tell us how much you want to pay homage to our noble pricks."

"I want to..." she said weakly, the pain from the hair pulling mixing with other, deeper feelings, sexy and submissive. "Please, just stop hurting me."

"You heard the girl," said a new voice, male and full of quiet confidence. "Let her go."

The bald Brit's face filled with fury long before he turned around. "And just who the fuck are you?"

The magenta-suited man was also facing the interloper.

He was a man in his mid-twenties, in green T-shirt, black leather jacket, black jeans and some very funky boots, half motorcycle, half cowboy. His hair was black like Nyte's, short, but sticking up a little, insolently, sexy as hell. And those eyes, silver blue, lightly glowing, simmering, like some private joke was going on back there in his handsome head, behind the very faint, slanted smile and perfectly

shaped cheeks.

It was a total package, though even without the looks, she'd have been weak in the knees for him just on account of how he was standing up for her.

"I'm nobody you'd know," he said, smooth as shit.

The magenta-suited man narrowed his already tiny eyes. "Damn straight, you're nobody. And you're gonna be a dead nobody in a minute."

"That's right," growled the Brit, pointing at the man's chest, more like a swimmer's than a weight lifter's. "Cause we're gonna take you out back and stomp on you till your brains ooze out your piss hole."

"You broke a commandment, pal. This is our church, see?" The magenta-suited man was spouting off—both of them clearly loving the talk as much as anything. "And in here we're the fucking gods."

"Sorry," shrugged the cheeky newcomer. "I'm afraid I'm not very religious."

"All right, you asked for it," declared the longhaired man in the pukey off-pink outfit that he probably thought was hip. "And now you're gonna get it."

The magenta-suited man never got to connect with his cocked fist. He went down so fast, Nyte didn't even have time to draw a fresh breath.

"Holy fuck," the man screamed from his knees, clutching at his stomach. Meanwhile the silver-blue-eyed man just stood there, like he hadn't budged an inch.

The Brit, a mix of fury and shock on his face, tossed Nyte's leather jacket in her face and rushed at him full

tilt.

Nyte had just enough time to peel it from her eyes before the Brit was stopped in his tracks, like he'd met a brick wall head on. A second later he hit the floor, face first, next to his friend.

The Brit spit out two teeth and tried to get up. A booted heel pressed immediately to the small of his back, pinning him.

"I wouldn't advise that. The next time will hurt a lot worse."

The man grunted, his stomach pushed back to the floor.

The magenta-suited man was still groaning and swearing, unable to rise from his knees. "I'm fucking on fire! I'm being eaten up inside!"

"Take your friend to the hospital," the newcomer advised the prone Brit.

Nyte bent down for a closer look at the man's wound. To her surprise, there was no sign of anything, not even a drop of blood.

The newcomer grabbed her arm. "Come on, I think you've had enough for one night."

She scampered along behind him on her stiletto heels, jacket in tow. He took her out a service door directly into an alley behind the trendy club, with its swirling lights, gyrating dancers and overpriced drinks.

"Omigod, that was fucking awesome!" She was out of breath, giddy and totally pumped up. It would take a little while for the weirdness of it all to sink in. There was no way this guy should have been able to do what he just did to those muscle men. It was more

than karate; it was like he had raw lightning in his fingers.

"Cigarette?" he offered, pulling one from a pack in his jacket pocket.

She put it in her mouth, letting him light it with his silver butane lighter. "Thanks." She took a puff, like it was all very matter-of-fact, standing out here in this damp alley with her freaky strong rescuer, having narrowly avoided being raped by a pair of men who were supposed to be protecting the club's guests.

"Those were some pretty fast moves," she probed, never having been particularly good at thank you. "You a black belt or something?"

"Something like that. So what the hell were you doing in there, anyway? Don't you know the mob owns this club?"

It was a one eighty, the man going from partner in crime to overbearing authority figure. Like her teachers and the social workers and cops.

Nyte took another drag off the menthol, trying to keep the shaking in her hand to a minimum. If this bastard thought he was going to have the satisfaction of seeing her crumple for him like those bouncers, he had another thing coming. "What was I doing? I'll tell you what I was doing. Fuck you: that's what I was doing."

A few more puffs went by, with neither of them budging.

"Okay, so it's none of my business why you came here," he conceded. "It's just that I know your type, that's all."

She flicked the expended cigarette to the damp

asphalt and ground it beneath her small boot toe, half the size of his. "Oh, and what *type* is that?"

"Thrill seekers. Creative suicide types, looking for that artistic meltdown. 'Another troubled teen goes down in ball of flames, film at eleven.'"

Nyte shook her head, laughing without humor. "Just my luck. Of all the rescuers in the world, I get the biggest judgmental asshole on two legs. See you round, Ace," she flipped her hand in a show of pure ironic disgust.

He let her get about halfway down the alley. "You didn't tell me your name."

"It's Nyte. As in the opposite of day."

"Nice to meet you, Nyte. I'm Jase. Want to guess how I got that name?"

Nyte didn't bother to stop walking. She was curious, and pretty horny, too, but there was no way she was going to spend even one more minute with this self-righteous creep. "It's a little late for guessing games. Maybe in my next life."

"That's a long time to wait."

She turned back around, hands in her pockets against the chill. He'd sounded kind of sweet just then, like maybe he wanted to make it up to her. And she couldn't ignore completely the fact that he was the hottest guy she'd ever laid eyes on. "Look, it really is late and I'm tired, so how about you just leave me alone, okay?"

It wasn't exactly an invitation to call her for a date, but it was about the best she could manage under the circumstances.

"But you owe me, Nyte."

She stiffened warily, her radar going back up. "Owe you what?"

He was coming toward her, casual, totally fluid, like he wasn't even moving at all. "Anything I want."

"Like what? Sex?" She'd spat it out without thinking. Or had she?

"You're used to that, aren't you?"

"Used to what?" She demanded.

"To paying off debts with your body."

Nyte smacked him hard across the mouth. "You're worse than they are," she accused, more freaked than anything by how he seemed to be able to see into her soul so easily.

"Probably," he replied, to her surprise. "Because it's not just your body I want—it's your mind."

"Sorry, they're both spoken for."

His lips curled, very slightly. "Give me your palm, Nyte."

She pretended not to understand, but when he repeated the command she found herself holding up her hand to him, just as he wished.

"Close your eyes."

Remarkably, stupidly and without any regard for personal safety, she did just as he'd instructed. The man—called Jase for some special reason—seized her wrist. His grip was like steel.

"Trust," he whispered, his voice penetrating like an x-ray.

She could swear she heard a switchblade opening. This is it, she thought, I'm really going to die. They're going to find my stabbed, raped body in a back alley. Hope my underwear's clean; she imagined her

mother's reaction.

The sting to her hand, the long single cut of the knife on her soft flesh, was like the caress of a lover, and a sharp claw of bittersweet, sensuous pain. Nyte shuddered, giving in to slight moans. She'd been wounded, violated and attacked. Her palm was a cunt and the cut was its opening.

"Yes," urged Jase and now he was sucking at the wound, running his tongue up and down, dabbing at the sliced flesh, suctioning with his mouth, taking her blood, taking her essence. Between her legs, she liquefied. Her nipples were tight, needy points. She wanted, needed to fuck, in the alley like a dog on all fours, on her back on the filthy cardboard. This man could have her, or the bouncers, or any of the winos. Anyone at all.

Oh, yes, Jase. Sweet, fucking Jase. Kinky motherfucker, licking and sucking her blood, making her want things that were so very wicked and forbidden.

"Baby," Nyte murmured, wrapping her legs around his lean waist.

He had her against the wall, and she had the vague feeling this thing wasn't under his control any more than it was under hers. His pants opened seemingly of their own accord, and her panties were pushed aside, making room for his probing, pointed manhood. His shaft sank deep to the hilt in a single thrust. He grunted at the warmth and wetness of her, a perfect fit. He throbbed, filling her utterly. For a moment he lingered, before pulling backward for another go at her. This time was even harder and

more jarring. There was no holding back now, for either one of them.

The whole thing couldn't have lasted five minutes, though it felt like her whole life. They exploded together in a complex, heated rush, breath-to-breath, rushing to know each other, every detail, in a single act. Slick sex organs, locked in conspiratorial fervor, defying convention and public decency. Sperm pouring, pussy convulsing, accepting. Microseconds of jagged bliss. Counting down. Down and down.

"Jase," she whispered, wanting to make it last forever.

But something was happening. He was shaking all over, pushing her away. Just as his penis pulled out, she felt something else in his touch. Something far from human.

A wolf. Large and powerful. Snarling and deadly. With silver moons for eyes and a blood red tongue, the teeth jagged and yellow.

And then there was another creature. Something black and enveloping. Like a frozen cloud, a storm of dark rain, a thousand bats' wings knitted together, the sound of their flapping, a terrifying slicing whirl. It wanted them both, this invader. And it would have had them if not for the wolf.

Jase?

Briefly, in the shadows, she saw them grappling and snarling. Primal beasts that seemed to have no material form. The wolf snapped its jaws, the other one cried out and then it was gone.

"Jase, are you all right?"

He was on the ground, his back braced against the

wall. "Take the cab," he winced, holding up a crumpled fifty-dollar bill.

She'd been about to ask him what cab when she heard the honking at the end of the alley. The driver was waiting on her. That was weird. Taxis never came down here this late at night.

It was then she remembered the cut on her hand. The blood was everywhere. How would she ever get this cleaned off her? She'd probably need stitches, and there was no way she could go to any hospital.

"It'll be all right," he read her mind, handing her his T-shirt. "Wrap it in this...and go home."

Nyte wasn't sure why, but she knew she could trust him. "What about you, will you be okay?"

He had his head between his knees. "I'll be fine," he gasped. "In...a minute."

She stooped to give him a kiss on the cheek. "Thank you, Jase. For everything."

"Go," he growled. "Please."

For the whole ride home, Nyte felt weird-good, floating and happy, just like a regular girl, some unreal prom chick, except that as usual everything was upside down. Her love was dark, her sex was pain and her life was...what exactly?

Not surprisingly, Hank was waiting up for her. She was past curfew. She'd catch hell, and, oh, what an excuse for her mother's live-in boyfriend to play his worst games.

And wait 'til he saw the cut on her hand.

She was trying to think of excuses when she looked down and saw the blood was gone from her clothes, all of it. Unwrapping the T-shirt, she had an even

bigger shock.

The wound was gone. Like it had never been there in the first place.

Shaking her head, she tried to refute the evidence. Pink skin, unblemished, uncut. Virgin. How had he done it? More to the point, who was this Jase, really? Man? Wolf? Both, or neither?

Any more speculation would have to wait. Hank was at the door, and her time was up.

"Get out of there, you little whore," he was growling, yanking up the door handle. "Do you have any idea what you've put your mother and I through?"

He dragged her up the sidewalk to the house as he frequently did on nights like this. But for once, Nyte didn't care. She'd found her soul mate. A person—a being that lived where she did, and thrived there. And she was going to see him again if she had to camp out at every club in the city to find him.

* * * *

Lucien Verdan De Millescant, known to himself as Jase, lover of women, fugitive of the Code, licked his lips of the lifeblood, watching the woman disappear into the night in the chariot of steel. Child-woman, by the name of Nyte, self named, as was Jase himself. Mere coincidence? He thought not. Such a connection happened but once a thousand years and it was for an opportunity such as this that he had become a rebel in the first place.

Grasping his side, his wound nearly past, he rose

to his feet. It had been a close call. Tristans, the Chief Guardian, had nearly had him and the girl both. Jase had been able to fend him off, absorbing the bite of the black-winged vampyr, but his old comrade and enemy was getting closer these days and faster. Tonight he had honed in on Jase's embrace with the human female almost immediately and he'd nearly succeeded in capturing them both inside his black web, his thousand-winged cape. A cloak over all happiness whose name was the Code, a miserable set of laws which he and every other shiftling must follow now that they were exiles in the human world.

Doomed to a life as shadows, creatures without hearts or substance. But he would not accept that limitation. And that was why he must pursue the woman. He'd let her go for the moment to protect her identity from Tristans, but he would not give her up.

Yes, Jase was a criminal and Tristans the hunter, but Jase would not be running today. He would have this girl, enjoying her and consuming her, and, perhaps, deeming her ultimately as the One he would mate with for life.

Nyte. Born Michelle Jennifer Hastings, of 65 Clover Leaf Circle. Her real name and address was one of the many things he knew about her now from drinking her blood. This and every other fact floating in her brain and beating in her heart. What he had consumed and absorbed both aroused and troubled him greatly. The feisty, raven-haired beauty—once a redhead—was in trouble. She'd suffered much and was going to suffer more.

She was surrounded by predators. Evil men who'd

gotten in her soul and made her think the wrong things about herself, forgetting her true nature. His initial intuition was correct, Nyte had come to the nightclub in order to be hurt. She was on a suicide mission, albeit unconscious. But it was more complicated than even this. At the same time she was trying to send out a warning signal, a beacon in the night that might save her mother. And her little sister, who as yet was untainted.

His admiration, his pulsing warmth for the young woman surged with his realization of what she was undertaking. For the sake of others, she was suffering and would go on doing so, as long as required. Such was the making of a true hero. A true guardian of her people. How ironic that he, a criminal according to the laws of his own people, would seek to become her champion. Even now, as Tristans and the other Guardians hunted him, he was going to slow his progress, expose himself. Take risks he should not.

Could it be true love? Perhaps. Then again, there was the possibility it was all bloodlust—a terrible taste he'd acquired from slumming with too many vampyrs.

A werewolf himself, he was not born to love blood for its own sake, but only as part of the joy of the hunt. By contrast, when a vampyr drinks the blood of any mortal, he sucks their essence, then craves it all the more. Its very heart and soul hurts for the need of her, his agony multiplied to infinity by her absence. Not love by any mortal definition, but merely a function of its own survival.

By and large, vampyrs were benevolent, contrary

to myths, but they could, under the right circumstances, turn into ghostly killers, organisms barely alive, shadows between two realms, enjoying slaughter for its own sake, enjoying no pleasure. This is what Tristans was, a fallen vampyr, a pale wisp, a nightmare to every living soul, despite his function as Chief Guardian.

He could only pray that he himself was not becoming such a creature in wolf's form. Was it already too late? This had been his argument all along about the Code. By denying the various shape-shifting species access to love, especially with humans, they would inevitably lose their humanity and revert to their beast nature.

If love it be with this woman, said Jase to himself, and to those who witness such things in the cosmos, then let me find it. If on the other hand, I would bring to her harm, than let me perish first.

"Hey, that's the fucking guy!"

It was one of the bouncers, the one whose jaw he'd nearly crushed. So they were finally getting around to taking care of the other one. The longhaired gentleman with the burn spell in his stomach.

There were more of them, coming out of the steel door from the club.

"Tony, Leon, get Simon to the car," ordered a dark eyed boss in a silk suit. "We got unfinished business here."

The two thugs carried the doubled over, whimpering Simon past Jase.

"You should have run when you had the chance, you dumb fuck," chuckled the man closest to him.

"Don't kill him right off," the boss ordered as various weapons were drawn by the would-be attackers. "I want him hurt real bad first."

Jase's teeth set on edge. He was not in a mood to play.

Slowly, deliberately, he rose to his feet. Bare-chested, fists clenched, he began to walk towards them. They'd been warned. More than warned.

"Look at him," the boss roared. "Can you believe the balls on this fucking guy?"

Jase drew a final human breath, exhaling it as cold vapor. Before the mobsters could pull a trigger, swing a pipe or make another remark, he was on them, snarling tearing, claws gashing, teeth like lightning, the men's screams gurgling and drowning in blood; there is no interval of time to measure how fast it all goes down.

You had your fucking chance, he thinks in the midst of the slaughter. I told you, take the guy to the hospital and let it go.

A few seconds later, Jase the man was walking down the sidewalk, the barely recognizable remains of six men lying in a heap around the dumpster, awaiting the trash collection next day.

* * * *

"You don't ever learn, do you, you little bitch?"

Nyte hurried up the stairs so he wouldn't make too much noise on the way. It would happen in her room, as it always did, with the door locked so neither mom nor Tracy would have to know. Hank's breath stank

of scotch tonight, which meant it would go harder on her. Beer nights were better, and sometimes, if he'd just stuck to wine from dinner, it could be almost tender. But this was a scotch night, and she'd been caught red-handed breaking curfew. And in slutty little clothes, no less. All of which meant Nyte was going to have to try and appease him some right off the bat.

"Hank, God, I'm sorry," she knelt before him, reaching for his zipper. "You deserve so much better than me. Just give me a chance to make it up to you."

He shoved her back by the shoulders. "It's not that easy, is it, slut?"

She looked up at him from the floor, knocked on her ass. "No, sir."

Fuck you, she thought deep inside. Fuck you a hundred million times—I do this for Tracy and Erica, the poor, sick, alcoholic woman you've been holding hostage all these years.

Hank was smirking at her, enjoying her predicament, her helpless position and above all, her barely disguised hatred. "You're a bad actress, kiddo. Now take off those clothes and let's get down to business."

He was undoing his belt, preparing to slip it from the loops. That action, combined with the rocket-hard cock in his pants, left little mystery as to what the business was going to be. "You can leave the boots on," said her mother's lover. "They're a good reminder what a little whore you are."

Nyte rose to her feet and began to undress. The jacket would be the first thing to go, and also the

hardest. It was the one thing she had from Daddy that still made her feel close to him. It was well worn and stitched with the patches of his service. She could still vaguely smell the mixture of cologne and jet fuel – or at least she thought she could.

Mostly it made her feel safe and secure to have it on and sometimes she would look at the old pictures, from that time when she was six and he'd let her wear it. Everyone was laughing because it hung to her knees. Daddy was crouched beside her, grinning in his uniform, looking so handsome and strong. And Nyte's mother was there, too, looking so happy. And healthy. That was at Patrick Air Force base, not too much before his last mission.

The mission that would take Captain Robert Hastings away from her forever.

Observing her reluctance, Hank said, "Get that old rag off you and let's see those titties. They grown out any?"

Nyte flushed red, tossing the precious coat onto the bed. It's true, her breasts weren't large and full like her mother's or her friend Joanne's, but Nyte had a more slender frame. She was sensitive about them, but the curvaceous blonde Joanne was always telling her not to worry.

"You have a tight little body, Nyte. Trust me, that's what all the boys are looking for."

It was just that Hank enjoyed humiliating her; it was part of his foreplay.

"Where did you get that bra?" he demanded as she unbuttoned her white cotton blouse.

The brassiere was nothing. A simple underwire

one she'd had for a couple of months. He was just trying to get in her head, that's all, pulling one of his power trips. Her poor mother had to account for every nickel, and God forbid the ketchup shouldn't be on the table where it was supposed to be. That kind of slip-up would earn Nyte a look at the supper table and she'd know she was in for it, regardless of who'd screwed up the condiments. That was the rule of Hank's Hellhouse. No matter what went wrong, Nyte was guilty. And Nyte submitted without a squawk, so long as mom and baby sister were left out of the equation.

Hank had moved in when Nyte was fourteen. That was the year she'd changed from Michelle and officially learned what made the world go round. Her alcoholic mother had barely been dating the man—they'd fallen off the wagon together after an AA meeting—and he was spending his first night in the house full-time. Being totally drunk and totally a scum bucket, he waited till Erica was passed out and came into Nyte's room.

"I just want to be nice to you," he kept slobbering, trying to conceal his asshole side. "Why don't you just relax and let me?"

She had no idea what to do or what the balding, pug-nosed man even wanted from her, but she was too afraid of him to resist. If Erica hadn't come in just in the nick of time and offered up her own body as a sacrifice, there was no telling where it would all have led.

"Please," Erica had wailed, having been resurrected from her inebriated stupor by some

uncanny parental radar. "Leave Michelle and just come back to bed. Let me do things for you—I can make you happy. I know a lot, Hank, I'm not green. Anything you want, you can have."

Nyte would never forget that wolfish grin. "Anything?"

She'd said yes, and a few minutes later her daughter was hearing muffled feminine screams from the master bedroom. The next day Erica stayed in bed, and the day after that. Thus would begin a reign of domination over the woman that would last 'til Nyte's eighteenth birthday, when she effectively bought back her mother's freedom, offering up her own younger, more vibrant body for abuse. To keep her extra servile, the man made regular threats against her little sister Tracy, who was only fifteen.

"The bra is old, Hank," she told him now. "We haven't been shopping, I swear it."

"Lying little cunt," he snarled. "You and your mother both. You've been out shopping again, haven't you?"

Nyte bared her breasts and cupped them for him, trying to get the subject off of her mother. Lately he'd been talking more and more about Erica, and Nyte was becoming afraid he'd get bored just having her and start wanting to abuse both mother and daughter.

"You know we'd never do that, Hank. Unless you said we could. So do you like my titties tonight? I think they're a little bigger, don't you?"

Hank scoffed. "Nails on a board, honey. Bumps on a log. Capisce?"

She pinched her own nipples, ignoring the insults.

"But I've got very sensitive nips. Doesn't that count?"

"It don't put food on my table. Not like whoring. As a matter of fact, I have been thinking about selling your mother's muff. She ain't half bad for an old bitch."

Nyte was being egged on, controlled like a marionette on a string and she knew it. "You don't need Mom, not when you got me. My snatch is tighter than hers, you said so. You could get a lot more for my ass. And remember the time you put the clothes pins on my nipples? I can take the pain better, too."

Her eyes watered. She hated the fucking nipple clamps, but she had to keep him engaged.

"I can't sell what you give away for free, can I? Tell me," he sneered. "How many cocks did you service tonight? One, two, three?"

"I didn't have sex, I swear it, Hank."

He shook his head in disgust. "Just get the fucking clothes off and get on the bed."

Nyte knew all too well what that meant. He wanted her on all fours, her head facing the headboard. It was his favorite position for beating. And for sexual usage. She unclasped the skirt now and quickly slid down the purple panties. He had a comment about these, too, about how only a slut would wear something like that.

Still in her boots, she put herself into subjugation on her own bed. There were already welts on her ass only partially healed from the last strapping she'd endured. For days after this it would be hard to sit down, especially at the dinner table, where she was forever hearing her mother go on and on about what

a good man Hank was, how he was so kind to her and the kids, and wasn't he extra sweet not wanting to marry her because he feared he wasn't good enough?

And meanwhile he'd be sneering and winking, grabbing his crotch behind her back and whispering disgusting things in Nyte's ear. The latest was about how he wanted to fuck her friend Joanne.

"Get her for me," he'd been saying, like the girl was nothing more than a carton of milk to be picked up at the store.

Nyte was dreading it, but sooner or later she was going to have to involve her best friend in this growing web of deceit and degradation. Would Joanne be willing to lay for the man to save Nyte's mother, or even Nyte herself? There was no telling what Hank might do if they pissed him off too much. The man had guns, and once or twice in recent weeks, while he was cleaning them he'd called Nyte or Tracy in to watch. It was creepy, especially the way he'd lick his lips and wink at Nyte as he rubbed the oil into the barrel of his .357 Magnum.

Murder was not beyond the realm of possibilities. She saw stuff like that on the news every day. Crimes of passion. Domestic bloodbaths. In her own school there was a shooting last year, with a junior killing himself along with a cheerleader who he claimed had jilted him.

"I think we should get this tattooed, what do you think?" Hank was behind her, rubbing her ass. She couldn't see a damned thing he was doing, and it was driving her crazy. "We could get your little nickname on there—or better still, my name. How about that?"

Hank's slut? Or just 'whore.' That would be fun explaining for the rest of your life, wouldn't it?"

Nyte didn't bother answering. She occupied herself thinking of all the boys she'd been with lately, which ones really scared the crap out of him and might be willing to beat Hank up for her. Zane, the biker, was her best bet. Lately he'd been picking her up for school every morning, taking her off to the Screaming Wheels clubhouse or some other dive to screw her brains out, making sure she never made it in to school until at least ten-thirty. Hank sure as hell hated that, as would her mother, if she weren't on so much Valium and vodka right now.

Push come to shove, though, even the wild Zane wouldn't be up for a gunfight with a potential psychopath. No, Nyte needed someone scarier than that. Hank was just starting to lay into her with the belt when she remembered Jase. He'd already defended her once, hadn't he? Why wouldn't he do it again? If he could take down two bulging musclemen without batting an eyelash, not to mention some freaky bat thing, he could sure put the fear of God in the potbellied ex-Marine, Hank Kareski.

But this Jase was an unknown quantity. Who knew what more he would want from her? Maybe it would be better to stick with more of this, the devil she knew, whistling leather finding its way where it belonged; on her wayward, whore's ass. Yes, this was exactly what she knew. And what she deserved.

"I've been a bad girl, Hank. A very bad girl." Nyte moaned, scarcely aware anymore of where her acting for the sake of Tracy and mom left off and the reality

of her own submissive passions began. He'd called her a terrible actress and maybe she was. In that case, there must be something real in all this to arouse her to such an interesting performance.

"Touch yourself, little girl. Show me," he crooned.

Nyte fell on her face on top of her sun and moon bedspread, putting herself in place to reach back for her own pussy. She found the lips slick and puffy, the juice between them copious and most eager to flow.

"I'm soaking wet. I'm so horny," she confessed.

"You need my cock. You need the discipline of my dick."

"Oh, yes," she breathed. "Put me in my place, humble me with it."

"What if I just marry you?" he asked, plunging his throbbing cock deep inside her. "What if we eliminate your mother all together?"

"No...don't...hurt her," she protested, the words coming out as a semi-breathless chant.

"But you and me belong together." He worked his hands around to grab her tits. "Tell me you don't feel it, too."

"I—I don't know...it's just..."

Hands on her waist, he took full advantage of his age and sexual superiority, taking just enough care for her pleasure to make a willing slave of her yet again. "Just what? You know you want to belong to me. I'd make you my special pet. You'd never have to worry about anything. I'd feed you and take care of you. You'd wear my collar and sleep in a cage. You'd be totally safe, always at my feet, naked."

"Oh, Hank," she cried. "I'm going to come. Please,

sir, may I come?"

"Yes, I want you to. Let me feel you spasm around my cock. Show me what you can do for me, sweetheart. Show me what a good girl you are."

"Oh, yes," she pushed her ass against him, freshly whipped and hot as sin. "I want to be good for you, please, let me be good." The convulsions were upon her, small at first and building in waves. "Oh, Hank."

And now he was pushing at her with the all the strength of a former middleweight boxer turned gas station owner. Her tiny little body was taking a pounding and she was craving every second of it, the pleasure overriding the discomfort.

She thought of Jase. Man and wolf. And the other creature, too. And the fucking, and the way her soul dug so deeply into their world. It was just like hers. And she wanted to be there now, in a black place, a midnight garden, under a moon shining black light, the copulating shadows of gargoyles and demons like comic puppets in the air, the sound of sighing trees and screaming fucked women, prick points of blood, a million tiny flowing wounds, trickling red like a fountain, blood in the center of it all, a blood fountain to toss silver coins into, to stand round and sing and hold hands...and to rut in, to heart's content by devil's urging—or was it the gods, the gods of antiquity commanding? And flying in the air, creatures, not human, not winged, but both. A million beating wings, covering sky and all sounds, saying but one thing over and over.

Her name. The name she had given herself to break the power of her teachers and the priests and

policemen and filthy bosses who ruined her mother's life.

Nyte. That is what the wings said. And in that moment, she knew why she was born and who she was, for the wings were lifting her, clutching her breasts, enveloping and wrapping her in the throes of a sexual thing, a climax...but all too quickly, she fell, the height couldn't be sustained.

Old-fashioned pain comes in, as it always does, the wound is remembered, the gash, and she forgets her purpose. The reason she and Jase have been linked, their names etched together for so very, very long.

So whose side is she on, she wonders? Bat, wolf or neither?

"Come inside me," she cried wickedly. "Come in my little hole."

It wasn't till the passion subsided and Hank was crawling off her that she realized what she'd done.

"So much for loyalty," he tossed her real father's leather jacket in her face. "Right, honey?"

Rolling herself into a ball, naked, bruised and bewildered, *Nyte* began to cry. It was something she hadn't done in a very long time, not since she was little.

"I'm sorry, Daddy," she kept saying, though she wasn't sure what she could have done different. And that was the most damning thing of all.

* * * *

"You've hurt yourself," chided Cassandra, looking more than fetching for a woman of nine hundred

years. "And you're drunk, as well."

"Though not necessarily in that order," Jase slurred, having showed up unannounced at her door somewhere between midnight and dawn.

"That'll be enough out of you." The small blonde woman in the stunning vintage nineteenth-century gown promptly ushered the hellacious-looking werewolf to the red velvet Victorian couch.

"I don't want...blood...on your furniture." He plopped unceremoniously.

"Never you mind, it'll camouflage nicely." Leaning forward, rivulets of spun gold trickling from her gorgeous cascades, the green-eyed Cassandra pulled aside the halves of the leather jacket. The stain was reddish brown, covering his chest.

Jase licked his lips, trying to remember where he'd been. There were the thugs in the alley. And then the pack of wild dogs threatening a homeless man a few streets down. All in all, an interesting flavor combination. "Most of it isn't my own," he mused.

Cassandra went to get a washcloth and some warm water. And a bottle of greening salve—an old shiftling remedy equally beneficial dabbed on the skin or swallowed down with water. Cassandra made quite a picture, bustling in her red dress, the deep V revealing her lush bosom. Jase was instantly hard and he hoped very much she was not otherwise occupied tonight.

"What time is it?" he asked as she knelt before him.

"A little past four." She wiped him clean. "The sun will be up soon enough."

Her touch was good. He'd nearly forgotten how

well this woman knew how to love him. "Time for all good little shifties to go to bed, eh?" he grinned.

She brushed his hands away from her breasts. "Leave me be, you fool. I don't know what kind of trouble you've gotten into this time, but sex won't help it. Honestly, Jase, do you want to be caught by the Guardians? You know Tristans won't rest 'til he has you."

"Tristans be damned. Mm, that's it, Cassie. That's the spot."

"Don't call me that," she dabbed at the gashes on his chest with the light green paste, made from magic herbs unknown to humans. "Where did all this come from exactly?"

"Feral dogs and mafiosos, I believe. Or was it soccer hooligans and grizzly bears? I forget now." Taking advantage of her position between his legs, Jase leaned forward to let down her hair. It poured forth most satisfyingly over his hands. "Cassie, I must have you. Now. You know you are all I ever dream of."

She pulled her head back, but not before he'd gotten himself a nice feel. "Don't give me that line, wolf man. That cock of yours hasn't been hard for me since the French Revolution. I know you. You've a new girlfriend."

"And if I have?"

It was amazing, uncanny, how she knew him. There was a time they really had been lovers in the deepest sense of the word. Fellow travelers, gay companions at the Court of St. Bathos, when once the Peoples of the Change were one, hawks and owls,

bears and eagles, wolves and cats, and even vampyrs together, holders of territory and proud possessors of their own art and culture before the interventions of the mono-men, steel suited barbarians, human crusaders born into terror and ignorance, claiming to act for a god of whom they knew nothing. Many a brother and sister had he seen consumed in the flames, felled by the diabolic arrows of gold, dipped in the water of their infernal saints. A poison to his kind, spelling the end of their dominion.

But not the end of their existence. Living on, they had gone underground, haunting the towns and eventual cities of Europe in ones and twos, concealing their powers, contributing to society as best they could, quiet, and lonely, defacto immortals, immune to every change, answerable only to the Code, that set of laws devised by the Guardians to insure the secrecy and survival of the race.

The first of those rules was not to love any human being, nor to touch them in any intimate way, except for pecuniary gain. Jase had broken that rule, once and once again, and above that, many times more, over and over. It had broken the heart of Cassandra, who had yearned to be his Blood Mate, and it had made of him a pariah. None had so flouted the Code.

For many years, centuries in fact, because of his many braveries, his contributions and acts of heroism on behalf of the People, the crimes were overlooked. But times continued to change. Cities were on the rise and the race of men was itself entering into a dangerous new era, suspicious of the stranger, bound and determined to expose and eliminate every old

myth.

Jase was a danger. His existence. His very name itself chosen to flout the Code. Everything about him begged capture and punishment. Which is why he was underground, hiding from humans and shiftlings alike.

By taking him in, Cassandra, lovely blonde-haired cat bitch, with the most lovely flanks and teeth in her beast state, rendered herself criminal, too. And this was more than he could bear.

One day soon he would have to make a stand. Call a general convocation and meet head on the old fears of his kind. If the Code could so easily be used to advance the power and tyranny of someone like Tristans, then perhaps it was time to change that Code.

And if the humans were still so afraid, perhaps it was time to meet them head on as well.

"If you have a new woman, Jase." She wiped the dried blood from his forehead. "Another *human* woman, than I wish you well. But do not expect me to support this, or even to listen."

But she is just like us, Cassandra. She suffers, too. She is hunted. She has renamed herself like me. The differences need not be walls between us. The old ways need not rule us forever.

All these things his heart yearned to cry out.

He lifted her chin, making eye contact and putting a stop to her fussing with him. "I expect nothing, Cassie, just that you be yourself."

She gave the tiniest sigh and then they were in each other's arms. There would never be a home like this,

never a place, a ballet of twisting limbs that could so recapitulate the whole of his life.

"Cassie, my Cassie..."

She bit his lip to silence him. He let her take his blood even as he pushed her down onto the sofa and shredded away the gown from her breasts. Hopefully the dress was not too expensive, but he was sure she could afford it in her current guise as a high-priced twenty-first-century call girl. In earlier times, she had been a courtesan, her beauty gracing the finest courts of Europe. In other ages, she'd known the life of a madame, commanding the finest of whorehouses, and even that of a temple prostitute. In every age, it was sex, though, and he had often asked her how she did not cross the line herself.

"Do you not feel something for these humans? Ever?"

It was a finely edged question, fully loaded, like the barrel of an ancient musket.

"Are you to be my judge and jury?" she'd teased. "Are we all to condemn one another for breathing before our race draws its last?"

Perhaps it was the sheer number of men, and in such a coldly, calculated rotation that protected her from the danger, rendering impossible that she would ever fall in love with just one.

"Let me hear you say it," he demanded now, tearing away the skin of her clothing, baring that body of timeless beauty, curved in the ancient way, with a fullness that this desiccated, laser-beam driven century of size zero supermodels would never understand.

"No...no words," she gulped for air, her head twisting away, her hands pushing, not at full strength, but in the infinitely serious mode of lover's play.

"Say it, Cass, say it, my Cass." Expertly he claimed her breast, taking what he could of it in one mouthful. How much more was left, he thought. Always more. Squinting shut his eyes, dining on the sweet nectar that was Cassandra, draining dry the magnificent mammaries, he felt himself transported, to the plains and fields of old, semi magical, regions of eternal Fall, golden wheat always upon the hillside, tassled like the robes of the queen, and of eternal Spring, gurgling brooks, like green fresh wine and flowers in the hair of the females. He and Cassandra, always he and Cassandra, laughing most brightly of all, playing as children, he a pup, she a kitten, confounding their elders with their mischief, pranks to delight even the craggiest of hearts.

The inseparable pair. Even by the jealousy of one, Jase's contemporary, classmate and friend, Tristans, who had wanted the beautiful Cassandra for his own. Brooding, he would watch, for an opportunity, for an excuse. It would not come for many, many years, not till the fall of the Court itself.

No, Jase, do not look at these things, says the soul of Cassie to his. He tries to hold her fast, but she leaps from his arms, too slippery to hold in golden form, furred, ears pricked back, limbs quick as lightning, eyes green to the horizon. Jase transforms behind her, in the larger brown form of the male wolf. Two loping were-creatures, faces too terrible, too beautiful to

comprehend. Cass the cat, Jase the wolf. His breath is on her tail. He thirsts, he hungers, he lusts.

And finally, he leaps, going directly for her neck. The scream of the female is blood-curdling. From the forest trees, birds scatter and squirrels scamper. Her indignation, her boundless fury is registered in a mammoth shake.

But he will not be budged. She will go down. She will submit. He is determined. Sensing this resolve, the cat hankers down, seeking to flip them over. Clawing desperately at the ground, she seeks to make the leverage.

Frustrated by the hold he has, she tries the opposite strategy, suddenly bucking on her hind legs. Momentarily, he is dislodged, but then he is right back on her. Cruelly, he digs his teeth back into her neck. He'll draw blood now 'til she gives in. The taste of it only makes him stronger, while the losing of it renders her ever weaker. The handwriting is upon the wall, and all at once she signals her surrender, down upon the underbrush, mixed with the rich black soil of the homeland. The hawk circles the sky. The mating begins. Male mounting female, Jase upon his mate, his best friend and playmate. His blood mate. His soul mate.

In a different world, yes...

But not here, not upon this earth of unchanglings, where their own kind, the shiflings, the noble were-men and women, have no place.

Jase lifted the naked Cassandra from the couch, the rags of her dress falling away. One spell has been broken, another will begin. Carrying her to the brass

bed, the bed of her sleeping and not the separate one she takes her clients on, he laid her out.

"Take me," she whispered, her golden curls settling exquisitely on the pillow, her legs delightfully opened.

"Not that way." Jase grinned slantedly, removing his pants and underwear. "Turn over."

Cass shook her head. "This way," she reached for him with her small white hands, the fingertips dipped in blood red.

Jase noted the resistance—a new thing for her. "Turn over," he insisted. "We will do it from behind, in the ancient way."

"I don't want that, Jase."

"And why not?" He laid hands upon her and she squealed, pushing him away. What didn't she want him to see? The struggle was short-lived, with Cassandra ending up on her stomach. Jase drew a ragged breath, seeing the scars, relatively fresh, here and there oozing blood from the pressure of the bed beneath her.

"Who has done this to you?" he demanded, though he knew the answer already.

The lovely Cassandra had been visited by Guardian, led by the fine and noble Tristans.

"You were whipped."

"It is nothing," she said, though she flinched at his slightest touch, even upon her shoulder.

"They were looking for me," he supplied.

"I told them nothing, Jase."

Jase clenched his fists. "This will not go unavenged."

Cassandra returned to her back, imploring. "No, Jase, you mustn't do anything of the sort. You must run. Keep on running and don't look back."

He shook his head, the resolve, the overwhelming power within him greater than anything he had ever before felt in his thousand-year life. "That is no longer possible, Cass."

Her eyes glazed for a moment, the makings of tears. "Because of the girl. You love her."

"I saw her but one time," Jase put her off. "You I have known since the beginning."

"Like a sister," she said sardonically, though even as she spoke she was climbing to her knees to take him in her mouth.

"No, Cassandra." But they both knew he would accept the caress.

If only this were enough, he thought. If only the love of his fellow shiftling could fill the emptiness, dull the gnawing pain, bring him back to the fold, even.

Cassandra submitted herself completely, taking his erect, up-pointing shaft to the back of her throat. He had never been serviced by anyone better, not even the exotic slaves and whores of the East he'd encountered in his travels over the centuries. In many ways, Cassandra was born for this role, the consummate pleaser of males, though there had never been another she'd given herself to in quite this way. To all others she was the ironic pecuniary lover, the casual taker, the cynical exchange agent.

But what about with Tristans? His old nemesis would not have stopped at whipping the female.

He'd have raped her, too. Jase fought back the images from his brain. How had it been done? Did he work alone or did he use accomplices, to hold her wrists, forcing her to stand upright as he wielded the cat-o-nine tails? Over and over, slicing her pale, white back, the sweat trickling down her skin, her golden hair drenched as she moaned, writhing and twisting, but in the end denying him either the screams or the information he sought.

Still fresh from her wounding, he imagines her pushed down rudely upon her bed as the so-called enforcer of the Code thrusts his cock in and out of her dry hole, proclaiming himself her Blood Mate by sacrilege. The blood he'd have drawn, yes, but his victory had been hollow. For by her suffering, she'd his ultimate defeat.

One day. Soon.

Jase grasped her head, the sweet, sensuous curls winding so naturally in his fingers. Why, oh why must things be as they are? Why limits and pain and enemies to fight? And then it dawned on him, if Tristans was pursuing him this hotly now, with so little regard for the laws of purity than anyone at all with whom he was acquainted was in danger.

And then included the dark-haired human girl, brooding Nyte with so many more secrets than her tender age should allow. He must go to her. Protect her now, not only from her human foes, but from an enemy she could not possibly understand.

But first, he must complete what he had started here. He and Cassandra both. But not like this. Not down her gullet so impersonally.

"Cass," he whispered her name. "My golden sun."

Sun, as in agent of light, in direct contrast to Nyte, he thought ironically, easing Cassandra onto her side.

"Let me take the wounds," he said, laying himself beside her to bathe her with his tongue.

Cassandra tried to pull away. "You'll weaken yourself," she protested. "They are deep. Deeper than you know."

"Just relax," he counseled. "I want to do this."

The licking of the wounds would affect them both. He would take her blood and with it, the pain and anguish. Her skin would be healed and the memory eased. He would, in her mind's eye, be standing with her, remaking the event, together to face the demon of her rape. But she was right; this act of nobility was not without its cost. His own essence would pass through her. He might, for a time, lose his ability to change to his wolf form, or even some of the supernatural powers he enjoyed in his human form. For a time, he would be to a greater or lesser extent, fragile

Cassandra sighed deeply. This bond, this connecting for their kind was something more intimate than sex. Their minds and souls pooled for a sweet, though short interval. Hopes and fears...and desires. Yes, Cassandra had her share of these, as did he.

And here he discovered something interesting. The whipping had not been entirely a torture. It had brought spikes of pleasure, awakening needs, deep and primal in the woman. As had the hostile taking at the hands of Tristans and his Guardians. They had

truly overpowered her, forcing her not to only yield up her body, but her feelings as well. The dark-eyed Chief Guardian had demanded Cassandra's pleasure as his booty, refusing to come inside her 'til she orgasmed herself.

And he had made her say things, too, humiliating, degrading things that were themselves aphrodisiacs. Tristans was indeed an animal, and in the lowest sense of the word. Forcing her to declare herself his slut, a whore deserving to be kept chained and on a leash, trotting behind him, licking and kissing his feet. Among other things.

This was the place of the female, Tristans believed, and it was his extreme vehemency in such things and utter lack of finesse that had disqualified him for consideration as their people's next king. After the Fall of the kingdom, when there was no monarch, he had seized heartily on his new role as judge, jury and executioner of any among his own people who dared show any feelings of love for the enemy.

Jase's rage knew no bounds. Tristans no longer deserved mercy in his eyes. The being he had once known was dead and gone. This new creature that he had becomes was fit only for death, without a shadow of doubt.

The question was why had Cassandra craved this treatment? Why had a part of her sought to grovel, naked and filthy, rightless and subjugated? How was Tristans able to make her beg for his cock in her ass, not to mention a collar of steel and a cage to crawl into?

It was the soul of Cassandra that spoke, replying

silently to his.

Because it is his will. He would be king. Only one thing stands in his way.

What thing? And what kingship? We have no kingdom, he replied in kind.

Now it was Jase's turn to be rolled on his back.

"Pierce me," she demanded, crawling astride him, breathless. With practiced fingers, she held apart her cunt lips, displaying them a mere inch above the head of his cock. "Pierce me here and be my master."

Cassandra sank herself to the hilt and Jase felt immediately the stirrings of explosion. He grabbed her hips, wanting to make it last, but there was no holding back for either one of them.

Pushing down on his chest with her hands, she reared back and slammed home again. Twice more she repeated the action, his pelvis meeting hers mid air. Teeth gritted, the practiced sexuality of a seven-hundred-year-old relationship under their belts, they came in concert, sighs and cries and wails of mutual pain and joy and above all of the sheer beingness of life.

No one would ever affect him like this. Get inside him this way. And he knew it was the same for her. Unless, of course, she should find her way to accepting the offer of Tristans to live under his black thumb.

Jase's reason failed him at this point and he became once more the animal their ancestors had been. His first orgasm barely complete, he turned her over and began to fuck her afresh, using her cunt walls to keep him hard. It was the same for her. Teeth sunk in his

NYTE'S FALL

neck, she held him close, making it hurt for both of them.

Again and again they came, flipping and flipping again, groping and grappling, clinging to the sheer cliff face, high above an abyss neither dared face. It was a race against time. Against sun and destiny. And each other.

CHAPTER TWO

Tracy's voice came to her from the end of a tunnel. A tunnel to Brat Land, one-way passage only. Nyte was in the shower, trying to wash the stink and touch of Hank off her body. Understandably that took time. Especially since she'd dozed off standing against the tile wall, the soap still in her hand like a loaded weapon, a stream of foam emitting from the end and washing down the drain.

"Michelle, you better get your ass out of there or I'm telling!" The fifteen-year-old threatened, sounding more like five.

"Chill, Tray," she cupped her hand to her mouth so as to be heard over the cascading water. "I just got in here."

"Bullshit, Michelle, it's been forty freaking minutes!"

"Stop calling me Michelle!"

It might well have been forty minutes, though, especially with the falling asleep in the shower stall. It was actually the first rest she'd gotten, having laid awake all night after Hank left her. Nyte never was one for sleeping after dark, anyway. Even as a little

girl she was apt to awaken at midnight, looking for the full moon as if it were her own personal sun. Listening carefully for the sounds of the rest of her family—which she had memorized at a quite early age—she'd wait till everyone else was in bed and then she'd come alive, dragging out her dolls and books and various artifacts, taking them to the window box to play by moonlight, or else, on a cloudy night, illuminating everything beneath her covers by the power of flashlight.

It was there she would create her monsters.

Monsters became an early fascination and by the time she reached puberty, an erotic obsession as well. She liked the disorderliness of them, the destructive fuck-it-all sexiness that ran so completely counter to middle class, flatland values. Locked in a subdivision in an equally locked suburb of a zombified city, she could only dream, and, by way of proxy, reach out and touch her real heroes through the likes of the tough boys and motorcycle trash she allowed to hold her hand and take her to movies and generally freak out the pathetic establishment.

The pathetic, hypocritical establishment, made up of clean-scrubbed people on the outside, like Hank, who were the real fucking monsters on the inside.

So now she was Nyte for real, on the official documents of her life, and though she earned stares and a few clucks of the teeth from those of no imagination, it was all worth it whenever she had a chance to introduce herself to some hottie.

"What's your name?" He'd ask and then she'd pronounce it for him.

If he said something stupid back, like “I guess that makes my day,” or “Well, you certainly just made mine,” she’d know he was a loser. But that didn’t happen much, because she could tell pretty much from the look of them what they would say.

She’d seen all types and she was pretty bold these days, too. Enough to freak out Joanne and her other friends. That’s part of why she went out alone these days. You had to take some risks, as Nyte saw it. Sure, there were assholes, but then again, there were the ones like Jase.

Jase. Even his name was different.

She thought of him here under the water, and almost mechanically her hand slipped between her legs, pushing the soap against her clit. It was his hair she thought of first. Short, dark, darker than hers if that was possible. Just kind of poised there, like it had just been tussled with by his best girl and gone right back to its business with total indifference. A haircut without being a haircut. Zen, that’s what it is.

What was it like, she wondered to look at the world through those dark eyes? Eyes of silver blue, set in a face too sharp, too dangerous to belong to a model. Models had to sell clothes, she knew that, and you wouldn’t see the clothes on someone like that. Shit, you wouldn’t want clothes, or anything else to do with this fucked up, flatlined world after a little time with a face, a man like that.

What was his story? Pain was etched into his cheeks, really cool angles and shadows. Or maybe it was just the arrogance of male youth. How old was he exactly? The clothes said young, but the way he acted,

and how he talked to her sounded way older even than Hank. In a way he was like her father, above it all but not in a snobby way. Just a better breed, used to breathing cleaner air and seeing bluer skies. He could almost have been a pilot, the way he carried himself.

Soaping up her breasts, she pinched one of her nipples. It was time to come, to shoot all over her hand while thinking of Jase. In between the rhythmic spasms, in the space of one pelting drop to another she tried to recapture it all, every precious moment they'd shared. Most especially what had happened at the very end.

How could she have let him cut her with a knife? And suck on the wound like some kind of vampire? It didn't even hurt, though, not like the time she broke her ankle or when she burnt her arm on the stove. It was an itching pain, something that made her want to go deep in herself. And even deeper in him. He'd made her think of sexy things, even before he'd laid a hand on her. Talk about a mind fuck. It had all spilled out, like that first time you really talk to a new boy and you just tell him everything so you can watch it all again through his eyes, and suddenly your whole life comes alive in a way you never imagined. Except there weren't any words between her and Jase. Not those kind, anyway.

Unless he was reading her thoughts. If so, he knew everything. Did that include the sexy parts? Did he know about all the cocks? Lord, did he know about Hank?

She pumped her pussy to two, three orgasms in a

row. Closing her eyes, she replaced the reality—her hand, her bar of soap—with fantasy, ever so much sweeter.

His hands. His cock. His lips. Biting her own knuckles, she kept from crying out. Meanwhile Tracy was still bitching in the hall the whole time, oblivious as always.

“It’s about fucking time,” said the auburn-haired princess when Nyte finally emerged, wrapped in a towel, another one in a turban on her head.

“Watch your mouth,” Nyte warned. “You’re still a kid.”

Tracy scrunched her pretty face into a look of pure hatred. It was something Nyte could not abide. Watching her sweet kid sister turn into one of those totally bitchy, snobby girls who makes everyone else’s life a living hell had been maybe the hardest blow of all.

“Why? Are you afraid I’m gonna grow up and be a tramp like you?”

Nyte bit her tongue. She had to be forgiving. It was the house, the way they all lived. Hate seethed in all of them. Wasn’t that what the bullshit school psychologists said? The spineless wonders who couldn’t do a damn thing to help. Not that she’d ever tell them anything.

“Just take your shower, Tray, and give it a rest.”

“Whore!” Tracy slammed the bathroom door.

Nyte closed her own door in preparation to get dressed for day whatever-it-was of her senior year of high school. Parole imminent, she thought. Next stop...who knows and who cares?

She was just rummaging in her panty drawer when he came in. Sporting a hard-on, liquor already on his breath. It was going to be one of those days, she sighed.

"Just a quickie," Hank murmured, after taking a last look in the hallway to make sure the coast was clear.

Nyte shed the towel, revealing the body that was everybody else's but her own. "How do you want me?" she asked, just wanting to get it over with.

"A blowjob will do," he pawed at his trousers, sounding all professional like he was bringing his clothes to the dry cleaner.

Hank was very particular how he wanted his dick sucked. He liked her to wrap her tongue around the ridge underneath and just slide the meat of him in and out very gently. He also liked her to dab the little drop of pre-come at the tip just prior to his ramming himself all the way to the back of her throat for the finale.

"Oh, fuck yea," he grunted, enjoying her carefully honed skills. "That's where you belong. Maybe I should have some of my buddies from work try you out, huh?"

He was ready to fuck her mouth in a hurry. Nyte worked on keeping her jaw slack. It wasn't easy being intimate like this. She wanted to retch. Here it was 7 a.m. and already he smelled like a walking brewery. It was getting worse, the drinking, and that was concerning her. So far, she was handling him, giving the animal all he needed to leave the others alone. But she knew it was only a matter of time. Men like this

were never satisfied. They'd want more and more. And they'd do anything to get it.

Nyte knew this from experience.

Hank wasn't the first bad man her mother had brought home. There'd been others, drunks with tempers, the kind that cause fights at 3 a.m., dishes flying and yelling and screaming. Sometimes they would hit Erica, and Nyte would cry. Tracy was protected as much as possible. That was Nyte's job, the one thing her mother asked of her.

"Make it nice, Michelle. Make it nice." As if somehow maintaining the fiction of a normal happy home would keep her little sister from absorbing all the weirdness.

Without a doubt Hank was the worst, and he'd brought out Mom's worst side as well. She was weaker and more alcohol and drug dependant now than ever. Hank made all the decisions, he managed her survivor's pension, the social security for Tracy, and, as of late, he was the girl's parent figure, too. Tracy loved him because he spoiled her rotten—a deliberate effort on his part to separate the two sisters.

For every bad thing that happened to Nyte, something good happened to her sister. It was no wonder no one would believe what was going on. They didn't want to, Erica above all. She had her own little fantasy world to live in, the world where everything was nice and happy and where at any moment daddy might come walking back through the front door to pick up where he had left off.

"That's it, sweetheart, drink it down." The man pumped his disgusting seed, giving her no option but

to swallow it all. Making her drink his come was one of Hank's favorite ways to humiliate his girlfriend's daughter. So was making her lick his asshole, but he was a little pressed for time this morning.

"Go on," he said, zipping himself back into his work pants. "Get dressed. And I better not see you dressing like a whore, or I'll take down your panties and beat you black and blue."

Like he wouldn't do that anyway just for fun.

"What do you care how I dress, I'm just a tramp, remember?"

"Don't disrespect me, you little cunt," he growled, betraying his usual lack of logic. "In this house you treat me right, and we follow the rules, just like a regular family."

"A regular family?" She laughed. "And how many regular families do you know where the high school senior stepdaughter blows her stepdaddy—before breakfast?"

He raised a backhand.

"Go on, break my fucking jaw," she challenged. "Give social services a good reason to come in here. Oh, wait, I'm eighteen. I can just call the fucking cops."

Hank scowled and walked off. Sometimes it went like this—he'd push her down so far she'd lose all fear and just give him shit right back. But come the next day, or the day after that she'd be scared again, or tired, or just plain horny, and then she'd react very, very differently. Maybe it was like this for all so-called victims of abuse; she wasn't sure. It was just surviving to her. Doing what she had to do.

The main thing now was figuring out what to wear. Putting in the all-important call to Joanne, who was totally cool and down to earth for a gorgeous blonde, she got the scoop.

"Red all the way, girlfriend," said Joanne over the cell phone. "I even asked my tarot cards."

"Tarot cards?"

Okay, so maybe Joanne did act a little too blonde sometimes.

"Sure, they'll tell you anything you want to know. Like today, I flipped over the death card, and the skeleton had on a red hood."

Nyte thought of the color of her blood being sucked through the cut in her skin, a little dribble of it down Jase's chin. Who had he made that wound disappear?

"Red it is," she agreed, thankful to have an airhead pal to take her mind off things. They were an odd pairing, really. Total opposites, but balanced somehow. Nyte was the somber goth chick always on the edge of trouble, and Joanne was the perpetual cheerleader—literally. Joanne's friends didn't understand what she saw in Nyte. Personally, Nyte had no other friends, so it didn't matter.

Nyte found a short red skirt in the closet, a leather one that a rich man had bought for her one night in exchange for taking nude photos of her. Nyte was a little bit drunk at the time, and it took her a while after she woke up in her bed with the skirt on the next morning to remember where it had come from.

There was a possibility she might be sent back home from school, because it was very tight, but that

wouldn't be so bad either, so she decided to go for it. The black bustier was definitely a no-no, but if she chickened out, she could always keep the bomber jacket on. Then again, the coat would be hot, so she opted for a compromise, wearing her black Death Blow t-shirt with the torn off sleeves and cut out v-neck.

The black combat boots and fishnet stockings were a must, the perfect finishing touch.

"Later, Mom," she bounded down the stairs heading for the front door.

Erica was in her bathrobe, sitting at the kitchen table, using all her concentration and both of her hands to hold the ceramic mug filled with steaming black coffee. Hank, slime that he was, was standing right beside her with a small whiskey bottle, adding little nips to the steaming beverage.

What she wouldn't give to have him tied down to the pool table, totally at her mercy. She would start with his cock, removing it very slowly with a rusty, dull saw.

"Honey, you should have breakfast."

"I'll get a granola bar at school, Mom." There was no way she would stop and have a meal with these two. She'd rather eat worms. "I love you!"

"Love you, too," her mother's voice cracked as Nyte hurriedly opened the door. "Don't be home late."

As late as possible, thought Nyte, shutting the bizarre world behind her.

Now to see who would show up to bring her to school. The high school was only six blocks away, but

it would never do to show up on foot. Not when there were so many interesting rides to choose from. With her reasonably good looks and the many salacious hints she dropped, she could count on boys stopping to give her rides. She was really hoping for something dramatic today, enough to give dear old Hank heart failure.

Sure enough, up the street, there was Zane, his hands revving the Kawasaki. He had a big grin on his face and do-rag on his head. He was dressed and ready to play. Licking her lips, she wagged her finger, wanting him to pick her up right smack in front of her house. The twenty-year-old drop out and part-time ATM robber had no problem making waves. Driving right up onto the sidewalk, he circled her twice before coming to a stop.

"Where's my sugar?" He wanted to know.

Nyte presented herself for kissing, and whatever full body exploration the hoodlum might want to make. Astride the motorcycle like a god, he grabbed her ass and pulled her close enough to suction himself to her lips. She opened them at once, signaling her readiness for invasion. It wasn't just his tongue he wanted inside her, though. Sliding his hands down over her hips, he worked his thumbs under the hem of the red leather skirt, sliding the material high enough to determine she was wearing panties.

"Take them off," he said, and Nyte did just that, wriggling them down over her hips right there on the street of their nice middle-class neighborhood.

"You're gonna service some of my homies today," he told her as he slipped her panties over the

handlebar. "You're not on the rag, are you?"

"No," she shook her head. "I'm a week away, at least."

He was reaching under the T-shirt now. "What the fuck?" He found the bra. "How much underwear you got on?"

"That's it," she purred. "The rest is all me."

"Lift your shirt," he ordered when she'd handed over the bra.

Nyte did so, blatantly baring her tits for all of Hank and Erica's snobby neighbors.

"Hold still."

He took both her nipples at once between his thumbs and forefingers, compressing them like a vise. Compared to this, Hank's clothespins were nothing.

"Whose girl are you?" He demanded.

"Yours," she whimpered. "Only yours."

"On the way over to the clubhouse, you better think long and hard, babe, about improving your attitude."

"Y—yes, sir."

Oh, yea, this was perfect. Hank must be in there shitting his pants, she thought gleefully.

"You wet for me?" He wanted to know.

"Always," she promised.

"All right. Get on."

She took a last look over her shoulders, blowing a kiss to Hank, his nose pressed to the window like an angry pug.

"Now, bitch."

Her legs shaking, the freshly chastised Nyte climbed up behind the biker. She had to press her

cheek to his back to hold on, and this made her nipples scream with fresh pain. Meanwhile, her thinly covered ass was tingling on the leather seat.

It was going to be one of those rides. Just a few feet down the street and already she was feeling the vibrations, the pulsing power deep in her nearly exposed pussy. The young man had her totally at his mercy, her legs spread, her body immobilized against his hard back, her cunt drenched with the juices of her anticipatory having at the hands of him and his gang.

Did the people driving around them in traffic have any sense of this? Seeing the young couple beside them, could they tell the girl was going to play hooky from school so she could fuck and suck the boy and his friends? Would that make any difference to them? Would it make those staid commuters hard or wet, depending on their sex? Would they pull over and masturbate, or clog the freeways, jumping out to find partners in other cars? It was a funny sight to picture, one made all the sweeter knowing that Hank had watched the whole thing from the window, fuming, plotting his revenge.

As always, it would be her own ass to pay for the joke, but what did she have to lose? What did a girl with no daylight existence matter under the sun, anyway? Where she went and spent her sunshine hours were of no concern. Studying, fucking, flipping burgers, it was all the same. As for where she did find her heart and soul, in the bowels of night, there were no questions asked, anyway, nothing but fleeting thrills and first names, whispered in alcoves, or

shouted on dance floors and almost always made up.

Names like Jase, which the more she thought about it had to be fake.

Pure smoke, like the man himself. She'd never see him again, she was sure of it. This was her reality, on the streets and she'd been foolish to forget that. Kissing Zane had reminded her. So had taking Hank's dick in her mouth. It wasn't a girl's world. Didn't her mother's example show her that? Feminine dreams were made to be smashed.

Which is why she needed to smash them first, before someone else, especially the shadowy too-good-to-be-true Jase who was bound to break her heart. In fact, hadn't he done this already, the way Daddy did?

Good men leave you behind, that was the moral. And scum stays around, like a ring on the bathtub. Running her hands under Zane's jacket and T-shirt, she felt his ribbed abdomen.

She was going to be fucked, she thought, the wind snapping at her hair. By an entire motorcycle gang.

How cool was that?

* * * *

Jase tossed and turned, an icy sweat upon his forehead. The licking clean of Cass' wounds had cost him more than he'd expected. Tristans' toxin was deep inside her. He'd injected her through his sperm with a hatred, a diabolic intent for which there was no precedent among his people. How and where had Tristans' soul turned in such a dark direction?

This went beyond the personal blackness he'd shown so far to something nefarious and universal. Cassandra had been right. The vampyr did intend to be king. And not only that, he had designs on a new empire, a course of war and subterfuge that would take not only their homeland back but the whole of the earth.

If only he could see the details. If only he knew who the one was that could stop him. The true heir to the kingdom, the one the old king would have chosen had there been time.

But his mind was too clouded, his body so weak, he could hardly move. Again and again in his fevered dreams he had managed to rise to his feet and stumble to the door over Cassandra's objections, but each time he would recover himself and find he was still flat on his back, his head laying on a drenched pillow, his body on a drenched sheet. His speech was unintelligible and Cassie kept dabbing at his forehead, her face sick with worry. She blamed herself, it was clear, but the choice had been his.

What mattered now was getting himself together and finding Michelle—Nyte—before Tristans did. She was important in all this, a piece of the puzzle. He was close to her, Jase could feel it. Tracking her down, just hours behind now in his search and closing the gap. Reaching for Cassandra's hand, using every ounce of strength, he bid her help.

"The only way..." he managed to utter.

She took his meaning, knowing that he needed her to use her own powers against Tristans. It was risky, and put them all in danger. Jase couldn't even believe

he would ask her to do such a thing for a mere human. It was taking advantage of Cassie's love for him, and he knew it. She would do it, but for the wrong reason.

He opened his mouth to voice this, but she had her finger on his lips. "Too late," she smiled, sitting beside him on the bed. "It's already done."

Her eyes slipped closed and she went ramrod straight. Among the kinds of shiftlings, Cassandra was a were-cat, among whose gifts was to be a weaver of the spirit world, which meant she could put souls in and out of tune, righting or disrupting them, or even, if she wished, injuring them beyond repair.

To do so would be a crime unspeakable, even against the likes of Tristans. What she would do to him instead—on Nyte's behalf—would be to put up a veil of protection, in essence cloaking her existence from his so that he would never find her, even should the trail lead right to this room.

At first she smiled tranquilly, and Jase was pleased. It would all go smoothly. But then a dark shadow passed over her and she started to convulse. Tipping forward, she fell into Jase's arms. Now they were in it together, in the realm of her own mind. A gray forest; tendrils of thought, like mighty trees, rising from a shimmering glass earth.

At first he is lost. Then a floating, miniature version of Cassandra points the way and he runs to follow.

Ahead he sees a man—the image of one—facing away. He wears purple velvet, a cloak and black boots. It is Tristans, leaning forward, striking with a

sword, attacking at the roots of the tendrils, the stalks representing the mind of Cassandra. And by implication, his own.

He lets out a growl and Tristans, seeing him, drops the sword and flees. Now they are running down a dark corridor. Jase is close behind, giving chase. Cassandra appears just in front of them, a flash of light emerging from her forehead. The imaginary Tristans vanishes in a haze and it seems he has been foiled, at least for the moment. The cloak is over Nyte. He will not guess her identity, nor will he even remember trying to probe Cassandra's mind tonight. Although Jase cannot be sure the cloak is large enough to include all those who know her.

This much was sure, if Tristans had learned anything even remotely in his attack, he will use the information ruthlessly.

The tack complete, Cassandra returned to normal.

"Must...get...up..." The exhausted Jase groaned, but this time Cassandra would not negotiate. Could it be she wanted him here for herself, to keep him from going to Nyte? He wanted to talk about this, but she was wiping her hand across his forehead, imposing a spell of sleep.

"You must rest," she said, stealing away the last of his consciousness. "Like it or not, I will not let you die."

* * * *

The girl was a piece of meat. Shapely enough, with good flanks for breeding and amusingly bright yellow

hair, but still only a slab of flesh, to be played with, exploited and disposed of however one chose.

Such was the first impression of Tristans Delacourt Vindanuevo, High Guardian of the People upon the young human female and so, too, would be the definitive judgment, written upon her tombstone, for Tristans was never wrong about such things.

She did have one other value, though, a very high one—albeit quite temporary. For though he could not see it clearly, this young human had some link to the vermin he was hunting. She didn't know Jase—of this Tristans was sure. But it could well be she knew of someone who did. His memory was foggy on this point. He knew she was eighteen. Her body was fair and it wasn't impossible a human-loving pervert like Jase would be attracted to her, though Tristans wasn't sure exactly why he knew what he did. There were gaps in his memory and it occurred to him someone had been trying to block his internal tracking mechanisms.

Cassandra, maybe? Could it be the bitch was working actively with Jase after all? If so, he would pay her a return visit and this time he would not be so gentle. He smiled, thinking of what it would do to Jase, knowing his hand, his cock and his whip had so heavily marked his precious little feline.

Waiting for the girl to exit the motor vehicle she'd been riding in, a blue sedan which he'd followed from the so-called school she'd been at all day, Tristans sat tight in his rental car. They were in a neighborhood, a clustering of houses, evenly spaced on paved roads. He would never become used to these twenty-first-

century human dwellings. With every century that passed without them having the influence and supervision of his kind the human race grew stupider and more vapid. What kind of living being secures itself in a box, crammed shoulder to shoulder with a million others in the same boxes? Where were the high turrets, the castles of old, the great stone cathedrals, their buttresses challenging the very heavens? Now there was architecture, there was a race one could respect, at least a little as an enemy.

But this, this bastardized excuse for living was a desecration of everything both races had ever stood for. It would all be dealt with, though, in the new regime. The new dawn would bring back order and beauty to the world. And above all, fear.

Fear by man of his betters — of the shiftlings and all they represented.

How he hated this skulking about, hiding himself like a common criminal. But it must be done, to hatch the plot — which first of all, and foremost required the elimination of the enemy.

The interloper. The pretender. His one and only rival for the crown.

Waiting for the drop-off car to turn the corner, Tristans walked to the house.

"Can I help you?" The pretty blonde girl opened the door, cocking her head like a spaniel.

The poor little fool. Had she an ounce of wit, she would tear the clothes from her sleek little body and fall to his feet, begging to serve as his slave.

Or else run from his sight in blind terror.

"Are you alone?" he asked.

"Yes," she nodded, apparently lacking all sense of self-preservation. "But who are you?"

He looked her up and down. She'd taken her shoes off and her coat. The red skirt was short and tight. She had on a red tank top and a gold necklace, a match to the one on her ankle. A girl like this could clear sixty to eighty dollars an hour in a slave brothel in Bangkok, Budapest, or Boston. Over a twenty-four-hour period, allowing maybe an hour or so off to take care of bodily functions, that would add up to a pretty penny in a hurry.

"I'm here to torture and abuse you. In the next few hours I will succeed in putting a single face to all your nightmares for the rest of your life; would you like to invite me in?"

He gave her a moment to absorb the words—he could see they weren't registering behind her baby blue eyes.

"W—what did you say?"

Tristans brushed past her. "Never mind. I hate to repeat myself and you really wouldn't believe me anyway."

"Get out," she demanded. "Or I'll call the police."

Tristans looked about the interior, the contents predictable, pathetic and utterly unoriginal. "What's your name, girl?"

"I don't have to tell you that!"

Tristans grabbed her by the arm and hauled her to the sofa. She was tall for a female, nearly five foot six, barely three inches shorter than himself. But the strength was all on his end. Toppling her face forward, he reached in the pocket of his trench coat

for the lightwhip. It was a device of magic, technically illegal by the Code because of its utter alienness to human technology, and therefore its dangerous conspicuousness. But Tristans was a Guardian, and Guardians did whatever was necessary to defeat evil.

Including copulating with humans as a means of interrogation.

The advantage of the shimmering blue device was that he could slash through her clothes, rending them into useless strips of material. Another benefit was that you could lay on deep wounds, instantly cauterizing them to prevent bleeding. A woman could be whipped over and over almost indefinitely this way without your ever having to stop.

Her screams were intense enough that he had to put up a sound damper round the house. After just three blows to her back and buttocks, with her sobbing hysterically, begging him to stop, he put the question to her a second time.

"Joanne!" She cried, the defiance beat from her lovely body. "I'm Joanne."

"Very well, Joanne. You may get up, go to the door and lock it. After that you will remove your clothes and kneel before me naked, knees wide apart."

The girl stood there in shock.

"You have to the count of ten," Tristans informed her. "If you have not complied with my wishes by then you will be punished in a way that will make you sorry you were ever born."

The girl swallowed hard and took off like a shot for the door. He half expected her to make a run for it, but she did as she was told. Calmly, he continued the

count, enjoying the spectacle of her tearing off her garments in accord with his orders. She just made it, putting herself in position at the count of nine. He waited till ten was past to tell her she had not spread her knees wide enough.

"Wait, give me a chance," she begged, airing her golden-thatched pussy most deliciously.

"Too late," he cracked the light whip, a bright and lovely filament of cerulean blue that singed the skin of her breasts, forcing her into contortions to avoid its cut. She tried to cover herself, but it was only the beginning. Again and again with calm, cruel expertise, he laid into her, allowing her no respite. Whatever parts of her body she left exposed in an effort to protect some other, he marked, ruthlessly. Nipples, buttocks, belly, thighs, no part of her was exempt.

"What are you?" He inquired when at last she lay in a heap, too weary to avoid the blows at all.

"I don't...understand," she croaked.

He hit her again, turning the device to full power this time. "You must try harder, then. What are you?"

"Please," she moaned, the smell of her own flesh filling her nostrils. "I don't know, I swear."

"Perhaps a clue will help." He forged the collar round her neck from thin air, heavy cast iron, a single piece, removable only by blacksmith's heat.

Joanne touched her fingers to her neck, feeling the sign of her imbondment. Even a woman as dense as her could not miss the implications. "I'm afraid," she whispered, her body shuddering. "Am I...am I a slave?"

Tristans pressed his foot to her back, forcing her deep into the carpet at his feet. "Why do you try my patience?" he demanded. "Again I ask, what are you?"

"I am a slave," she said with much more conviction. "Master, I am your slave."

"There's a girl," he soothed. "As a reward, you may lick my boots."

The female could hardly move. The scars covered nearly every inch of her, the pain no doubt tearing into her senses. But she dared not resist. Not this. Not now.

"You learn quickly," he praised as she lapped at the shiny leather, her lush young body quite fittingly on all fours. "You may consider yourself one step ahead of the rest of your species; they will all be having to do this before too much longer. Tell me, have you a dungeon of some sort—a basement I believe you call them now—somewhere I can chain you up and fuck you that has a bit more ambiance?"

The girl trembled in visible terror. "Sir, please, don't."

"Are you defying me, slave girl?"

"N—no, sir. There is a basement, yes."

"Good, then we shall attend it presently. There is some information I need from you, my dear, but as you may or may not be aware, there is an old custom among your people that says the testimony of a slave may only be collected through torture?"

"No, sir," she replied, more a sob than a verbalization.

"You may call me, master, slave Joanne. Out of

curiosity, how long till anyone else gets home?"

Joanne hung her head, limp curls hanging in blatant defeat. "Not till tonight, master. Nine, maybe ten o'clock."

"How fortunate for us. We've plenty of time to play. To the basement then, shall we?"

He made her crawl, which was, after all, only fitting, given her new status.

CHAPTER THREE

Nyte awoke on her belly on a filthy mattress. She was still in the condemned house the Screaming Wheels dubbed their club and office. The time felt wrong to her, much later than it should be, so she reached for her watch. The nearly three hundred pound man next to her didn't want her moving, though, so he grabbed her hair, holding her down.

"Let go, you son of a bitch," she squealed as he pulled it painfully at the roots.

He answered with a snore.

The bastard was fettering her in his sleep. Blinking through tear-filled eyes, she looked at the window. The light was full and red. Damn, it must be late in the afternoon already. She'd missed school entirely, which meant yet another unexcused absence. There'd be another call home to deal with, and a fresh beating. Now she'd have to get Joanne to Hank for sure. It'd be the only way to keep him off all their backs. Joanne shouldn't mind, too much. She wasn't a virgin, and once you'd had sex with one person, it was no big deal to do it with another. And another after that. Anyway, this was for a good cause. How often did

you get to be screwed and really feel like you were helping somebody out in the process?

Come to think of it, Nyte had thought once or twice lately about having a go at Joanne herself. Did that make her a lesbian?

Damn it, she had to get out of here before it got too much later. "Hello? Anyone there?" she called out, trying to enlist help against the hair-holding monster man. "Zane?"

It wasn't Zane who answered but one of the others, a tall, shirtless dude in greasy black jeans by the name of Wrench. Wrench was thin and wiry with a scraggly gray beard and a braided ponytail, and he'd fucked her pretty good in the ass a while ago from what she remembered.

"Hey there, sleeping beauty, guess that bliss didn't put you out long as it was supposed to."

"Bliss, what's that?" she asked as Wrench disengaged her hair from the hand of the big man whose name she recalled now was Monk.

"It's like ecstasy, only stronger. It'll be in your system twenty-four hours. Makes you hornier than a jaybird. Should have kept you loopy, too, but you seem to have some kind of resistance."

Nyte felt her pussy. It was throbbing, coated with thick deposits of semen. She'd heard of bliss, but she'd never seen it in action, least of all on herself. "What was I like, Wrench, what did I do?"

"You were an animal, sweetheart. First you crawled on your hands and knees from dick to dick, sucking like there was no tomorrow. Then you started in dancing, swaying those hips, begging to get

fucked."

She plunged her hand inside herself. "And then?"

"Dog pile," he laughed, pulling out a cigarette from a pack in Monk's vest pocket. "A dozen dicks flying at you all at once."

"Yours, too?" She lifted her hips in the air, desperate to bring herself off. Whatever was in this drug, it was for real.

He patted his crotch. "I got my share, sweet cakes."

"Take more," she panted. "Take me again."

Wrench, whose various tattoos gave the story of a half dozen lost lovers, a sting in the navy and a two-year sentence in San Quinton for breaking and entering, shook his head. "Sorry, but you wore me out. Maybe we can wake up the others."

"No. Not them." Nyte was on her feet, on tiptoes, wrapping her arms around his neck. "You and me. Take me somewhere sexy. Please?"

She should have asked to go home, but the drug had a mind of its own. Bliss, sometimes called the slut drug, because that's how it made women act.

"Well, I suppose we could go down to the Wild Horse," he reasoned. "That's a jumping joint. Wet T-shirt contests without the T-shirts, humping in the toilet stalls – and that's just on ladies' night."

"Sounds like that's where we need to go," she dry humped him, not caring that she was staining the crotch of his pants. "Just as soon as...oh, God..."

She came right against him, her head nestled on his shoulders, her tremoring breasts pressed to his leanly muscled chest.

He gave her a few seconds to level off, letting her

hold him like a slow dance without music, the only motion being that in her head. Only once he was totally sure where she was did he gently suggest they should get going, if she really did want to make a getaway before Zane or any of the others woke up, that is.

"Whatever you say, baby," she purred, licking at his chest, soft and easy as any kitten. Wrench was pushing fifty and that was good, because he made her feel safe.

"Keep that up," he quipped, "and I'm gonna marry you — the hell with Zane."

"Why don't you?" she said boldly.

"Because you're high as a kite," he pushed her off him. "And come to think of it, I am, too."

"See," she grinned. "We already have things in common."

They laughed at that all the way to his bike, a big Harley, the sight of which made her cream.

"Go fast," she said. "And whatever you do don't turn back. Ever."

* * * *

"Isn't it marvelous?" Tristans held up the mirror for the self-viewing pleasure of the seated, tightly tied girl. "Have I not made your body a thing of beauty, a canvas upon which I have expressed to the world my deepest desires to inflict pain and suffering?"

Joanne shook her head this way and that, her eyes wide and pleading. Was she saying yes or no? "Answer the question," he roared, extinguishing yet

another of the waiting row of smoldering cigarettes upon her hanging, useless left breast.

Following up immediately, he inserted the coiled light whip inside her gaping vaginal opening, setting it just low enough so as to pulverize, tickle and disrupt her cunt, but not to cause permanent damage. At once she began to spasm, and he punished her for that with another cigarette because she'd not had permission for an orgasm—even a painful one.

"Yes," she exclaimed, gasping, and whimpering. "I am more beautiful because of what you've done to me, master."

She ground her teeth in agony as the tip of yet another cigarette faded from orange to white to black, its heat bubbling and blistering her skin

The best part of all of it was the tears and how he could, at any moment, erase the wounds, cleansing her of pain, only to start again.

"Do you have a boyfriend, Joanne?"

"Yes, master. His name is Brian. He plays football."

"Football? Now there is a despicable and cowardly waste of time if ever I heard one. Why is he not at swordplay or chasing after dragons? Never mind, I know the answer. Your species is above such things now. I suppose he has not even sought to claim you properly—running you down in the street on horseback, binding your kicking and screaming body over the back of his saddle, taking you, finally to his bed where you will do precisely everything that you are told. What do you say to that?"

Tristans was leaning over her, his hands on the arms of the heavy wooden chair, his eyes, bottomless,

piercing the shallow depths of her soul. It was barely a contest, barely worth the effort.

"Please, master, I am only a girl. Only a girl."

It was time. Time to end the charade, to finish her off. "What you will see next, slave Joanne, what you will experience, will change you. It will mark you. Can you understand?"

She was sobbing, dry heaves. No, of course she could not understand.

"My kind take various shapes," he explained. "Depending on our genetic predisposition. There are among us cats, wolves, jackals, eagles, even owls. The most fearsome, however is the vampyr. We are the natural lords of our race and yours. Yes—I am one of these, the rarest of all shiftlings and in my animal guise I am the great taker of blood. I thirst more than all the others. I will take from you and you will give. Have you ever been raped, my dear? There are many ways this can occur not only to body, but also to soul. Except that in this case I will take nothing less than your total and complete surrender. You will beg to give me your blood, and with it all that you know. You will tell me what I need to find my enemy—for he is bonded to you in some way I have yet to understand."

Joanne's teeth chattered. How wonderful it was, the little peaks of her nipples, and the way her crotch continued to juice, terrified as she was. He had worked her well, mixing the pleasure and pain to bring her to this point.

"Unveil, spirit of vampyr," he whispered, chanting the words in unearthly tones, his arms stretching out

as wings. "Open to anguish and thrill and knowledge."

It took the full power of the dampers to bottle the sound of her scream, the anticipatory cry, deep in her womb, lust and anguish mixed, the cutting, slashing razor of nightmare awoken to a worse reality.

Tristans poised to savor her fear, seeking as best he could to see himself reflected in her eyes. It vexed him that this one experience would forever allude him, for no matter how much of the world Tristans conquered, he would never know the terror of facing himself, the glory of being his own victim.

There were no words to describe what he would do to this girl, or what he looked like in this form. The silly vampire tales of men in tails with pointed ears changing into smiling, bumbling bats, were about as close to the truth of his nature as a cardboard child's cutout of the sun was to the blazing ball of gases itself, a million, million fires, harnessing the very forge of creation itself.

Some persons reported seeing a storm of bats. Others a black ghost with red eyes. Still others, a winged demon that dove always for the throat, tearing it out at first contact. But a wise vampyr, learned and unafraid to use its true power, had finesse as well, especially when it sought some specific piece of information.

The girl's blood was vapid, almost tasteless. As was her soul. She'd been fed on triviality, half-truth and gossip. He was nauseated. No wonder the human race was poised at the edge of extinction. If this was the flower of youth in their most powerful country,

there was no telling what might be found in lesser quarters. She knew nothing, believed nothing except pop music and meaningless electronic games and childish spats with equally childish friends. She was going nowhere, she'd come from nowhere and for the whole rest of her life she'd never do one damned thing of real substance.

But wait, what was this? Digging his claws into her breasts for balance, he adjusted the thick needle-like teeth, precision drills, one, two, three, four in her skull. Damn this screaming and the blood. He was trying to work here. Had she no consideration? It was a matter of bringing things into focus...there, he had it. This yellow-haired bauble brain had a friend, dark haired, perplexing. Made of sharp edges that did not fit her smooth world. And yet this Joanne loved her. How peculiar. There was a magnetism there, something that drew, across long distances, breaking through otherwise unbreachable barriers.

Yes, that was it! This dark-haired girl was the one. A self-styled creature of the night. She would draw him, if she had not already done so. She would draw him into her orbit, and he, fool that he was, would become her slave.

What an unfit ruler his adversary would make! The kings of old had miscalculated. He could not have been the one designed to serve, and had there been time for the selection to have taken place at the noble Court of St. Bathos, this would have been made clear. As it was, he, the Chief Guardian would have to mete justice alone, attending to his very own crowning.

This Nyte must die, and with her the one who

stood in the way. The one who blasphemed the Code, calling himself Jase—the word in their people’s language that meant outlaw.

This Outlaw would never be king, and she, perish the thought, would never sit beside him, co-ruler of a joint kingdom, two races in one.

“You have been most kind, my dear.” Tristans jerked himself at lightning speed out of her and back into his human form. A snap of his fingers and her wounds were gone and her bonds.

“What happened?” she looked up at him, folding her arms over her naked breasts. “How did I get down here to the basement?”

“You’re dreaming,” he touched her forehead. “Only dreaming.”

“Oh,” she sighed, drifting instantly to sleep. By the third breath, he was gone, out the front door and into the black night air. No time for the car now, he was on a mission. To find the girl.

To conquer Nyte.

* * * *

Jase awoke well after dark. He did not look well.

“I know you’re furious with me,” said Cassandra, wearing a blue dress, her hair up in Roman tresses, light and spring-like. “But I only did what I thought was right to save your life. You were in no condition to fight a mosquito, much less Tristans.”

“No, Cassie,” he refused the soup she was offering. “You did what you did out of jealousy. Because you knew I intended to save her.”

Cassandra's eyes stung. She didn't think it possible to still be hurt after all these years. So much suffering, so much death. She'd seen her whole family slaughtered before her eyes as a young girl, her entire way of life destroyed in one cruel invasion's stroke. Who could have had more cause to hate the race of men than her? But thoughts of vengeance led nowhere. She had buried such feelings, centuries ago, in the graveyards where her mortal caskets, one each, buried empty for the various lives she'd lived, and with them all feelings of jealousy, too.

Yes, Jase had managed to hurt her again, opening a living vein; the last one, perhaps.

"You do not know what you are saying."

He lifted her bodily, moving her out of his way, the soup spilling in the process. "I know exactly, Cassandra, but as usual, you will not believe in me, you will not give me the credit I deserve."

She knew this side of him well. It was the beginning of the end. The attitude he affected when it was time to leave again. The sex over, the restlessness setting in, he would be on his way again, till the next time he was horny, drunk, or wounded. Only this time the stakes were far too high to give up without a fight.

"I alone stood by you," she accused. "I alone remember who you truly are...does that mean nothing to you?"

He shook her off as she tried to grab at him. "Leave me go, female. I am about the work of men."

Completely out of character, she fell to her knees, clutching at his leg. "Please, Jase, don't do this. I've

the most terrible feeling of what will happen if you walk out the door like this."

"Enough, Cassie. I grow weary of your worrying and prattling. End it now or I shall see you never again."

He left her on the floor where he'd pushed her. She did not rise, but lay there, crying. "You do not mean it." She clenched her tiny fists. "You cannot mean it."

And indeed, she prayed that was true—for his sake far more than for hers.

"Goodbye, Cassandra."

The slamming door had with it a finality, chilling and damning. It was precisely the kind of blow a person—a shiftling—protects him or herself from by trying not to get too attached to anyone or anything in this world.

It was already too late for her. Just as it probably was for Jase. Still, there was a chance to save him, if she could direct his course. And Tristans, too. They were headed for certain collision, but she might just be able to make it so they only sideswipe each other, allowing Jase to escape. Forever. It didn't matter if she didn't see him, or if he wanted his little human bitch. Instead she would know he was happy, and there was nothing more in this world that could matter to her.

Crawling on her knees, nicking them as she made her way across the wooden floor, she found the switchblade knife on one of the priceless teak tables. She could not remember who had left it. That oil billionaire, maybe. It was handsome enough with its gold design and mother of pearl inlay. But that was

aesthetics. What mattered now was its sharpness.

"Ana laku, manada ru," she began, holding the knife up, from her heart to the gods. *"Shamena saslay."*

She had invoked the ancient prayer and now there was only one thing left to do. Holding up her palm she struck at herself with the knife, opening a gash, long and angry and red across her palm. At once the pain screamed out of every broken cell, every shattered nerve fiber. The blood was fresh and clean. Hungrily, purposefully, she put it to her lips, slurping, drinking, drawing her own strength out of it.

But this was an exercise for Jase, not herself. Call it white magic, or divine supplication, even mental telepathy, forwarding her powers. No matter how you termed it, it was an expression of her deepest self. Of love.

A feeling that she would hold for him forever, though he would never acknowledge it, must less return it.

* * * *

Joanne could not move from the chair. It occurred to her it was late enough one or both of her parents might return, but she was glued to the spot, as if some enormous puddle of super epoxy were holding her right in place.

The analogy of the glue made her laugh, though there didn't seem to be anything particularly funny about what was happening to her. The bottom line was that she needed someone to tell her to get up,

someone to say it was all right and that she move on to the next thing in her life's agenda. Not that you could really have an agenda, or a life, after what she'd just been through. There was no relating to it, no making it into a memory, it was just something that had to lay there on her heart, the way it felt when she learned her grandmother had cancer and she was going to die, no matter how much her ten-year-old self loved the old woman.

Really, she needed to get upstairs. Funny, she didn't have a mark on her. The man had done quite a bit to her, though, hadn't he?

Wait—had she said man? Of course he wasn't a man, he was some kind of demon, a bat-haired, long tongued demon that had decided to set up shop in her neighborhood. How had he put it? Oh, yes, he was going to be the face on all her nightmares. Now wasn't that a pleasant thought.

At some point Joanne found herself creeping up her own stairs, afraid someone might see her like this, acting all on her own, not under orders. Should she crawl up to her bedroom like the slave she was? The symbolism would be sound, but doing so would slow her up intensely and there was no way she intended to be caught out like that, totally exposed. The stairs felt alien under her feet. With each creak of the sighing wood she felt afresh the hidden, closed-over wounds. There was no healing up of her psyche. She knew what was done and no one could make her forget.

A bat creature had dug at her neck, puncturing and drinking out of her throat whatever it wanted. And

her skull, it had drilled into her skull. Calling itself a man, it had broken into her parent's home, forced her to undress and done unspeakable things to her person. It had made her fear and lust and want all rolled into one.

It was a very old creature, she had determined this much about her new master. When first it began to walk the earth, things were much different, pretty bodies could be owned and men could be slaughtered, cut down in blood for the slightest of offenses against their sovereign. Houses were either thatched huts or castles and those who displeased the wealthy could be chained in dungeons, left to rot. And girls could be put there just for the pleasure of men, as convenient places for fucking and hurting and enjoying them. In the way she had been enjoyed.

A past, ancient era, thankfully in the recesses of history. Or was it? This creature, this vampyr, as he called himself, was speaking of a new order to come. Of slavery for the whole of her species. And he had the power to back him. She could feel that in his touch, his caress, in the way his tongue dabbed at her and plunged into the wounds made by his sharp teeth. Each of the bats she'd seen in the storm about his head was a fellow creature, a soldier in his army. Slowly, he had been amassing servants, agents who owed their everything to him. Convicted criminals, of his own court, captured fugitives, and even more strangely, beings of other dimensions, largely unseen in this world.

The moon was their portal. That bright silver disc a doorway from their world to here. It was fresh blood

that drew them, and the prospect of conquest. They lived to taste fear and despair and they craved the taking and making of slaves.

Slaves such as she had become.

There was no turning back. Still naked, body electrified, she leapt beneath her covers, drawing them up to her neck. Shivering, but feeling no cold, burning but knowing no heat, she lay, waiting, for what she did not understand. Twice she attempted to use the cell by her bedside. Once to call Nyte (voicemail) and once to call her mother (double voicemail).

Actually, she had no idea what she would have said to either one of them if they'd answered. When her mother finally came home, later on, she pretended to be asleep.

I'll wait till he comes for me, she thought. I'll be the bat's slut, waiting for him—holding on in readiness for whomever he chooses to send. This was the hard part, she thought, the not knowing how long it would be or how it would end.

But there was a peace in it, too, a sense of joy in her very loss of complete control. The idea made her jittery and agitated. And horny.

I am a slave, she shoved her hand between her sopping thighs. Just like that, I am a slave.

* * * *

"And you're sure she's legal?" the manager asked Wrench for the third time as the limber, dark haired beauty poured the sudsy pitcher over her head.

Wrench watched the breasts pop into view as the shirt plastered itself to Nyte's body. "She's legal to strip," he confirmed. "But not to drink."

"Yea, well, she's sure high on something," said the man with the crew cut, rolled up sleeves and flattened nose. "And I damn well don't want the cops finding anything on her."

"She ain't gonna be hiding much at this rate," Wrench lit a cigarette, leaning over the bar.

The man frowned. "Just get out of here quick. She makes me nervous."

"Some appreciation that is," Wrench snorted. "Considering the business she's doing for you."

It was true, the men were all gathered around Nyte, downing beers and scotches, plying her with drinks and generally carrying on like there was no tomorrow. She was the proverbial bitch in heat and Wrench was beginning to wonder how he could get her out of here without causing a riot.

"She's on bliss," Wrench confessed.

"Fuck," the barkeep muttered under his breath. "That's all I need. How long ago she get it?"

"Eight, ten hours, maybe."

He whistled. "I'm surprised she's on her feet."

"She's a fighter, that one. Going places, too, let me tell you."

"What are you," he sneered. "Her father?"

"Hope not," Wrench quipped. "I had her head in my lap in the john less than a half hour ago."

"Might try me the same," the barkeep enthused.

"I got no problem with that, just help me find a way to get her out of here peaceably, before she starts

World War Three."

Wrench was definitely getting too old for this shit. Hell, he was closer to the nursing home than he was to the bar scene anymore. Girls that were once young enough to be his daughters were turning up the age of granddaughters and the only thing he cared about anymore in lovemaking was getting through it without losing his erection to the ghost land of old age.

"I think I can be of service in that regard."

Wrench and the barkeep both looked at the newcomer. A man about forty with silver gray hair, a cleft chin, turtleneck and leather jacket.

"Oh, and exactly what are you gonna do?" the barkeep could barely contain his ridicule.

"I'll see the girl safely home."

Wrench licked his dry lips. Was this character for real? "Dude, no offense, but I don't know you from Adam, and there's no way I'm letting you take that kid outta here, not while she's my responsibility."

The man pursed his lips, very slightly. "Why don't you ask her yourself?"

Wrench decided to go along with the gag. "Sure thing. What'll I tell her your name is?"

"Tell her I'm here to take her to Jase," said the dark-eyed man with the half smirk on his face.

"Jase? Who the hell is that?"

Something in the coal black eyes glimmered, just for a second. "Just tell her," he said curtly, lips thin as a pencil line.

Wrench had a feeling he was coming real close to pushing this guy over the edge. The question, what

was on the other side? He ran about five foot eight and he was in decent shape, but he wasn't about to take on the likes of the barkeep or the room full of drunken bikers.

"I hope that's not a threat," Wrench decided to push a little. "Cause people don't take kindly to threats in here."

The eyes lightened. "I'm not in the business of threats. My apologies if it seemed that way. I'm...anxious. That's all."

Wrench wasn't buying it. He had half a mind to see if the guy was packing heat. Instead he went over to get the girl's input.

Nyte was in the process of teasing four or five of the men, lifting her shirt up and down so they could pour beer on her and lick it off. Another three were playing with her ass, putting their hands down her panties. Wrench didn't know where her leather skirt had ended up.

He made a mental note to kick Zane's ass good and hard for bringing this kid to the house in the first place. She should have stayed home, giggling with her girlfriends and doing her nails.

"Excuse me, I need the lady a minute." He had her by the arm.

"Oh, Wrench," she grinned. "It's you. You ready to fuck me yet?"

The others looked at him with a mixture of resentment and jealousy, all clouded together with liquor.

"What the fuck you doin', old-timer?" one of them demanded, a big man with a beard and chains

decorating his leather jacket like Christmas tree garlands.

"Yea, give us the bitch back," said a second, a scary looking dude with a huge scar from his left cheek across his chin and down his neck. "Or we'll cut you like a fucking melon."

Switchblades were already drawn to make the point.

"We don't want any trouble," insisted Wrench. "Just cut us some slack, okay? The kid's eighteen, she got wasted, and I'm the world's sorriest motherfucker for bringing her here."

"You got that right," a six-foot plus, three hundred pound man in a wool cap and a surplus army jacket said, moving in dangerously close.

"I think you all want to back off," said the man with the turtleneck, who'd apparently decided keeping his nose out of this was too fucking smart for him to manage.

"Don't make it worse," Wrench counseled.

"Not at all. If you'll allow me." The man in the turtleneck took Nyte's arm and turned her away from the wall of deprived tit-suckers and panty-pullers.

"Who the fuck are you?" Nyte wanted to know.

"I'm your uncle Jase. You haven't seen me since you were a baby."

Nyte was clearly responding to the name, though Wrench was picking up on the new line—he'd gone from being the guy who would take her to this Jase to being Jase himself. "Hold on, dude, you just changed your story."

"Who the fuck is he, anyway?" One of the drunks

asked.

"He looks like a little faggot to me," said a second.

"I say we stomp some sense into the bastard," shouted yet another. "Who's with me?"

Every mouth opened in agreement, the wide range of accented yeses being nicely punctuated with belches.

"And let's rape the little bitch, too," someone put in as an afterthought.

Well, that's original, thought Wrench.

"Here goes nothing," he muttered, fists cocked in readiness for what he knew would be a sound ass whipping in defense of the girl.

The fight never came. In fact, the next thing he knew, Nyte was gone, and the creepy turtleneck dude, too.

"What the fuck?" said the guy with the beard and the dangling chains, pretty much speaking for everybody.

Wrench scratched his head. "Beats the hell out of me."

"It's like some kind of UFO shit," said the barkeep.

"The fuck it is," called the guy with the army jacket. "It's just the beer talking."

"Beer don't make people disappear, asshole," said the bearded man, the only one big enough to challenge him.

"No, but my fists can make you disappear."

"Easy, gents. How about fresh ones all around?" called out the barkeep. There was a cheer and almost immediately things went back to normal.

Wrench and the bar man were the last two talking

about it.

"I know what I seen," he told Wrench. "And nobody will ever tell me otherwise."

"Tell me about it. I brought the girl in here, for Crissakes."

"Then you better say a prayer for her."

"I'm an atheist."

"Yea? Well after seeing what we just seen, you might better reconsider."

Wrench put in for another beer, and a double whisky, too. "You got a point," he concurred. "I might just reconsider at that."

* * * *

Nyte was just a little seasick from the gondola. The really odd part was that she'd never even heard of one before, and here she was thinking about being sick in one while floating down the Grand Canal in Venice.

"It'll get better," promised the man opposite her. "Just try the wine."

She took the glass of red wine, very, very dry. "Do I know you?"

"We've never met."

"In the bar; we were in a bar," she insisted. "But how did I get here?"

"Don't you like it?" he asked.

"I like it fine," she tried to be polite. "I just want to go home."

The boat swayed ever so slightly. The stars in the sky were magnificent, sharp and bright, diamonds

laid on a velvet background. Buildings rose along either side of the water, magnificent monuments, with tall stone pillars and plenty of simpler houses, terracotta, the water lines in front indicating just how long this city had been battling the rising tides.

"There is no more beautiful place in the world," the man told her. "Your race takes credit, but it belongs to mine."

"What do you mean, your race?"

"The wine," he reminded. "Drink the wine."

Yes, the wine. She had to keep it all straight. This was the man from the bar, who knew Jase's name, and he was taking somewhere, maybe to find him.

"Do your parents let you drink?"

"My father's dead, and my mother's too much of a lush herself to care. Me, I could take it or leave it."

"Your thing is fucking."

"Hey, you can't talk to me that way."

"But isn't it true? You spread your legs whenever you're told." He had a cane and he was running it up the inside of her leg, under the red dress she was wearing. "Have you even said no to anyone?"

Nyte tried to push him away. "Now's a great time to start, don't you think?"

He cracked the cane down hard on her thigh through the soft cotton, though it still felt like it was on naked skin. "Sit still. And open your legs."

Her leg stinging terribly, Nyte obeyed.

"I do hope you're going to be more cooperative than Joanne," he said, probing for a reaction.

"Joanne?" she sat forward, forgetting his instructions. "What have you done with my friend?"

The man poked her breast hard with the tip of the cane. "Legs," he repeated.

Nyte opened herself. "I want to see my friend."

"Lift up your dress," he said impatiently. "Let's have at that cunt."

"Go to hell. It's not for you."

But it might be for you, she thought winking at the handsome young gondolier, busily piloting them in his straw hat and striped shirt, his chest rippling with muscles.

"You've earned your punishment," he declared, setting about to beat her, slowly and methodically, taking his shots where available. The majority landed on her arms and across her ribs on account of her trying to cover herself. She drew up her legs, making herself small, but still he came after her, wearing down her ability to resist, blow by blow.

"Stop," she pleaded. "And I'll give you what you want."

"No negotiations. I accept only your unconditional surrender."

"I surrender then! Completely!"

"Remove the dress. Throw it overboard."

Nyte looked around. It was quite dark, she saw no one around and besides, this was some kind of illusion anyway. Unzipping and pulling the garment over her head was a challenge in the moving boat. Twice she nearly fell overboard.

"Remove the underwear as well," he commanded.

Now she was down to garters and stockings, and a pair of high-heeled black shoes. "Are we really in Venice?" she asked stupidly.

"Stand for a moment, let me look at you. Yes. Let the light catch you."

She tried to pose, like a nude in some old painting or photo. "I feel foolish," she said, trying to balance herself.

"That's because you've no sense of style. Very well," he sighed. "Let's try something you do understand. Turn around and get down on all fours."

"W—what are you going to do?"

"I think you know the answer to that question."

He was going to fuck her in the ass. She wasn't sure how she knew that, but she did. "I'm a virgin back there," she lied.

"I know better, silly girl. I've already read your mind."

Had he, though? And if so, could he keep up with her?

On sheer instinct, she dove over the side of the boat. "Like the locals say," she bid him farewell. "Sayonara."

"That's Japanese, not Italian," he called out.

She didn't care. The water was surprisingly warm, like soup. Though instead of floating in it, she sank like a stone, nearly to the bottom. It was difficult to see in front of her face and there were small objects, bits of debris, hitting her constantly. The water, if that's what it was, kept thickening, making it harder to swim. Meanwhile, behind her, she could feel the man closing in. Racing after her, like a shark.

He wanted her asshole.

Her ankle was the first part of her to be nipped and she thrashed wildly. The son of a bitch was biting her.

On up her calves, closer and closer to her vital organs. She screamed as the claws reached her back.

What the hell was it?

Her voice didn't carry in the water. Not even when the thing tore into her neck.

* * * *

Nyte must have passed out, or else maybe she was never awake in the first place. Because now she was nowhere near Venice, nowhere near any gondolas. In fact, she was as far away as one could get. Even the chic modern dress was gone, replaced with a long, medieval one, a velvet gown of pale blue.

Rising from the thin bed on which she'd been seated, she went to the bars that comprised the front of her world. Nyte was in a prison cell, a very ancient one, like a dungeon. Heavy shackles connected her wrists, with a foot of chain between.

"Hello?" She called out tentatively into the dimly lit corridor, her hands gripping the ice-cold bars. There was no response, just the motion of the shadow of the wall torch as the orange flame danced in the open air.

"Is anyone there?" She heard trickling water and somewhere in the distance, a scream very faint. "Please, I must know where I am!"

An outer door of some kind burst open and a moment later a guard came to the cell door. He wore chain mail, a helmet upon his head, dented and rusty. In his hand was a short club of some kind. "Be quiet, shiftling bitch," he growled.

Nyte cried out as he smashed her clinging knuckles with the wooden club, driving her away from the door.

"Let that be a lesson," he pointed the well-worn stick. "The next time you'll get a different kind of banging."

There was no mistaking his meaning as he grabbed his cock and balls through the red tights. "Now just sit your pretty ass back down, and we'll have no more trouble."

"Yes, sir," she retreated meekly to the narrow bed wedged against in the corner.

"I'm not scared of you, you know," he was saying, apparently for his benefit as much as hers. "I don't care what they say you are. I'll bugger you sure enough, and make you squeal for mercy. Unholy she-wolf, my ass—I'd make you into my little pet bitch quicker than you could say holy war."

They have me mistaken for someone else, thought Nyte, but he seemed in no mood to listen.

"Isn't that right?" he taunted, pushing his link-covered belly against the bars, his erection tenting the dirty gray pants. "One taste of this cock and you'd be tame as a kitten. Go on, come on over, give it a suck, you know you want to."

He was actually taking it out, a filthy, smelly organ for her to consume. The miserable bastard wanted her on her knees for him.

"Please, I don't want trouble. My name is Nyte, I live on 65 Clover Leaf Circle. I go to Templeton High School. My homeroom teacher is Mr. White."

He frowned. "Whatever witchcraft that be, it don't

frighten me." He took out his skeleton key and thrust it into the lock. "Yes sirree, I know to silence shiftling witches."

The guard entered the cell, his club at the ready. "Down," he commanded.

Nyte slipped from the mattress onto the floor. The stone was cold and damp and the straw laid on top of it pricked her kneecaps through the dress. If this was some kind of nightmare or another hallucination from the drug she'd taken, it sure was realistic.

"You'll take it deep, bitch, or I'll crack your head wide open."

Nyte did not wait for him to demonstrate with the club. Gaping her jaws, she allowed him to feed his cock between his lips. The skin of it was almost black from lack of hygiene and it was all she could do to keep from vomiting.

"That's it, girlie. Do me right."

The guard's balls slapped her chin as he rammed himself in and out. Nyte thought she might die—but, then, perhaps she was already dead and in hell.

"Oh, the load I'm gonna fill you with," he was gloating, his voice a soft growl. "Better than anything you've ever tasted."

Nyte braced herself to swallow, but just as he readied himself to orgasm, a man came up behind him, interrupting.

"That will be enough, soldier," declared a man wearing a long, hooded black robe. "You may dismiss yourself."

The guard froze. Quickly, he withdrew his glistening, saliva-covered cock and shoved it back in

his disgusting pants. "Yes, sir. Right away, sir," the guard said nervously as Nyte returned meekly to her place on the bed. "And may I say, Your Excellency, that I intended no blasphemy."

The robed gentleman put his hand on the guard's shoulder. Nyte felt a chill down her spine as she realized it was the same man as on the gondola, and before that, from the bar.

"It is quite all right, my son. Go to the confessional," he said. "Admit your sins. Let the priest guide you."

The guard looked infinitely relieved. "Yes, Your Excellency, thank you, Your Excellency."

The robed man waited till the guard had left the cell. "Oh, and one more thing, my good man."

"Yes, Holy Inquisitor?"

"When you have finished your confession and made your sign of contrition, you will go to the tallest parapet of the castle, plunge a dagger into your breast and jump into the moat as an added penance."

The blood drained instantly from the man's face. Nyte knew at once that he would obey, terrible as the sentence was.

"Yes, Holy Inquisitor," he whispered. One quick, bewildered look at Nyte and off he went, walking already like half a ghost.

"We've not actually had a formal introduction," noted the inquisitor, closing the cell door behind him. "My apologies. May I?"

She watched as he pulled a rough-hewn wooden stool from the far corner and set it across from her.

"You are Nyte, " he seated himself. "A lovely

name. Appropriate, too, I might add. I am called Tristans."

She refused his extended hand. "Am I dreaming all this?"

"All life is a dream, at least for mortals."

"I was in that bar. With Wrench. After that, everything's a blur. He said I took some bliss. Maybe that's what this is about."

Tristans pulled down his hood. He bore a resemblance to Jase, though there was a cruelty to his features, a darkness in the eyes that indicated unpredictable violence. "Actually, you are in a very real jail cell. Many of my kind have languished in such places. As a matter of fact, you are scheduled to be burnt at the stake, following a lengthy torture. Would you like to know the details? The highlight will be your rape, fore and aft, with a red hot poker."

Nyte shook her head. "This can't be happening."

"Oh, but it did, over and over. In that case you are in the year 1453, in a dungeon belonging to the Duke of Molenon. I will have the privilege of conducting it all, in my role as the Holy Inquisitor, in charge of rooting out shape shifters such as myself. A bit ironic, don't you think?"

"You can have anything you want. You can make love to me," she pleaded.

The one called Tristans scoffed. "You want to bribe me with your body? It's of no value, my dear. I can have you as I wish already. Just as I did your little blonde friend."

Nyte's heart seized in her chest. "Joanne! What did you do to her?"

Tristans leaned forward, whispering in great detail, his mouth close to her ear. Tears dotted her eyes. This is all my fault, she thought. I should never have ditched her today. We were supposed to go to school together. Sisters in red, because she'd seen the silly death card on the Tarot.

"Yes, that's it," he encouraged. "Weep in anticipation. Great will be your suffering—unless you tell me what I want to know."

"About what? What could I possibly tell you?"

He lifted her chin. "We shall find that out in due course. In a moment, I will rape you, and the fun will begin."

She recoiled from his touch, her head spinning. "You are the devil. I have overdosed on the bliss and I'm dead."

"Oh, no. You are very much alive." He grabbed the links of her chain. "You are in my world, and you will stay there till I let you go. Think of it as being inside one of your vapidly childish video games. I make the scenarios, and you must live through them. Historical, futuristic, phantasmical. Whatever I wish. I can even change my own appearance if I like. I'm quite proud of my new powers. They grow daily as my kingship approaches."

Nyte screamed as he turned himself into Hank. "Time to play, kitten," he pushed her down onto the bed, fumbling under her pale blue skirts.

"No, not him," she wailed. "Anything but that."

"Very well, never let it be said I am not a generous man."

Once again Tristans changed his appearance and

this time it was too terrible to behold. Pinning the girl down with a hundred claws, a cloud of dark wings flapping about his pestilent face, the gaping mouth, a sinking cesspool ringed by a hundred blackened teeth, sharp as ice picks.

She turned her head, her terror beyond verbalizing, her entire body a shaking, convulsing sob as inch by inch the thing stripped away her dress. Oh, God help her, she was wet. She couldn't help but want the snaking cock, a devious, devouring worm that would poison her even as it bought her off with cheap pleasure.

"Do not close your eyes!" It hissed, threatening punishments even worse. She delayed too long and it peeled away her eyelids by itself. This time she saw the only thing worse than a monster, the only guise more psychologically destructive for a girl's rapist to have than that of a fallen vampyr.

"Daddy!" She screamed. "No!"

But its too late, she can't put up her walls fast enough. He—it—gets in, long enough to sink its teeth into her neck, like ice picks in her bloodstream and drill bits driven into her brain.

Time moves to slow motion, everything clicked off in the present.

We have shared, it tells her. And now I know all that you know...

It is poised to finish her off, but suddenly she hears it make a scream of its own, blood curdling. Something is attacking from behind. A monster upon the monster.

A wolf.

You're through, Tristans. I will kill you for this.

She hears Jase's voice, spoken between the shiftlings, on a level of communication not known to humans. She is privy to this and much more by virtue of her position.

Ever the chivalrous knight, eh, Jase? So predictable. In life, and in death...

The wolf growls from deep in its gut. Tristans is torn off her and thrown across the cell into the wall. The wolf—Jase—pounces, going for the throat.

Nyte, he called to her. Run. Run as fast as you can.

"No, let me stay and help!"

You...can't. This is more than you can understand. He sounded breathless. She was afraid she was distracting him.

"I'll go, for you. But promise you'll find me."

I will...I swear it.

Nyte ran from the dungeon cell, down the darkened hallway. She found a set of stairs, and at the top of those a rounded wooden door. Cautiously, having no idea what was on the other side, she opened it.

"Gotcha!" A man grabbed her wrist, dragging her out into the light.

Nyte was back in the bar, just outside the ladies bathroom.

"What's the matter?" snarled Hank, who was the man keeping hold of her. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Sorry, man," said the barkeep. "We didn't realize she was only eighteen. I mean, she's legal, but, hell, she's still in high school."

Hank slipped the man a twenty-dollar bill. "It's not your fault, buddy. Michelle's a tramp. Just like her mother."

"Wrench!" she called out to the lanky biker, who

was down at the corner of the bar nursing a beer. "Help me! He's going to beat me!"

Wrench shrugged awkwardly. "Not my business, kiddo. That's between you and your stepdaddy."

"He's not my stepdaddy!" She wailed.

Hank waited till they were alone in the parking lot to slap her. "You're only making this worse, you know that. Now take off those clothes and get in the trunk."

Tears streamed down her face. "You're going to kill me this time, aren't you? Please don't. I'll be a good girl, I swear."

She was trying to fall down on her knees to suck him, but he was having none of it. "Kill you? Christ, where do you get these crazy ideas? I'm just gonna teach you a lesson, is all. One you won't forget."

Nyte stripped for him, handing over her garments, piece by piece.

"Get in," he opened the trunk of his sedan.

Nyte climbed in gingerly, trying to avoid the used oilcans and black, grease-soaked rags that littered the bottom of the worn metal surface.

"Quit being such a prima donna." He pushed her down face first.

"Hank, wait," she cried.

Hank grabbed one of the rags and pushed it between her jaws. She wanted to retch.

"Give me your hands," he ordered.

Lying pathetically on her side, she held up her wrists. He closed them in a pair of ordinary handcuffs. She hoped he'd let her off easy, but he had rope, too, long coils of it to wrap around her ankles

and loop up to the handcuffs. Drawing the knot tight, he was able to pull her wrists all the way down to her feet, rendering her totally helpless.

"You know," he mused, pausing to run his hands casually up and down her sleek young body, "it's a pity you're such a fucked-up little cunt. 'Cause otherwise, you and me could hook up. Hell, you could even carry my babies."

He was rubbing the side of her tits like he owned them and lightly slapping her flanks. "What have we here?" He poked between her sopping thighs. "I guess you feel the same for me, huh?"

Hank blew her a kiss. She'd never hated a human being more in her life. If only she could be a wolf like Jase, she would tear this fucker to shreds and spit out every last disgusting piece so it didn't contaminate her stomach.

"You don't look so happy, my girl. Time for Nyte to go night-night," he mocked.

She shook her head frantically. He couldn't shut her in darkness like this. He knew she was claustrophobic.

"Bon voyage," he grinned, taking a last moment to savor her misery before slamming down the lid.

And just like that, Nyte's world was total darkness. A confining metal prison, little more than a cage or casket. Hank started the engine and peeled out. Every little bump was like a jolt to her core. Why the hell was she so horny? It was that Tristans' fault for putting her in all those bizarre situations, tapping into all these strange sexy-scary places in her brain and then not satisfying her.

Of maybe it was Jase. Her wolf. Damn, she wanted him bad. He was fine. The finest thing on two or four legs. If there was no other reason for her to survive whatever new ordeal Hank had for her, it was to get her own little claws into her lover's delicious hide.

And Joanne. Shit. How could she forget her friend? If Tristans had really had his way with her, there was no telling what shape she was in. Had Jase not interrupted, she'd have gone that way, too, and sexually exciting as it would have been, it would also have done a number on her head big time.

I won't die, she vowed, clenching her fists and her pussy, simultaneously. I'm a survivor, and goddamn it, I will get my revenge.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jase did not let go of the neck of Tristans. If indeed it could be called a neck. His old nemesis had grown much stronger since their last contest. He was evolving, shedding his old form and assuming a new one. Indeed, he could no longer be sure what sort of shiftling he was anymore. Something new, perhaps, a mutation, a variation of vampyr without precedence. It was hate fueling him and jealousy. Honed to razor sharpness by ambition.

And this is what worried Jase most as the huge creature whirled him round and round in an attempt to dislodge his teeth from its body. Tristans could no longer be considered the Chief Guardian, but some new agent acting for his own ends. Blood was the solution, the drinking of it now — every last ounce that flowed through his veins.

Tristans unleashed a mighty roar, black and cavernous from out of his foul mouth. It was no use, though, Jase would not let go. Making a monumental effort, he sunk his claws in all the deeper. He would stop him, here, now. For good.

But Tristans had one more card to play.

The tentacle snapped at Jase like a whip. By all that was holy, none of his kind should have such limbs! Again, he was struck. And now there was a second of these tendrils about his throat. Choking him. Crushing his windpipe.

Tristans was laughing and mutating again.

The wolf now battled a snake with many heads, each a sharp, poisonous mouth that jabbed and cut and tore at his fur. He could get no oxygen. Whimpers escaped his throat. He had become the torn, whipped dog.

Tristans read his every thought and encouraged the negative.

You are going to die. I am judge and jury and executioner. The poor little wolf. Once mighty, now very guilty, pitiful little wolf. Too bad you won't live to see me crowned king of two worlds...

Jase seized upon his last breath, thinking of sweet Cassandra, who'd been there from the beginning, and of Nyte, who'd emerged at the end of his life and who constituted his one and only regret. If only he could have known her better; touched her heart and soul, made love to her sweet little body, licking her from head to toe, making her giggle and moan, the white-skinned naked female on her back, utterly subdued and open to the playful wolf, the lustful wolf, the tireless wolf.

Goodbye, Jase, the creature silently hissed, the hideous thing that had emerged from what had once been Tristans. *And good riddance.*

Goodbye, indeed. An ignominious end, and for a grave he would lie in a dumpster on the streets he

had loved so well, a bed of garbage to sustain him, rats to gnaw at his flesh. Lifting him high in the air, Tristans carried his broken form to the nearest alley. Spitting him out into the filthy green metal container, Tristans blew him a kiss.

Using the last of his strength, Jase turned back into human form. Let them find me this way, he thought, so that the humans who find me be caused no added discomfort or fear seeing my animal form.

Assuming anyone even looked inside these things before trucking them to the waste disposal sites.

* * * *

Cassandra was with a customer when he came to the door; the pounding so loud she could not ignore it. It did no good to beg for the human's life. Tristans squashed him like a bug, then burnt the remains with his fiery eyes.

He'd been a bank vice-president, thirty-three with dimples, a kindly smile. In his wallet he carried pictures of his children and his pretty wife, whom he liked to brag about all the time.

"Jase is dead," Tristans told her after reducing the man to ashes. "I have crowned myself king of the shiftlings."

Cassandra clutched the sheet to her breast, unsure what to react to first. "You are wounded," she said meekly. "I will attend to you."

"No." He grabbed the sheet, pushing her back onto the bed. "We will fuck first, then you will clean my wounds."

"Yes, Tristans," she whispered, barely resisting the impulse to call him lord. Could it be true? Had her prayers gone unanswered? Had her attempt to manipulate the heavens failed to create the near miss needed to spare both their lives?

"Your hands are like ice," she said as he grabbed her hips.

"And you stink of humanity."

Cassandra's cheeks reddened, though it had been centuries since she'd felt the least amount of shame for doing what she did to stay alive.

Without preamble, he entered her, his cock rock hard, his pelvis pushing her painfully down onto the bed. The man's body above hers was ghostly pale, unhealthily so, and he was bleeding as well, from out of a series of gashes on his upper arms and his chest. The sinews of his neck were a mess, though he'd apparently managed to staunch the worst of the blood loss with the application of his own saliva. Overall, he'd done admirably well to keep himself from bleeding to death.

"Things will change now, Cassandra. Crimes will be avenged. The pride of our race will be restored. The race of men will pay."

Cassie tried to resist the waves of pleasure from his smooth, manly motions. She could not now afford to go stupid in her head. "We have survived, Tristans. What greater pride can there be?"

He smiled, his lips bloodless. "You have never told me, Cassandra, how it is you survived the attack. Indeed, after the scattering of our people, you and I were not reunited for many decades. What exactly

did you do in that interval?"

Cassandra squirmed beneath him. She did not wish to have this conversation, not did she wish to be used this way. "Tristans, please. You know the Code allows us the right to protect our secrets in the dark times—as it allows me the right to do with my body as I wish to support myself."

"True. But the Code also forbids one of our kind to become a slave to the humans. Again I ask, Cassandra, what became of you, exactly, beginning from that day the so-called crusaders sacked our castle and burnt our lands?"

She pushed at him with her palms, but he seized them both, pinning her wrists together overhead with a single one of his hands. Leaning into her with his hip, he took prisoner her left nipple. "Talk," said he with the cruel and eerie patience of a trained torturer.

Cassandra knew she would never hold out. Pain had always been her weakness, which is why she had refused a noble death on that tragic day. "I shall tell you," she wilted, "I shall tell you everything."

"Begin. And leave out no detail."

Her nipple still clamped and her pussy invaded, Cassandra began her tale, putting words to memories she had never before voiced to a living soul.

"I was in the courtyard. We knew there was little time and there was debate as to how to conduct ourselves. Many of the young warriors, too young to be already on the battlefield, wanted a fight to the death, a chance to tear as many of the enemy apart as they could manage in their beast forms. But the old king spoke against them, saying that this would only

insure their victory. Some must survive. Perhaps the future might be better. If even a few avoided death by unnatural causes, taking advantage of our species two thousand year life span, then we could hold out hope of one day rebuilding.

"You and Jase and the rest of the mature warriors were already defending us, on the battlefield in your human forms, so you were not privy to these discussions. What was eventually decided was that some of us would try to escape, while the rest would sacrifice their lives to keep the humans at bay. I was among those chosen to live, though I did not want to. The king and the other elders gave the orders, however, and I had to obey.

"There were five in my group. Three male and two female. We rode on horseback at full gallop, escaping south. Our goal was to reach the river valley and from there, to make it the relative safety of the gypsy lands. We made good time, stopping only twice for water the whole of that first day and into the night. Finally, at the brink of exhaustion, we were required to rest. Not daring to make a fire, we huddled in the dark, two at a time keeping watch.

Unfortunately, both the warriors guarding us fell asleep and were overcome by marauders. This left us three, the one remaining warrior, myself and a younger female named Alaysia. These ones who took us were soldiers, deserters from the battlefield on the hunt of booty. We had nothing of value to offer them, save our bodies.

"We were given a chance to live, if we declared ourselves their slaves. As you well know, it is not in

our way to accept imbondment, and though the Code by which we live now was not yet written, I still knew it a crime to yield. Alaysia, barely of age, with long dark hair, clung to me trembling.

"The one brave warrior, a were-hawk, shouted for our captors to go to the devil. Running at the soldiers, he was run through with the sword. Now it was our turn. What choice did have? We dared not show our animal form, for this would alert them to look for more of our kind in the area.

"'We must do as our brother,' whispered the girl to me. I nodded, my mouth paralyzed in fright. I was supposed to shout with her and run with her into the points of their blades, but something held me back. Oh, Tristans, you do not know how ashamed I am to say this, but I held my ground, standing as a statue. Alone did Alaysia cry out, and alone did she meet her death.

"Now it was only myself and the marauders. They cleaned their blades on Alaysia's skirts and then they looked at me. 'And what about you, little bird,' asked their bearded leader. 'Will you sing for us?'

"I said nothing as they approached me, but neither did I resist. They formed a circle about me and began to touch me. I trembled like a leaf, though I was still too paralyzed to speak.

"'I think you'd like to be our slave, wouldn't you?' the man cooed, toying with my golden curls.

"'Of course, she would,' said another, holding a knife to my breast. I began to whimper as he ran it slowly, very lightly over my exposed chest, just above the bodice of my low cut dress. He was very

thorough, slipping the cold metal over every inch of my skin, all the way up to my cheeks. He even made me open my mouth and lick it with my tongue. They made crude jokes about my oral skills.

"Another man was behind me, pinching my behind with his mail-gloved fists. 'Undress,' the man with the knife commanded. 'Let us see the body you are giving us.'

"I told myself it was not as it seemed. I was dreaming. I would wake up. These men did not exist. They would not take me. They would not use me. But they did and they would. Methodically and brutally. Widening the circle, they waited for me to do my part. Already some of them were taking off their armor and peeling off their sweaty shirts. I saw cocks exposed, too—each of which I would come to know so very, very well.

"They called me a highborn bitch and as I stepped barefoot from my dress, they ordered me to throw it upon the fire they had built. They were letting me know how I would not wear such fine clothes again. Most of my undergarments, too, I was made to burn, though the bearded leader held back the last item, a thin, knee-length chemise.

"Holding it up to my face, he told me if I cooperated I would be able to earn it back, whereas if I failed to please them, I would continue my travels with them naked. It had not dawned on me up to then they would really keep me. At last I found my voice.

"'Please,' I begged. 'I do not wish to be a slave. Kill me instead.'

"They laughed at me and told me it was too late, I

already was. It was then I felt my first taste of the lash.

“‘Down on all fours,’ one of them commanded me, striking my back with a leather strap.

“‘And that,’ said the leader when I had fallen to my hands and knees. ‘Is where slaves belong.’

“I was not taken immediately. First they made me crawl on the ground, kissing and licking their boots. When I was slow to move or insufficiently servile in my groveling, the man with the strap would strike at me, on my back and thighs and ass. They amused themselves, making me scamper like a little whore. Before too long they wanted me licking their cocks as well, and now there was an entirely new area of deficiency to beat me for. I had taken my lovers in my mouth before, but this was no act of love. It was degradation, pure and simple, with impossibly high standards to meet. They were teaching what it meant to be a slave, what it meant that I had declined the more noble path of death.

“The strap continued to fall upon my defenseless, burning skin as I took the first one in my mouth. It was the leader. Immediately, he grabbed me by the hair, forcing me deep. His breathing was fast and hard and he came in my mouth after only a few thrusts. He promised the next time would be slower and sent me to the next man down in rank. I took them each in turn, sometimes swallowing and sometimes having their thick, white seed sprayed upon my face and hair. They timed it well so that by the time I’d satisfied the last one the leader was ready for me again.

"He mounted me from behind now, commenting on how wet and fragrant I was. It humiliated me to be aroused this way, but I was helpless, for the power of these men had touched something deep and sexual inside of me. They made me come, too, forcing me to feel every bit of the pleasure they did.

It went on and on, sometimes in twos, with a man behind and another in my hot and willing mouth. My ass they saved for last. The leader had this privilege first. Compelling me to lick his cock for lubrication ahead of time, he plunged himself between my virgin cheeks. I screamed into the night air, cold and dirty and in pain, but even this aroused me in a dark, mysterious way.

"When they were finally done with me, I was not allowed to put on the chemise, but I was allowed a horse blanket, which they laid on top of me as I slept. I was on my side in the dirt, my ankles bound to my wrists. A gag was thrust in my mouth, made from some scrap of filthy material. A number of times in the night I was awoken by one or another to pleasure them orally, which meant I was still exhausted by morning.

Showing no mercy, I was marched to an ice-cold river and forced in at spear point. I washed myself as best I could in the small amount of time they gave me. Afterwards, freezing cold and sopping wet, I was bound across the leader's saddle for a hard day's ride. For the better part of two weeks, it was much the same, sex all night, and bondage by day. Finally I was sold in a wealthy city, far to the east. From there, I was sold as a concubine to the harem of a prince, who

eventually set me free upon his deathbed.

"And there you have it, Tristans. The whole, shameful truth."

Tristans eased his penis from her, making her whimper with need. "And did you expect mercy for your honesty—late as it is in coming?"

"No, I did not," she moaned.

"And as well you shall not receive it. You may beg, Cassandra, for my cock."

She blinked, moist-eyed, knowing herself had. "P—please, Tristans, do not deny me."

He leaned back upon one elbow, his weight on his hip as he faced her. "You are a slave, Cassandra."

"I was," she confessed readily. "Before I was freed. My master was Prince Maurizio."

"This prince was a human, was he not?"

"Yes."

"Then I do not recognize his power to free you."

"But the ones who enslaved me were also human."

Tristans grabbed her throat. "Do you presume to argue with me...slave?"

"No," she gasped.

He tightened his grip. "Really, this is unfortunate, Cassandra. I had plans to make you my queen. As it is, I am barely decided to let you live at all."

She looked at him pitifully.

"I know you have no pride," he spoke for her. "I know you will beg for bondage yet again—a chance to grovel and obey as a piece of property rather than face death. It's hardly worth my even asking, but I shall nonetheless. So, my dear, which is it, slavery or death?"

Cassandra bit her lip, drawing a tight breath as his fingers found the way to her sex, winding round her golden curls and pressuring her clitoris. "I want...to live," she breathed raggedly.

He continued to play with her, watching her arch her back. She'd kept her hands over her head, just where he'd held them down. Signs of a natural slave if ever there were one.

"The correct answer is 'I want to live, master'."

"I want to live, master."

Tristans stole a small orgasm from her. Just enough to leave her craving more. "Attend to me, slave girl. Lick and kiss my balls, but do not touch my cock."

Cassandra slid down the bed to put herself in place.

"You're quite good as a bond slut," he observed the attentive female. "Now put your hands behind your back, as though bound in place."

Tristans rolled to his back, allowing the slave to please him. He directed her slowly, maximizing his own pleasure while insuring her complete transformation into what she was already in her heart.

He took everything from her, requiring her to milk his seed and lick his wounds both. With the absorption of the blood and pain of the battle with Jase, she learned the truth of what had happened to him. She saw the werewolf's valiant fight against a greater power and his ultimate defeat, culminating in an unceremonious depositing in a refuse container in a back alley. She wept real tears of salt, which only added to Tristans' pleasure.

"I shall enjoy owning you, Cassie," he stroked her hair. "Especially knowing how you loved him so. It would have broken his heart, don't you think—seeing all the things I intend to do to you? You'll be my pet, Cassandra, on all fours for the world to see. Who but the true king of the shiftlings could own the world's first shiftling slave? Who but the ruler of men and were-beasts alike would dare to be so bold?"

He lifted her now, bidding her to sit astride his cock. She was so very lovely, her cheeks flushed, the blood, his blood, still on her lips. Soon she would grow weak, very weak, from the healing act she had performed. She would have to sleep. For a long, long time. Plenty of time for him to prepare her new life for her. To forge the chains that would be her only clothing and the cage of gold that would be her home. And the collar that would mark her as his, as well. Subject to his wrath, his lust, his whip.

"Writhe, little Cassie, writhe." He lifted her up off of him, commanding her motions above him. Her head tossed to and fro, the golden hair flapping in an invisible breeze. On her face, tortured bliss—oh, how he wanted in her head, to feel all that torture she endured, to know what it was like for a shiftling female to crawl and suck the dicks of men, to surrender pride for life.

He must drink her blood soon, savoring the vintage of her torment. It would inspire him to treat not only her with more cruelty, but all those others beneath him. Tristans felt a tinge of regret that he had not partaken of the blood of Jase's suffering. Too easily had he discarded the corpse, filled as it was

with a fortune in delightful intoxicant for him. He must go back, suck dry the corpse. But first, he'd come in the hole of the little slave girl. The once high and mighty Cassandra, ever too good for the likes of him, arm in arm as she was with her precious boyfriend, the beloved of the court and of the old king – childless buffoon that he was.

Well it was a new day now, and a new era had begun. One that would see his own pleasure before that of anyone else.

Grabbing his slave's tits, he shoved his pelvis against her, injecting her helpless pussy. Here was another challenge to be overcome. Ever since the fall of the kingdom, there had been not one baby among their kind. It was as if they were sterile outside of their traditional home, in their traditional world order. With him as king, there would be birth again and pregnancy.

This slave would be his test case. Wide-hipped, sweetly breasted, intelligent and healthy, she would make a fine brood mare. Chained and caged and beaten, held in her place, delivering him sons to rule beyond him, forever and ever.

Cassie moaned, orgasming along with him. She was limp as a rag doll and he had to hold her up by her arms. When he'd pumped the last of his sperm inside her, he lifted her off him and put her on her back. Her eyes were already closed. The heavy sleep had come. When next she awoke there would a gold collar on her neck, never to be removed, gold shackles on her wrist and a gold cage holding her lovely, sleeping form.

He pictured her on her side, legs drawn up inside of it. He would make it small—too small for her to recline or sit up completely. The thought made him hard again instantly. He must get to work, though. Summoning his fellow guardians and recovering the body of his enemy.

Let the reign of terror begin.

CHAPTER FIVE

Maizy Rae had wanted to be a model. When she came to the big city, a man told her he'd help her take some photos for a portfolio and get her a few auditions. What he did was take her life savings after making her fuck him and a couple of his friends. Thrown out into the street with nothing but the clothes on her back, it was only a matter of time till the halfway attractive brunette found herself in the clutches of a pimp.

Maizy's pimp was named Ezy G and he treated her about as well as you would a dog. Assuming you didn't like the dog very much. For starters, Maizy didn't keep a nickel of the money she collected by selling her body on the streets. And if she didn't make enough of it, Ezy G would beat her, right out there in the avenue if he had to. Getting herself arrested was also worth a beating, as was getting robbed, which was why Maizy was holding onto her purse for dear life at this very moment.

"Have a heart," she begged the six-foot-five robber in the workout suit, his neck covered in gold chains. "You don't know what he'll do to me."

"Let go, bitch," he growled. "Jeezus, it's just money."

The man punched her hard, knocking her on her ass. By now the other bad guy had jumped out of the car they were riding in to lend a hand.

"I'll scream," she threatened.

"Just take her along," said the driver, who was wearing a shiny blue suit and had slicked back hair.

And so Maizy Ray, in her thigh-high Lycra blue dress with the tits popping out, was dragged kicking and screaming to the automobile. Once inside, the big man managed to get her smothered.

"Should we kill her?" He asked the driver.

"Nah, it ain't worth it. We'll just drop her in a dumpster."

They drove into the nearest alley and pulled her back out of the car. She was still begging and pleading as they lifted her high overhead and gave her the old alley-oop over the top.

The big man knocked on the dumpster to say goodbye. "When you see Ezy G, give him a message. Tell him don't be running whores south of 30th no more without paying his respects to Carmine Valente."

"Yea," the driver added with a chuckle. "Tell him Mr. Valente's proud to announce his business expansion into the area."

"Shut the fuck up," said the big guy.

"What'd you mean shut up? That was funny."

They continued to argue all the way back to the car. A moment later the doors slammed and she heard them pull out, going very fast in reverse.

"Fuck. Fucking fuck and more fuck."

Then she saw the body. Covered in blood, young and handsome.

Her screams carried all the way to Ezy's self-proclaimed ho-mobile two streets down. "Now what?" he muttered, leaning against the fender of his modified Bentley with the fur-covered dashboard and orange chrome rims. A second later he was behind the gold-plated steering wheel, in search of the source.

"He's dead," Maizy was shouting at the top of her lungs, trying to jump out of the dumpster. "I'm in here with a dead guy."

That such a sudden release of adrenaline in this tightly compartmented area would have an affect on the bloodied man was something neither could anticipate. But as it turned out, the victim was not entirely dead.

If Maizy's cries were loud before, they were ten times as loud after the man reached out and grabbed her ankle. Over and over she cried for Ezy, not caring what he'd do to her once he found her like this.

The pimp was just half a block away when the man finally got her to stop screaming.

"Take me...home," he croaked.

Maizy crouched down in the filth of the dumpster, the rotten pork and soggy rice from Li Wan's, the Chinese place, crates of rotten tomatoes from the Korean grocer and just about every other kind of ethnic nightmare imaginable. "Mister, I couldn't take you across the street right now. The shape you're in. And I wouldn't know where to take you, anyway."

He was trying to say something else. She had to put her ear right to his because his voice was so faint. "You want to go to my home?" She laughed. "Sorry, but I live on the street. Unless Ezy sees fit to let me sleep in one of the ho crates in his bedroom."

"Maizy, you in there, bitch?"

She stiffened. It was Ezy, calling her from the end of the alley. "That's him," she whispered.

"Don't...tell..."

Maizy took his meaning and lay low, even though she would catch hell if he caught her hiding. A gangbang from some of his cronies would be only the beginning. For weeks afterward she'd face extra whippings and he'd probably put her on punishment rations, too. That would make garbage look pretty damned good after a while. Still, she just couldn't let this guy lay here and die. She had to stick around and do something for him.

"If I find you, you dumb-ass bitch," he was growling. "I'm gonna make you one sorry motherfucking whore."

The thing she had going on her side was that Ezy G was lazy, which meant he wouldn't look too hard. Sure enough, after a perfunctory search he got back in his car and took off.

Now what? she thought, looking down at the half-dead man.

"Thank you..." he croaked through pale white lips.

"Don't mention it, honey. I just don't know what you think we're gonna do from here."

She could barely make out what he was saying. At first she didn't believe it, so she put her ear right to

his mouth and asked him again. Sure enough, he repeated the outrageous request.

"Make love to me."

It sounded like about the most ridiculous thing in the world, but then she happened to look a little further down his body to see the most delicious looking erection popping his pants.

"What the hell," she muttered, unzipping him. If nothing else she'd be cheating Ezy G of a turn with her pussy, and you had to love that idea.

* * * *

Hank kept Nyte in the garage until morning. The old dog cage had been just sitting there since Rex was hit by a car last spring and as it turned out it was just right for a teenage girl. He gave her long enough to piss when they got home, then put her back in ropes and handcuffs before locking her in it. She begged him not to use the oil rag in her mouth anymore, because the fumes were making her nauseous.

He relented, stuffing a pair of her own panties between her lips instead. Naturally, he made sure to get them from the dirty clothes hamper.

"Hope you enjoy yourself," he lorded it over her when she was all locked up inside her new prison. "This is your last night under my roof. Tomorrow I'm finding you a new home. Somewhere where a slut like you can be put to good use. I'll leave you to contemplate what that might mean. Until morning, my dear."

Hank left her in the dark, closing the door behind

him. It was cold and she started shivering right away. She tried very hard not to give him the satisfaction of crying, but it really did seem he'd beaten her this time. She had no recourse and in just a few short hours she could be sure he'd be taking her somewhere from which she'd never return.

Her every nerve on high alert, she tried to hear in the darkness some clue to her predicament. The heater was on, its comforting hum mocking her now. She could hear scampering, too, probably of mice. That terrified her because she was so helpless. It didn't seem like she'd sleep a wink, but eventually she shut her eyes. She wasn't aware of sleeping more than a few minutes, but when she opened them again it was daylight.

At first she thought it had all been a dream, but then she felt the bite of steel on her wrists and the press of the metal cage on her hips and the sides of her breasts.

"Rise and shine, little cunt." Hank was there, standing over her with his shiny black shoes on. "Today's your big day."

He let her out of the cage and gave her another chance to piss. She was pleased she'd been able to hold it in all night. That gave him one less thing to abuse her over.

"You really do look better this way." He tousled her rat's nest of a hairdo. "The natural slut look, I'd call it."

For the car ride he gave her a trench coat to wear and a woolen cap. She knew as he got on the expressway into the city that it was going to be bad.

She was doubly sure of this when he exited in one of the worst parts of town.

"Lovely ambiance, don't you think?" Hank put his hand on her thigh, and there wasn't a damned thing she could do because he'd cuffed her hands behind her back inside the coat.

"Lovely for a rat fuck pig like you," she said, determined to fight him to the bitter end.

Hank jammed his hand between her legs. "Now why'd you have to go and upset me like that?"

He pinched at the sensitive skin of her inner thighs till she opened for him.

"You know I have to punish you for it."

"Gee," she said sarcastically. "What are you gonna do? Take away my allowance."

Hank shoved his fingers up into her pussy to get her attention. "I don't think I heard you right. What did you say?"

"Nothing," she winced as he jammed his fingers in and out painfully.

He let her go and unzipped his pants. "Give me the best blowjob of my fucking life," he ordered.

Nyte fell at once to his lap, consoling herself with the idea that, if he did kill her, at least this would be the last time to taste his disgusting pecker. He continued to drive, sighing contentedly as she bobbed up and down, treating her like she was his sexual slave. Which, of course, she was.

"I think I may almost miss you," he ruffled her hair. "But then I'll have the satisfaction of knowing you're performing a public service under the tutelage of my good friend, Mr. Ezy G."

Nyte swooned. It was a pimp's name if ever she'd heard one. So that was his plan—Hank was selling her as a ghetto prostitute. No wonder he'd said she'd never come back home. He might as well have sentenced her to death. Girls in that position were lucky to live to thirty with all the drugs and diseases, and the violence from the johns, and most especially from the flesh peddlers themselves, who treated them like private property to be abused and scorned.

Hank grunted as he ejaculated down her captive throat. If only I had the guts to bite his dick off, she lamented.

"That was great, baby. How about I return the favor?" He leaned over and popped the glove compartment, pulling out a vibrator, the long penis-shaped kind.

"Open wide," he grinned, pushing the thing up into her helpless hole.

Nyte clenched her thighs defensively. He wasn't doing her any favors at all. He was invading her with pleasure. Forcing her to have orgasms at his whim. Handcuffed in a car, only a coat on, in a ghetto neighborhood, on her way to be sold into prostitution.

"Hank, it's too much," she pleaded.

"Too much? Why you can never have too much sex. Can you, slut?"

Nyte was humping the air, lifting her ass off the seat over and over. She didn't care who was watching or that she was confirming every bad thing he'd ever said about her. She just needed to respond, she couldn't hold back. The artificial battery-operated dick was her master, just as this man was, and just as

the people who had her in the future would be.

She wondered about Ezy G. Might he be kind? Fair? Or at least not overly brutal. Not a chance. If Hank had picked him, she could be sure he'd be the worst kind of monster.

"I hate you," she exclaimed, venting her useless protest. "I fucking hate you."

"I hate you, too, honey. So much so that I'm going to have to do everything I've been doing to you to your mother, instead. And Tracy, too, as soon as she turns eighteen."

Nyte wanted to lunge at him, but he was holding the vibrator now and all she could do was moan and beg and writhe on it.

"That's it, bitch. Show me how it's done."

The orgasm erupted from deep in her soul, humiliating and satisfying all at once. But then, all too soon it was over, and she was just a nude girl in a car, on her way to be sold into prostitution.

* * * *

Joanne pretended to be sick all afternoon. Staying in bed, she hid under her covers with her hand between her legs, moving from orgasm to orgasm, almost without rest. The whole time, she thought about Tristans, what he had done and who he was to her, and how he'd made her into something that no longer fit this world.

Around three-thirty, after school was over, her boyfriend Brian called to see how she was.

"Do you love me, Brian?" She wanted to know.

He stammered on the other end of the line, because she'd never talked like this before.

"Forget it," she snapped. "At least you think I'm hot, don't you?"

"Yea, baby. You know you're the hottest girl in school." He sounded relieved, let off the hook. Well, she'd soon fix that.

"Do you think I'm a slut?"

"A what? No way, baby. Are you crazy?"

"Well, I am, Brian. I'm a slut and a lot worse besides."

There was a slight pause on the other end of the line. "Baby, have you been drinking?"

"No, I've never been more sober. Now here's what's gonna happen. You're gonna call some of your buddies on the team and then you're all gonna come over here and fuck me."

"What?"

"You heard me, Brian, don't act retarded. I want your dick and three or four others besides. And I want them now. If you can't arrange it, I'll find someone who will."

"No, wait, baby, don't hang up. I'll do it. It's just a little...shocking, you know?"

She was masturbating as she spoke, already half way to another climax. "What's shocking? You like fucking me, don't you?"

"Yea, sure I do."

"And you'd like to be able to have me whenever you want, right? And to show your buddies how you have control over me?"

"I—I guess so."

His hesitation made her mad. "Don't fuck around, Brian. Either you're man enough for this or you're not. I'm offering myself to you. As your slave. A pleasure slave. All you have to do is use me, exactly how you want me, for as long as you want me, the more humiliating and degrading, the better."

She met with silence. She was losing him. She was going to end up alone the rest of the day.

"Just imagine it, Brian," she tried to keep from panicking. "My body under your power. I have to do everything you say, whatever you want me to do. I can't say no, to you or anyone you give me to. I have to take dicks in my mouth and my ass, I have to crawl and fuck just like you want. You tell me how to dress, what to eat and what to think. I call you master, I agree to your discipline, beatings from your belt or whatever else. You do have a belt, don't you?"

"Um, yea." He cleared his throat. "Listen, I have practice later and I gotta run."

Damn it, what was his problem? Did he not want a beautiful slave girl to order around?

"What's the deal, Brian? Are you secretly gay or something?"

"Gay? Are you insane?"

"Yea, I must be," she said flatly, tired of fighting with him. "I'm sorry I broke into your perfect world with my craziness."

"Joanne, don't be that way," he pleaded, but she went ahead and hung up on him.

Closing her eyes, she willed for the room to stop spinning. For some reason the experience of hearing a man acting so weak and spineless with a woman was

making her physically ill. What she needed to do was to find Tristans again. Was it possible to summon him? Did she dare? On the other hand, what would become of her if she did not? There was little to lose, she thought, except for this newfound emptiness inside of her.

The very emptiness he had created.

* * * *

Jase's muscles screamed with life as the little blonde whore in the blue dress climbed on top of his naked cock. He couldn't move yet, but the friction and energy of her sex would soon restore his powers. The thing he had to be careful of was not to suck her own essence into his blood or sweat or memories. She'd be dead in an instant. He couldn't orgasm in her, either. This was strictly emergency resuscitation. Temporary at best. As it was, she would be bringing him right back into the worst pain of the fight. And that might rip him apart all over again.

She was a pretty little creature, trapped like a bird in a hellish cage. So many women were like her, these frail, human beauties so easily dominated and exploited. Reduced to hustling their bodies, wearing degrading clothing, behaving like tramps, out of fear for their lives. Had he the time, he would set things straight for her, giving her the freedom she craved.

But he would have to live first and that would be no mean feat. She let out a little moan, sliding herself up and down the length of his cock. It was raw and primal and vaguely forbidden, what with the bizarre

setting and outdoor locale.

"Oh, yea. Just fuck me, you big stud," she called out.

Jase groaned in reply and was amazed to hear his own voice. He had that much back already.

"You're good," she reached for his chest, "real good."

She'd forgotten for a moment the wounds. Seeing her hands covered in blood, she turned pale all over again.

"It's all right," he told her, much clearer than before. "It doesn't hurt."

She seemed to take the remark as some kind of permission to grit her teeth and dig in deeper. "Do it," she taunted, grappling with her nails.

The heat was building, friction mounting: boy, girl, the same story, no matter what the species; up and over the top, a glorious assent and the vista on the other side. He breathed the clean air, feeling he'd be free, really free.

The next thing he knew it was done and she was looking down at him. "I think I love you," she said to this man she'd never met. "I always have."

* * * *

Ezy G circled the girl, appraisingly. She was fly, no doubt about it. And fresh. Why this motherfucker wanted rid of her he had no idea—the only possibility was for the green.

"How much you want for it?" he asked, pushing the tip of his gold capped cane against her inner

thighs, compelling her to open her legs further.

"Make me an offer."

He regarded the suburban white man and the young white female, naked, her hands clasped behind her neck. There were marks on her; he'd beaten her. A lot. "You some kind of pedophile?" Ezy wanted to know.

The white man seemed surprised, like he didn't think a black pimp could use big words like that. "She's over eighteen. Never laid a hand on her before that."

Ezy felt the pussy; sopping wet. And tight. "She your flesh and blood?"

"What do I look like? She's my girlfriend's daughter."

Ezy tested her responsiveness. In a matter of seconds she was writhing on his hand. "If I buy this from you, you won't get it back, you understand that, right? I'll run it dry. Milk it for every dollar."

He grinned like a sick piece of shit. "I'm counting on that."

Ezy grabbed her cheeks, forcing open her mouth. "What's the mother say?"

"It's not her call."

"Technically, being she's over eighteen, the girl can decide on her own," Ezy G agreed. "I just hate to split up a happy family; you know, like happened to my people when they came to your sick country in the first place."

He was fucking with the white man, and enjoying it.

"The mother's not in her right mind. All I care

about is this one here never comes home. I want to go to sleep every night for the rest of my life knowing her evil little ass is out there hustling, being worked over by the biggest pricks in the city."

"So naturally you brought her to a black man so she'd get the worst treatment."

"That makes no difference to me. I'm not a racist."

Ezy made the girl lick her own juices off his hand, her pussy abandoned just shy of orgasm. She looked at him longingly, desire mixed with fear. Oh, yea, he had special plans for her later on. "No," he returned his attention to the white man. "You're no racist, you're just the kind of man who sells his own stepdaughter."

"She's not my stepdaughter, goddamn it."

Now the cracker was coping an attitude, and that really was crossing the line. Drawing his laser sighted Beretta from the belt of his brand new, canary yellow Italian suit, fallen off the back of a boat from Milan, he beamed it on the man's head. "I sure hope you're not disrespecting me, bitch."

He didn't seem to like being called a bitch—or having a gun aimed at his head. "Hey, take it easy," he put out his hands. "You can take the girl for free if you want. I don't give a shit."

"Oh, I'm taking the girl, all right. And I'm also gonna cap your white ass."

It was the girl's turn to speak up. "Don't hurt him, please."

That kind of surprised Ezy G, given how he'd obviously been beating up on her, but then there was no telling with a shorty. "What do you care what I do

to him?"

She had tears in her eyes. "Because my mother loves him."

Ezy had to laugh. "You white motherfuckers crack me up. Just like the damn soap operas. My own little "General Hospital" right here in front of my black ass. Tell you what, white boy. If you can get this pussy off in two minutes or less, I'll let you live."

His eyebrows shot up. "You want me to fuck her...in front of you?"

"No. You're gonna use your tongue."

He really looked lost now. "But...I've never..."

"Well here's your first and last chance." Ezy started the count at one-one-thousand.

The white man went to the girl and knelt before her. The horror on his face made it clear he wasn't bullshitting about never tasting pussy before.

Ezy put the gun to the back of his head. "Ten-one-thousand. Eleven-one-thousand."

The white man dabbed his tongue at the pink muff, making the girl jolt. She didn't look any more used to this than he was. It didn't take long, though. A few licks in and the horny bitch was bucking her hips, pushing herself against his mouth and nose. Whitey was slobbering, eating it up like apple pie. The juices were dribbling down his chin, but he didn't care. This was life and death.

At a minute and a half, it was a horse race. The girl was real close and she was giving good help, directing his tongue onto her clitoris. Ezy was disappointed; he might have to let the man live.

"Looking good," he goaded. "Daddy and

daughter."

They stiffened at once. The charge was untrue, but he'd hit a nerve. So he felt some guilt after all for taking advantage of the girl.

"Why don't we call mama? You can ass do them at the same time."

Their performance suffered considerably.

"Time's up," Ezy cried in triumph. "I win."

The man was looking up, begging on his knees. "Don't kill me. I swear to fucking God, I didn't mean any harm to you or your people. I'll do whatever you tell me. I'll come clean. I'll give everything I have to the United Negro College Fund."

Ezy shook his head. He almost felt sorry for the man. He really did. Aiming the pistol, he squeezed off a single round. A shot to the head, knocking him to the ground, dead instantly.

The girl started to scream.

"Shut up, bitch." He slapped her hard. "You don't feel anything anymore unless I tell you to."

She held her face, holding back the sobs.

"I did you a favor. You'd think you'd be a little bit grateful," Ezy grumbled.

Then again, she was a white girl. And you know how that goes.

* * * *

Tristans roared with rage. "He's gone," he tore through the contents of the dumpster. "Gone. Gone. Gone."

Oh, why had he been so stupid as to leave the

body? Stupid and over-confident. Somehow, he'd gotten away. This much was clear from the bloody handprints on the edge of the dumpster. He'd climbed out of the infernal thing.

"It's not possible," said Rolarz, one of his Guardians turned royal guard.

The self proclaimed king shook his fist at his servant, who was standing there in the alley uselessly, along with three other vampyrs he'd summoned for what was now going to be a prolonged search. "Do you see nothing, even when it is in front of your eyes?" Tristans demanded. "He is gone—someone has helped him."

They looked at their new ruler, hands in the pockets of their long dark trench coats. "Not a shiftling, I hope?" asked Rolarz, whose long brown hair was neatly combed to the middle of his back.

"No, you fool." Tristans hopped out of the dumpster, brushing garbage off his own long black coat. "It's a human. I smell her odor. He's managed to ensnare yet another human female. You will glean her scent from this refuse container, along with his and then you will hunt them both down. Is that clear?"

They exchanged uneasy glances.

"You want us to get in there, sir—I mean, sire?" Rolarz spoke on their behalf.

Tristans took a deep breath. It was so very tempting to kill each and every one of them. Instead, with exaggerated patience, he said, "I went in there, didn't I? Why shouldn't you?"

"No reason at all," agreed Rolarz.

Tristans pushed past them. "Give me a report as

soon as you have him. I've another lead to follow."

Lengthening his stride from a walk to a run, he extended his arms. By the time he reached the street, he was transformed, airborne. Nostrils flaring, wings beating like locusts, he followed the scent of the girl. The other one.

The little blonde was calling him, the slave Joanne. She had summoned him in her lust, disturbing his thoughts. And for that she would be most sorry.

* * * *

"We can stay here for the night," said Maizy as they approached the ten-story welfare hotel and crack house. "Ezy won't come this far uptown."

Jase was leaning heavily on her body to help him walk, enjoying the closeness of her flesh. He'd been intimate with her in a dumpster barely an hour ago and he was hungry again for her body. "Good. A bed," he nibbled at her ear.

"Honey, don't," she chided, but he could tell she wanted it, too. Hell, she loved him, at least she'd said so. It was a common effect of sex sharing with a shiftling. Humans simply weren't up to the charisma of the bi-form species. With a relatively benevolent creature like himself, the spell took the form of gentle loving and desire. In the case of a darker soul, like Tristans, the human female was apt to end up his complete and total slave. Even Cassandra had been mildly affected after her whipping and usage by the dread vampyr. He could only hope she was safe. And Nyte. What had become of her? Too many loose ends,

he lamented. Too many innocent creatures getting hurt because of his fight. His own private little war. Maybe he ought to just yield to Tristans, put an end to this violence that threatened to spill over into the lives of dozens, if not hundreds more innocent bystanders.

Hell, maybe Tristans should become king. Bring some order into the world. What could Jase contribute in his place? More sex? Look at him now. Everything on the line and all he wanted to do was take this cute little whore upstairs and screw her brains out.

"You know what I'm gonna do to you?" he confided as they stumbled up to the entrance of the notorious hotel famous for its hourly sex rentals. "I'm gonna tie you down to the bed and make love to you till you beg me to let you come."

"The only thing you're doing up there is lying on your fine ass and sleeping. Why I let you talk me out of taking you to the hospital, I'll never know," she fretted.

Neither one of them had any money, which was a problem in a cash-up-front joint.

"No can do," the longhaired hippy behind the bulletproof glass shook his head. "You'll have to hit the pavement. There's no loitering here."

Jase noted the occupants of the lobby. Two raggedly dressed men were snoring, passed out on a ratty couch. In the corner, a bone-thin girl was shooting up with a needle. "Could have fooled me."

"I have other ways to pay," said Maizy.

The hippy watched with great interest as she slid the straps off her shoulders, peeling the dress down over her healthy, braless breasts. "Damn," he

whistled. "Now that's what makes America the greatest country in the world."

She cupped them enticingly. "You like? A half hour, whatever you want, in exchange for a room."

He was licking his lips. "Let me see the rest."

Maizy pulled the dress over her head. She was naked underneath, save for a rabbit tattoo on her left breast and a set of gold rings, two in her nipples, two more in the lips of her shaved pussy.

"Mmm, papa likes. Let's see you shake it a little now."

One of the homeless men sat up to watch as the girl began to gyrate, arms above her head, advertising. It was clear the hippy clerk was playing her, but she was a whore, already slave to this Ezy G, too far gone to lose any more of her pride.

"Can you masturbate for me now?" The hippy was jerking himself behind his protective barrier.

Jase had had enough. With a single punch he penetrated the bulletproof glass and grabbed the guy's neck. "You got your show. Now give us a room."

"Hey, take it easy," he choked. "Look, I'm giving you the presidential suite. Stay as long as you like."

He passed the key through the drawer and Jase let him go. "You should get this repaired," he noted the hole in the glass.

The man just stood there staring, holding his neck as Jase grabbed Maizy and dragged her to the elevator.

"Baby, that was terrific," she purred as the doors hummed closed. "Help me with this, will you?"

Jase looked at the naked blonde, arms over her head trying to shimmy back into the tight dress. "My pleasure," he hit the emergency stop button.

"What are you doing?" She cried out as he came for her.

"As if you didn't know," he growled. "My sweet little dick tease."

* * * *

Nyte was given her first night off from whoring. She'd start in the morning and after that it would be regular, rain or shine, round the clock. Ezy G had explained this and a lot of other things besides. He was a very attractive man, and muscular, and as she lay next to him, listening to him snore, she had to admit, he was a great lover, too. Over and over he'd let her come, though he made it clear she was to be about his pleasure first and foremost.

As far as the man was concerned, hers was a position of chattel slavery, the direct comeuppance for all the years of bondage his own people had suffered.

"My girls have the privilege of paying back the debt," he'd told her earlier as he gave her an introductory taste of his leather horsewhip. "For everything they went through. Your white behind is reparation." He caressed her, in between savage slashes.

She was hurting from it even now, pinned on her welted ass, his hand resting on her cunt. The idea made her hot and horny, thinking it was there for

him, whenever he woke up. That was what she was to him, a cunt, an 'it'. Just like he'd spoken of her when Hank was there.

Hank. God, she'd never thought the man would die. Right in front of her eyes. And after she'd wished it on him, too. She felt so guilty. No man deserved to die, no matter how horrible he was. Yes, she wanted him to suffer. But not to be cut down by a bullet for no reason at all.

A chill went down her spine. She must never let herself forget this Ezy G wasn't just a lover, he was a killer. And he didn't want her for a girlfriend, but as his whore. A street prostitute who would work for him, give him every nickel, spreading her legs and sucking cock for any man with the price of entry. And she wasn't going to be allowed to just hang back and wait for men to come to her, either. She was going to have to hustle her ass. Solicit cock. Or face the penalty.

"I have other things besides the whip," he promised. "You'll find all that out."

For now, she needed to take a piss. Was she allowed to go on her own to the toilet? Did she dare wake him? One thing was sure, he wouldn't be too happy if she wet the bed.

Slipping her lithe body out from underneath his hand, Nyte padded quietly over the shag carpet to the bathroom. She'd do her business and be back in bed before he knew she'd even been gone. The man's condo was really luxurious. With gold trimmed mirrors, real statues and a home entertainment system that covered a whole wall of the living room.

So far she'd only seen a few of the rooms and she was tempted to take a little tour. But she was on a mission. Finding the bathroom, she flipped on the light and closed the door behind her.

Nyte almost tripped over the crate. It was made of unfinished pine, the pieces hammered together with tiny spaces between. On top there was a name, written in dark ink. Stacy.

That was odd. She didn't think Ezy had a dog. Bending down, she called for the pooch. "Stacy. Here, girl."

"Who's there?" called a voice from within, clearly not canine but human.

Nyte drew back with a gasp. "Omigod, you're...a girl."

"No shit. Who are you? You're new, right?"

"Y – yes."

"First night?"

"Uh, huh."

Stacy laughed from her box. "Oh, Lord. I remember my first night. Your head must be spinning, huh?"

She sat on the edge of the bathtub. "Kind of."

"He make love to you yet?"

Nyte considered telling her to go to hell, but there was no point in alienating such a valuable source of information about her new condition. "Yes, he did."

"Real gently, right?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't get used to it. Now that he's had you, you're just a piece of meat to him. Keep your nose clean and turn those tricks, that's my advice."

"What about you? How'd you end up in here?"

"A john told Ezy I mouthed off to him. This is my punishment."

"Did you?"

"Yea, but the guy was a prick. Ezy knows it, so he's being lenient."

"This is lenient?" she asked, astounded.

"Sure. All I have to do is lay around and sleep. And I'm warm, too. You'll understand after he makes you pull your first double shift."

Nyte put her head in her hands. She was going to cry again. "I can't take this. Tell me it's all a terrible dream."

"Sorry, kiddo. I'm afraid this nightmare is one hundred percent real."

"But he was so...nice." Nyte thought of how she'd tried to please him, licking and kissing him very gently and seductively as he lay on his back, arms behind his head. He'd had a million questions for her, just funny little things, like he wanted to know her as a person.

"He can afford to be, honey, he's your master. Never forget that."

She was on her feet. "No. Slavery isn't real anymore. I'll never believe it can come back."

"You can believe it, all right."

Nyte's heart seized in her chest. It was Ezy, behind her, his hand clamped on her shoulder.

"I—I just had to use the toilet," she said as he spun her about, lifting her bare feet off the tile floor.

"Toilet's not for you, baby girl." He deposited her in the tub. "Stacy, tell your new sister in chains how

animals like you relieve themselves."

"We squat, master."

"You heard her." Ezy folded his strong arms over his equally strong chest. "Squat."

She swallowed hard. He expected her to piss in the tub, with him watching.

"Ezy...Master...I can't..."

"Wrong answer," said Stacy.

Ezy kicked her crate. "Did I ask for your comments?"

"No, master. Forgive me, master."

"Should I fetch the whip?" he asked Nyte, who was still standing.

Nyte bent her knees, assuming the humiliating position.

"Legs wide," he coached. "And hold your pussy lips apart."

It wouldn't come at first, but when he threatened with the whip again, she finally let loose. A steady stream pouring over her fingers, sluicing down onto her feet.

"Look at me," said Ezy. "You're an animal. You don't have the right to privacy."

She blinked back tears.

"Would you like a name, slave animal?"

"Y—yes," she replied cautiously. "Master."

Ezy grinned, clearly pleased with his easy victory. "Stacy, what should we call the new slave?"

Stacy thought for a moment. "How about Stupid Slut?"

Ezy chuckled, reaching for the shower knob. "I'll take it under consideration."

Nyte cried out in pain as he blasted her with the cold water.

"You've got two minutes to clean yourself, bitch. Then it's off to work. Hi ho, hi ho."

There wasn't any warm in the mix and she continued to shiver miserably. Meanwhile Ezy was opening the crate, letting out the gorgeous little redhead. Immediately Stacy took his dick in her mouth in gratitude for her release.

"Now this," said Ezy G, enjoying the blowjob from Stacy and the view of writhing Nyte simultaneously, "is living."

Nyte closed her eyes, tight. Something in the water was making her remember. The icy, chilling fingers. Tendrils, really. A hundred heads, from the head of what is itself a snake. Tristans. His touch on her skin. Cold as death, creating an itch in her that would have to be scratched. Sooner or later.

The blood. They'd exchanged blood in the fight with Jase. What did that mean? she wondered.

It could entail an unbearable yearning for slavery. That's what had occurred to Joanne. But this was different. Both girls had been bitten by the vampyr, but only Nyte had tasted his. She was surprised none of them had noticed it at the time. Even Tristans had seemed unawares.

Nyte licked the water from her lips, imagining it was something else entirely. Was she losing her mind? So much had changed. Hank was dead and now anything seemed possible.

Arching her back, she opened her mouth into the water spray. Why this strange thirst? she wondered.

And why did the neck of the statuesque black man look so appetizing all of a sudden?

"Time's up," Ezy called out, signaling the end of her shower.

"Yes," she smiled innocently. "It certainly is."

* * * *

Maizy's arms were pinned overhead in the dress as Jase pushed her against the elevator wall. "Sorry, this can't wait 'til the room."

She moaned as he thrust his fingers between her legs. She was so hot and wet she nearly sucked in his whole hand. "Oh, baby, you're unbelievable. You drive me crazy."

He lifted her onto his dick in one swift motion. "Show me. Show me what I do to you."

She began to convulse on the spot, eyes rolling in her head. He held himself still for a moment, letting her get through the first couple of orgasms. Then it was his turn. Hands on her hips, he pushed to her depths, officially christening her his own personal fuck toy. A little bauble to hang from the windshield of one of these motor vehicles the humans drove.

"Oh, baby, baby, come inside me. I want to feel your hot come."

Jase obliged, treating her to a full dose of his more than human sperm.

"Yes...yes...yes...you're an animal," she cried.

If only she knew the half of it.

The trouble was, he was wearing himself down, running a hell of a risk for both of them. If he should

go under while they were fucking like this, she'd be as dead as him.

"Got to get...upstairs," he puffed, letting her go.

Maizy pulled on the dress and grabbed him by the arm. "Come on, then. Time's wasting."

The next thing he knew, his head was landing on a pillow, rather ripe with human odors.

"Sorry," she sat at the edge of the bed. "The place ain't exactly four-star."

"No," he smiled, reaching for her. "But you are."

* * * *

Ezy had a lead on his missing bitch. He'd been trying to play it cool, enjoying his new girl in her stead, but it definitely stuck in his craw that Maizy had outwitted him. Because Ezy G wasn't your everyday street hustler. He'd spent more than his share of time in the library, and on the Internet. Not that he had any use for school. That was bullshit. White man's bullshit. But knowledge, pure thought in itself, that he could respect. Once he'd read about how that great poetic sister Maya Angelou had been raped as a young child by her uncle. For years she did not speak to anyone, opting to spend all her time, and all her mind power in the small library near where she lived.

She relates how finally she did speak, after having consumed nearly every volume. By that time, she reported, I had something to say. And so she'd begun her struggle. Every brother and sister had to find a focal point of his or her own. His was reparation, won from his white slaves.

And right now he was down one. Sure, he'd gotten the freebie, but he had his doubts about her. In many ways, the dark-haired fox was the proverbial Trojan horse. Too good to be true. Though he would never let it show, she gave him the willies. The way she'd looked at him after that shower. Her hair all wet and wild. Like some kind of white panther queen.

Maybe she was a nut job and that's why the cracker wanted rid of her so bad. Hell, maybe she was a witch. He'd give her a shot, get a few g's off her ass, then plug her. He'd give her a week, no more.

Leaving Nyte off on the corner of 30th and Hines for her first trick, Ezy decided to cruise up and down the avenue looking for some leads. No one could hide in a city like this, no matter how big and disorderly it looked. Especially an owned piece of meat like Maizy.

Yea, he'd have her soon enough. And then he'd teach her what it meant to be a runaway.

* * * *

Nyte was afraid to even try and walk in the skirt Ezy had given her. It rode nearly to the bottom of her ass and in front it hardly covered her pussy. He'd told her she'd have to earn the right to underwear, which meant she was entirely naked underneath. Same for on top, where she had only the skimpy halter holding in her squashed breasts. She was freezing without a coat, but apparently that was a privilege, too.

He made a point of telling her how the purple plastic high heels were from the secondhand store and how he never spent more than five bucks on a

whore's outfit. The really hard part, other than having to stand out here looking for men to fuck her, was the fact that Ezy hadn't given her anything to eat since last night but a half-eaten candy bar that he'd tossed out the window at her feet just as he drove off. It landed on the dirty sidewalk and at first she wasn't going to touch it.

A minute later, however, she'd scooped it up and devoured it. Food from the hand of her master. The only kind she'd see ever again. Nyte licked her lips, thinking again of how he'd looked to her in the shower. Like a fresh meal. The man had stood her down, using his eyes to put her back in her place, but she could smell on him the makings of fear.

Given how she was feeling lately, that kind of thing didn't bode well for the king of white slaves. Not well at all.

"Hey, baby, you're a sight for sore eyes." The man in the white pickup truck rolled down his window. "You new here?"

"Very new," Nyte smiled for him. "How about you...are you new, too?"

The guy was blonde, maybe forty, not half-bad looking. "Nah, I'm an old timer," he grinned.

"So," she leaned over the doorframe, giving him a full view of her tits. "You looking for a date?"

"Might be. How much we talking about?"

"For you, honey? It's on the house." She was in the truck before he could say no.

"Guess this is my lucky day," he looked her up and down.

"Sure." She put his hand between her legs. "Lucky

as they come."

By the time he put the car in drive she was already licking at his neck, trying to see if she could taste the blood through his skin.

* * * *

Joanne's master came to her through the window. She went to him in her sheerest negligee, kneeling at his feet.

"My lord," she put her head to the floor of her own bedroom.

Tristans regarded the human female, considered maddeningly desirable by those of her own race. "There are disturbances," he reported, though she was capable of understanding nothing that he was saying. "Vibrations in the air that vex me greatly."

"Allow me to please you, master. Your slave will ease your worries." Her lips were upon his boots, where they belonged.

"I should like to whip you," he informed her.

"My body is your property, master. Use me, I beg you."

"You summoned me here. Why?"

The girl shivered, fearing his anger.

"My lord, I am lonely. I need you."

"The dark haired girl. The one who calls herself Nyte—has she contacted you?"

"No, master."

"There is another. He may be with her. He is like me. Powerful. Superior. Do you know this one?"

"No, master." She continued her licking.

"Crawl to the bed," he commanded. "On your belly."

The blonde lay herself prostrate. It was a pleasure to watch her wriggle like a worm, the pretty, see through nightgown collecting the dust of the floor.

She was out of breath from her efforts by the time she reached the bed.

"On your hands and knees, face the headboard."

He let her take her place, then made her wait for him as he explored her room, beginning with her closet. "You enjoy these slutty clothes, don't you?"

"Yes, master. It is what I am. You have helped me see that."

"You should not have called me back here."

The girl hung her head.

"Now you will pay the price."

"Yes, master."

"I will send my agents in my stead. You will do as they command. Your body is theirs until I return."

The girl shivered. He went to her, ripping the back of her negligee, shredding it till it lay in rags on the bed around her. "You will not ever greet your master with your body covered again, is that clear?"

"Yes, master." She clenched her buttocks, anticipating punishment.

"Nor will you ever withhold any part of your body." He inserted a finger. "At all times, you will be open, loose."

She moaned as the tension drained. It was a sexual experience, as surely as if he'd entered her pussy. "Oh, master, please, take me."

"No. I have work to do. Your cunt is not important

enough. You do not deserve me. You had one job—locating the Dark Hair and her boyfriend—that miserable son of a whore who will not die no matter how many times I kill him.”

He was hurting her ass, making her squirm. “Master, I don’t know what you are saying. I didn’t know of any job you gave me.”

“Silence,” he roared. “A slave is always wrong. Haven’t you learned the first rule of your new status?”

“I—I’m sorry, master.”

He flipped her onto her back and grabbed her throat. “Listen carefully, you little slut. I’ve been working on this plan for six centuries and I’m an inch away from total victory. Nothing will stand in my way now, do you understand? Not Jase, not you and not that monstrosity—that abomination or whatever the hell your whore of a girlfriend is turning into.”

“Master.” She was sobbing, more from the pain of disappointing him than from the compressing of her windpipe. “Let me make it better. Let me help you.”

“They will both die,” he continued, oblivious. “I will not be cheated, do you hear? Not after all this time. It isn’t fair. Jase should be dead. The girl should be a mindless little zombie like you. And I should be king of the entire world!”

Joanne’s eyes rolled in her head, her body wracked with her orgasm. The pathetic creature had come without his even touching her pussy. “Get up,” he released her. “Go and clean yourself. My men will be here soon.”

“Yes, master. Will that please you—if I serve them

well?"

He resisted the urge to dash her hopes out of sheer spite. If he was to be king, after all, he'd have to learn a little bit of grace. "Yes, slut. That will please me."

She sat up eagerly. "I shall wait for them, forever if need be. And I will be a perfect fuck, sexy and hot and oh, so good."

"Good girl. Your master...your king is pleased."

* * * *

It was the best fifty bucks Ezy had ever spent. The tip was a live one.

"Yea, I know the bitch," said the longhaired white boy working the front desk of the hotel. "Came in a while ago. With a crazy dude."

"How crazy?" Ezy wanted to know.

The man pointed at the hole in the plastic window, taped over with cardboard. "Crazy enough to do that with his fist."

Ezy looked at the half-inch thick Plexiglas. "There's no fucking way," he shook his head.

"Tell that to my neck." He lifted his chin, showing the bruise on his windpipe.

"Damn," Ezy G whistled. "That is one crazy-ass motherfucker. Strong, too."

"They're in the presidential suite," the man said. "I wouldn't go up there if I were you. Not unless you got an army with you."

Ezy grinned wide, pulling out two loaded nine-millimeter pistols, one for each hand. "How's this for starters?"

"Suit yourself," he shrugged. "It's your fucking funeral."

Ezy wasn't half so cocksure as he sounded. The thing was, there was no way he could back down, not after coming this far. Besides, he'd invested fifty bucks. Still, a part of him had to wonder what made a sensible man like Ezy G risk it all on a single ho. But Maizy always had been special to him. Kind of like his own pet. The other girls resented her for that, but it was his choice to treat his slaves the way he wanted. Shit, he could even love Maizy if he wanted. Not that he could ever really feel for a piece of white ass fit only for pimping on the streets.

Ezy loved no one. Only his grandmother, and she was dead and buried well on five years now. She'd raised him when his own mother had taken off on him. He'd never even met his father. Supposedly he was still doing time at some private prison in the Midwest. East Buttfuck, Ohio or some other cracker ass location.

It's a good day to die. Isn't that what the Native American warriors said? Now there were the real OG's of the North American continent. Running down Buffalo, taming wild horses, mastering the plains for a thousand years, till the white men came with their little dicks and big guns.

The hotel was constructed for shit. Whatever stability the structure had was long since eaten away by termites and dry rot. Raising a single sharkskin booted foot, he kicked down the door of the presidential suite.

Sure enough, there was Maizy Ray, sidled up to a

funky ass white dude, stark naked.

"Surprise, sugar," he beamed, leveling the pistol. "Daddy's home."

Maizy's scared shitless look was worth a thousand words. "Ezy, baby, I've been looking all over for you," she managed.

"Really? Seems to me you been busy with other things. Get up," he waved the pistol. "It's time for your little boyfriend to die."

She threw herself over the sleeping body, which seemed half dead already. "Don't hurt him, please, I'll do anything."

"You already do," he reminded her, though sometimes it did seem there was a double standard with this one, what with her not calling him master half the time and him not seeming to care.

Maizy dropped to her knees, smart girl that she was. "Baby, you know how much those guns turn me on."

He let her crawl over and lick the end of one of the Berettas. His dick went instantly hard.

"I want one inside me," she breathed, switching to the other gun. "Please, G?"

He pictured Maizy, helpless on her back, a Beretta deep in her cunt, buried, his hand moving it in and out. In and out.

"Please, master..."

Ezy blinked, eyes glazed from the power trip. The girl worked fast, having already unzipped his pants and taken his dick between his lips.

Looking up at him with sultry whore eyes, she grabbed both barrels and pointed them at her own

forehead.

"Maizy, stop distracting me. You know I gotta kill him. And then I have to punish you. It's gonna be your legs. I gotta break 'em both. Can't have you running on me again. The other girls have to know I keep it real."

"Just how real?" whispered a familiar female voice, just behind him.

Fuck! It couldn't be the new girl. There was no way she could sneak up on him like this.

"I'd advise you to drop those guns," she said, hugging him tight, her hands reaching under his jacket to tear open his sweat-drenched shirt.

"Are you crazy, bitch? You know what I'll do to you?"

But Ezy G couldn't turn around like he wanted to. Not with Maizy applying pressure with her teeth to his suddenly shriveling manhood.

"Looks like your girls are turning on you," said Nyte.

"I'll kill both y'all bitches, you hear me?"

Maizy clamped down, making him yelp. Ezy dropped the guns.

"Good boy," said Nyte, whose own teeth were dripping blood.

"What the fuck?" said the pimp, feeling the trickle down his throat as the dark haired girl bit into him.

"Payback is such a bitch," Nyte whispered. "Don't you think?"

* * * *

Jase awoke to see the two women above him and his first thought was that they'd compared notes about how he'd slept with both of them. It was a petty thought for which he felt quickly ashamed.

"You're alive," whispered Nyte, looking sexier and more desirable than ever.

"You are, too," he retorted. "And you," he added to the blonde hooker.

He tried to run through in his mind everything that had happened, all he could remember. Everything was a blur after his fight with Tristans.

"He came after you," Jase said to Nyte.

She knew immediately who he meant. "He couldn't catch me."

Jase thought that odd, because there was something in her eyes that said maybe he had. "You outran him?"

"Just like you said," she smiled.

Jase decided not to pursue the point. "I owe you my life," he said to Maizy. "I only thank the heavens you were spared in the process."

"I'm tougher than I look," she winked.

He remembered now how they'd screwed in the dumpster and how she'd said she loved him. Tough, indeed. "We're not safe here," he told them. "We must be on the move."

Sitting up was a painful prospect, more painful than he'd imagined.

"You're not ready to travel," said Nyte.

"I haven't any choice. Nor have you. Tristans is coming for us. And this time he won't be alone."

Maizy looked back and forth between the two of

them. "Who is Tristans?"

"Someone you don't ever want to meet in a dark alley. Come on." Jase swung his legs over the edge of the bed, nearly stepping on the prone man, bound hand and foot on the floor. "Who is that?"

"That's my pimp," explained Maizy. "I didn't have the heart to kill him. Any chance he could come with us?"

"Sure," grimaced Jase, taking his first agonizing step with one girl under each arm. "The more the merrier."

* * * *

Frank 'Doobie' Stalls was trying to smoke some weed when they came in. A half-dozen badass motherfuckers in trench coats and FBI haircuts. Narcs if ever he'd seen any. Fuck, he muttered under his breath, tamping out the reefer on the underside of the counter. I'm screwed now. Without thinking, he swallowed the thing whole, the still-hot tip burning the inside of his already bruised throat.

"Can I help you gentlemen?" He managed a weak smile.

"We are looking for this gentleman." One of them was holding up a picture of the psycho who'd busted the window and nearly done the same to his windpipe.

Of all days not to call in sick, he thought.

"Um, are you guys cops?"

The man's beady, coal black eyes narrowed and the next thing he knew a fist was coming through the

glass. The second one today.

Oh, shit. Not again.

"I asked you a question," the man said, holding him by the collar in mid air.

"H—he went up to the presidential suite. Everybody and his brother has gone up since."

The man asked what he meant, and he explained about the black guy with the guns and the young woman with the freaky black eyes, kind of like his. He was particularly interested in the girl.

"Thank you," he let him go. "You've been most helpful. Morashti, give the man something for his trouble."

Frank was pretty excited about the possibility of a tip, but then he saw the second man pull a long black gun out of his coat. Yea, thought Frank as the narc opened fire on him, this would definitely have been a good day to call in sick.

* * * *

Tristans had them dead to rights, Jase and the girl both. "It's the end of the line," he smiled, taking aim with the automatic pistol, that delightful piece of human engineering so suited for his dirty work.

"You can have me," Jase stood in front of the female. "Just let Nyte go."

"Really," he sneered. "Don't you ever get tired of this Romeo and Juliet act? I know I'm about over it. How about the rest of you?"

Tristans' guards gave their assent, robot-like as always. "Enough," he silenced them. "If you can't at

least pretend to have your own minds, don't bother. But who are these, two? Don't tell me you're planning on starting your own theater company of idiots? Or will it be a human zoo, where you can coddle the creatures you love so dearly?"

"They have nothing to do with this, anymore than Nyte does."

Tristans verified this, reading the minds of the tied black man and the white woman holding him for dear life. How amusing these human creatures with their pathetic ideas of love. What is the point when they barely live long enough to watch a tree grow much less develop a lasting relationship?

"He abuses you," Tristans said to the clutching blonde. "And yet you love him. Why?"

She seemed startled that he would know this. "I—I don't know why."

Tristans aimed the gun at her head. "What if I offered you your life for his?"

"I would die," she said. "To save him."

Tristans spit at their feet. "You are all pathetic. Weak, misguided and completely worthless."

It was Nyte who stepped forward, spreading her arms and catching Tristans completely off guard. "Not all of us," she smiled, the room filling instantly with smoke.

"Open fire," he screamed, realizing too late his error. "Kill them all."

When at last they could see again, there were only two bodies on the floor. That of the black man, now dead, and the equally dead white girl.

"The other two are gone, sir," reported Rolarz,

scanning the room.

"Of course they are, imbecile!" This time there was no holding back his rage. Turning the gun on his own officer he shot him dead, ripping open his chest with the machine pistol. "What about the rest of you. Have you any comments to make?"

Predictably, they shook their heads no.

Tristans contemplated killing the lot of them, but it wouldn't make him feel any better. Not when the mistake had been his. He'd assumed he was dealing with bleeding hearts, like Jase and the blonde girl who would never save themselves but the expense of the others. Nyte wasn't like that. She wasn't hanging all over any lover. She wanted out, and she had the means to do so. Taking Jase with her, and using a power she should not have, she had escaped, leaving the other two humans to die.

Where was his head? He should have taken more seriously the threat. Seeing her eyes, he'd denied what they told him. And yet it was true. This Nyte was already half vampyr and growing in strength by the hour. She must have consumed some of his blood during the fight with Jase. Already she was constituting a greater danger than Jase and if he did not act soon, it might be her hunting him and not the other way around.

Dropping his pistol in the middle of the room, he ordered the men not to touch anything. Raising his arms, he enveloped them in a single cloak, dispatching them to Joanne's house for safekeeping. Seeing the little blonde slave, they'd know what to do with her. Meanwhile, he would complete his work of

planting the evidence.

Outside the window he heard a police siren. Better still. Closing his eyes he remade his face into Jase's and retrieved the gun. A few dead policemen would be exactly the right ingredient for his stew of vengeance. Run, Jase, he whispered his voice to the wind. Run fast, you and your little bitch both. By morning you will be the most wanted criminals in the nation.

* * * *

Jase was not in the mood, as sexy as she looked wearing nothing but the men's flannel shirt they'd picked up at the Super Mart on their way to the interstate.

"Move out of the way, Nyte, I'm trying to watch the news."

"You should be watching me," she pouted, settling herself on his knee at the end of the bed where he sat glaring at the static-filled picture on the motel TV.

"This isn't a game. Are you listening to the headlines? They're claiming we killed eight people back at the hotel, including three cops. Tristans framed us—does that mean nothing to you?"

Nyte rubbed her bare, fragrant pussy on his pant leg. "Tristans is a child," she licked her finger and put it to his lips. "You're a man."

"And that's another thing," he grabbed the sides of her head, preventing her from leaning down to kiss him. "What you did back there was wrong. Two people died because you—because we were trying to

get away."

"So? They got to sacrifice themselves. Isn't that supposed to be the noble thing?"

Jase tightened his grip. For a moment, he thought of crushing her skull. "I don't know you," he pushed her off his lap instead. "I don't know what you've become. One thing's for sure. You have Tristans' powers. You shared his blood. I should have seen it coming."

She began to gyrate very slowly. He'd never seen anything so seductive in all his centuries of life. "Does that make me a naughty girl? Does it, Jasey boy? Why don't you punish me, then? Put me over your knee."

The next thing he knew, he was grabbing at her arm, doing precisely that.

"Beat me," she taunted, her feet and hands in the air, her soft sex resting on his muscular thigh. "Make me a sorry little girl."

Jase's hand cracked on her ass, the palm exploding hotly on the tight, firm flesh. She grunted from somewhere deep in her throat. To his outrage, she was actually enjoying it.

"I'll teach you," he said, hitting her again.

"Fuck you. I don't have to do what you tell me."

He slammed his hand down again and again, the blows too fast and furious to count. All he could see was the pert little ass, redder and redder, the insolent girl paying for her sins, that and his own rage, spilling out of him, bottled up for so long.

Finally he stopped from sheer exhaustion. Still the woman was not subdued.

"Is that it? Even Tristans could better than that,"

she taunted. "Maybe I'll go and find him. Do you think he'd take me if I begged him? On my hands and knees?"

Jase leaped to his feet, the wolf in him barely contained. Grabbing the girl's black hair, he dragged her to the bed, threw her across it and stuffed his raging cock inside her ass. He knew she could take it. His only fear was that even this would not be enough.

"Fuck me," she snarled. "Fuck me, you motherfucker."

He savaged her tight asshole, treating her without tenderness or mercy. On any other woman it would be a brutal rape, but this girl—this vampyr, for that is what she was becoming—could not only take it, she was craving it.

Jase was just about ready to come when the bitch rebelled. Tripling her strength, she reared up from underneath, tossing him into the air. He landed hard, sinking his teeth into her neck and pushing his dick into her gaping hot pussy. She growled with the indignity of being taken this way, like a mere human with a pussy to be fucked and used. If Jase were not careful he would be torn to shreds in her fury.

Hell, it was like fighting Tristans all over again.

Except this was a bitch vampyr and he was still wolf enough to bring her fledgling ass to heel. Turning her to her back he struck her repeatedly across the face, one side and then the other. Whimpering at long last, she opened her legs in submission. Jase sank his cock triumphantly, using her at leisure. She orgasmed, though it was incidental to his own pleasure. When he finally spilled himself,

he did not even look at her eyes.

Thankfully, she remained submissive, nibbling and licking at him after he'd rolled to his back for a few well-deserved hours of sleep.

"Do not disturb me," he kicked her to the floor.

She continued to whine softly until finally she fell asleep, purring contentedly.

He'd won the battle, but there was still the war ahead. And this one is my partner, he thought sardonically. The one who was supposed to strengthen him to deal with his external enemies, who as near as he could tell, now included the race of shiftlings and humans both.

Better sleep, he thought, while I can.

"I'm sorry," he whispered a last prayer to the spirit of Maizy. "To all of you."

As the most recent to fall because of his carelessness, it would be her job to convey the message to all the other spirits, the many others he'd also led into death with his foolish notions of love.

Again it occurred to him that perhaps Tristans was right. He was a criminal and he needed to answer. To the Code.

And one day, come hell or heaven, demon or angel, he would.

CHAPTER SIX

“Cassandra, my dear, it's time to wake up.”

She heard the soft voice and felt the tickling of the feather. At first she smiled, but then as she stirred herself and felt the rocking motions and the tight metal confines, the realities of her status returned to her, dooming her afresh to heartbreak.

Tristans was there at eye level, watching very closely, enjoying. It was this part of her slavery he most enjoyed. Seeing her rediscover it each time she woke up. These were precious seconds, watching those luscious flanks stir in the metal cage, suspended from the ceiling precisely at eye level. Seeing her eyes, pop open, blink and focus. It was the same each day. She feels for the gold collar, finds it still there. And the shackles on her ankles. And the metal box, from which she hangs like a bird. Sometimes he would even watch her in her sleep. Enjoying the restriction as she tries to stretch, pushing her hands and feet against the bars, and the rattling as she tries to turn with all her heavy chains on.

“What did you dream of?” he asked, just as he had each of the previous ten mornings she had been in his

possession.

He could read her mind, of course, and already had, but it was his will that she speak the words.

"I was back in the camp, with my first masters," she said through dried lips. She was very thirsty, but if she begged too soon for water, she would be punished.

"Excellent. And were you obeying them?"

"I tried, but I could get nothing right, master. They had to beat me and beat me."

"Tell me again of the slave auction," he commanded, caressing her prone breasts through the cage. "Tell me of how you were sold."

Cassandra sighed hotly, her nipples stiffening to hard little nubs. She did not desire to be stimulated in this way, but she made no move to resist. She was, after all, Tristans' property to do with as he pleased.

And there would be no recourse, for she herself had made the decision long ago to change her status. That she had hidden it so long changed nothing.

Closing her eyes once more, Cassandra returned to the place, summoning the experience for her master's pleasure. "The soldiers dragged me into the city to sell me, tied to the rear end of the leader's horse. My hands were behind me and the rope was 'round my neck. I had to run to keep up and twice I stumbled. I feared they would not stop but simply let me choke myself to death, so I made sure not to fall. I was naked and filthy, though still I was stared at with desirous eyes. Men lusted for me and women showed their contempt. I was a prime piece of booty and the soldiers were rightfully proud. They conveyed me

down ever-larger streets, till at last we reached a main avenue. There was a livery stable for the horses and beside it, one for slaves. I spent my first night there, much to my humiliation. My bed was hay and there were spiders and rats continuously crawling about.

"I was grateful when they released me the next morning. It was time to say goodbye to the soldiers, for they had already received their gold. They were denied the right to whip me because I was soon to be merchandise, but each was allowed a final time to bugger me. I was had bent over a bale of hay, man after man coming inside my puckered asshole.

"From there, I was taking for cleaning. Forcing me to remain still in a courtyard, they dumped bucket after bucket of icy water on me. Men stood about me with brushes on the end of long poles with which to scrub me. I had to keep my hands over my head as they braised my skin with the sharp bristles. They kept at me long past the point of tears. A clean girl, they said, sold better.

"I was not allowed to dry myself but was conveyed immediately to a holding cell where I was packed in with two dozen or more naked, wet females, shoulder to shoulder. Apparently, if we could not sit, they reasoned, we could not get dirty. They came for us one by one. They saved me for last, which I did not take to be a good sign. Outside the cell I was fitted with a steel collar, attached to a long chain that was to serve as my leash. They made me bend over and a lot number was painted upon my ass.

"Lastly, they chained my hands behind my back and ordered me to spread my legs. I watched aghast

as a man produced an enormous wooden phallus, which he thrust in and out of me till I was moaning quite loudly. Aroused slaves sell better, he told me, and I had better fetch a high enough price or they would eat the loss and feed me to the lions in the city's hippodrome.

My stomach fluttered in fear and my heart pounded as they led me, helpless on my leash to the auction block. The buyers sat on wooden benches, stacked in rows, staggered like in the old Coliseum. They were nearly all male, of every discernible nationality, color and dress. The only thing they had in common was the look in their eyes as they appraised my flesh. My flanks. My breasts. My belly and ass. I was a piece of meat to them, though a very complicated and pleasurable one, one that made their cocks stir and their pulses race.

"The auctioneer told my story, some of which was true and some of which was invented for the occasion. I listened in mild amusement under the pale blue sky as he spoke of my lonely years in a castle and of how I was rescued by a handsome prince, only to fall into the hands of marauding robbers on the way to his castle. I am sure they did not believe it, either, but a good fancy stirs the blood far more than the facts.

"When he was done with his narrative, he produced a pointed stick, which he used to point out my various assets. I flushed crimson as he alluded to my dripping pussy, my tight, hard nipples and the way I had moaned earlier with the wooden cock inside me.

“‘Surely one of you would like to own this creature?’ he queried at last, and so begin the bidding, a flurry of hand motions, all interpreted by the expertise of the auctioneer. Up to the final bid I had no idea who would own me. Would it be the fat baron, with a huge emerald on his pinkie whose bids alternated with munches on a turkey leg, or would it be the thin Bedouin with the long scarf over his head and the curved sword at his belt? In the end, it was the prince, as I told you, though he purchased me through a buyer, and it would be two weeks more till I laid eyes on the man himself.”

“A splendid tale.” Tristans was gently swaying her cage, thinking of what he would do to her today. Really, he was quite grateful for the diversion she provided. The search for Jase and his bitch was not going as well as he’d hoped. The police had found nothing, nor had his own men. He himself flew night and day across the vast deserts, plains and hills that made up the country called America, but it was a much bigger place than he’d imagined. So many people, as well. A vastly higher number than could ever have been sustained in his own day on a single continent.

Though he was loath to admit it, there were times he feared he might not be up for the challenge of ruling these humans. After all, they could barely govern themselves, though they had at their disposal the power to destroy a dozen worlds like this one, a hundred even.

He would need more soldiers. More vampyrs, and other shiftlings, too. An army, forged from the

creatures of the night, the creatures of man's most ancient nightmares. So, too, would he need help from beyond the reaches of space, from the black lords beyond the light of the moon who even now awaited his signal, the proof that he was worthy of leading their joint armies.

For now, though, he would enjoy another well-deserved rest. Savoring the ongoing degradation of Jase's former lover. The once-haughty Cassandra.

"Refresh my memory," said he to the caged girl, as if he did not have the number burned into his brain. "How much did you charge your customers, when you were masquerading as a free woman?"

"Ten thousand, master."

"American dollars?"

"Per client, yes, master."

"Quite a lot, don't you think?"

"For a slave, yes, master."

"Indeed. And what do you think you are worth now?"

"Only what master decides."

"How about a dollar a day? Is that too low a price for the complete, unhampered use of this body?"

"No, master." He was petting her pussy through the bars, making her horny and desperate.

"If I sell you for a dollar, then you'll do all the things you would have for ten thousand?"

"More, master...because I wouldn't be able to hold anything back."

He patted her, sending her into spasms, but not enough for an orgasm. "Such a good girl. Perhaps I will keep you myself for the day."

"Fuck me," she moaned, the sound from deep in her chest. "Master, fuck me."

The trances she went into now were becoming almost frightening in their intensity. Each day was more powerful than the last. No human would endure sex with her now. He had brought out her true feminine nature. The beast and slave girl within. Oh, how he longed to similarly tame the dark-haired girl.

Nyte. His one true equal in the world. Would he slay her or make her his queen? Much would depend on the nature of their first meeting. And that day was coming. They could not hide forever, this pathetic duo, the supernatural Bonnie and Clyde. He would not be able to count on the police. They were incompetent, as were all human authority figures. It would be his own servants who would accomplish the matter, and ultimately he himself.

With a wave of his hand, he lowered the dangling cage to the floor. The door opened and out crawled its beautiful occupant. A pet to kiss his feet. "Fuck me." She looked into his eyes between kisses. "Please."

"I wonder," he speculated. "Do you still have contact with him?"

He should have thought of this before. Cassandra and Jase had always been close. Perhaps they still were.

"My mind is closed, master, to everything but your will."

He probed for veracity and found she was telling the truth. It was not only her body in captivity in this place, this cage rigged in her former residence, but

also her mind. She was no longer free to wander, to think as she wished.

All the more reason, then, to open her mind back up, use her as a tracking device.

Tristans drew a deep breath, cleansing and purifying. Today he would go deeper with the slave Cassandra. Much deeper. Raising his arms, he prepared to change their surroundings, his own appearance...everything.

"Change, Cassandra," was his warning. "Become the beast within. Or die."

A single hissing of wings marked his own conversion to the creature of pure death. The humble female regarded him in terror, but did not freeze up. Having been given her orders, she converted to her cat form and turned tail. Through the jungle. The vampyr in hot pursuit.

Perhaps this time, she thought, not entirely with sadness, he will kill me outright.

* * * *

Nyte was showing no particular sensitivity to the light, but that did not mean anything in particular. Unlike in the stories, the true vampyrs were as much at home in the light as in the darkness. Nor had they any particular aversion to garlic or mirrors, or any natural tendency to aggression. Most were peaceable types, elder statesmen and storytellers. Gentle souls, easily ripped to shreds by the harsh realities of the world. If anyone had doubt of this, he need only look to the bats in nature. Though terrifying to behold,

they are shy, often awkward creatures, and many of them are not even carnivorous.

It was the inner character that shaped a dark vampyr. Bitterness and seething rage. Perhaps this is where the legend of the creature that fears the light came from. Tristans feared light, but only that which drowned out fear and ignorance.

The one thing that was true of the legends was the part about genetic mutation. A fallen vampyr could taint others by the sharing of blood. Nyte had been bitten, this much was clear. Why she was showing this trend toward darkness like Tristans and not behaving as a zombie, like most human victims, was due to two causes. First, she had taken his blood, also tainted. Second, she herself had suffered much trauma and had within her already the seeds of vampyrism.

If only matters were not complicated by sex. Jase wasn't just trying to evaluate Nyte and watch her for signs of the dark plague, he was wrestling his own desires, and a whole raft of emotions besides. At this point, he was not at all sure who was winning.

"We're down to forty-seven dollars," she announced shortly before midnight at the Starlight Motel on Highway 327 near Deep Crater, Texas. "We'll have to make another hit."

"No. It's too close to the last one."

Jase wasn't keen on these convenience store smash and grabs one little bit. They were risky as hell, and one of these times they were going to get their heads blown off by some clerk with a shotgun playing hero over a hundred dollars and a few six-packs of beer.

Speaking of which, Nyte had just downed her fourth can. "Don't be a pussy, Jase. The only way the cops can catch us is we turn ourselves in, and even then we'd have to hold their hands through the paperwork."

"We're pushing our luck," he said. "I can feel it."

She sauntered over, hot as hell in her black leather vest, jeans and black cowboy boots. "I can feel something, too," she grabbed his crotch. "And it's not a pussy."

"It isn't just the cops, Nyte. Tristans is looking, too, and he's not as stupid as they are."

Nyte tore the snap buttons on his western shirt and went to work on his hairy chest with her lips. "But he's not as smart as we are, either."

The girl was getting to him, as always. "If we're gonna go, we better do it now," he warned her off.

"We got time," she nuzzled his nipple.

"I said, no, Nyte, now knock it off."

"You knock it off."

He pulled her head back by the hair, savagely. She was bringing things out in him that even he, the wolf, had never felt before.

"Get out to the car now, bitch, or I'll lay into you with this belt hard enough to make you scream for your mother."

"Yes, sir," she said, her smile mocking him.

He pushed her to the door. "Leave me alone, goddamn it."

She picked up the sawed off shotgun, laughing. Hoisting it over her shoulder, she handed him the Magnum .357 pistol, which he promptly tucked into

his belt. "Save the hostility for the counter jockey."

"There won't be any hostility, Nyte. Just a clean robbery. In and out. Just like always."

"No, tonight will be different," she said, already halfway to the car.

Jase was sure of only two things as he followed her out into the crisp, star-filled night. First, that this night would be different, just like she said, and second, that whatever she was referring to would be both terrible and unavoidable.

* * * *

Cassandra did not want her eyes to see. Nor did she want her mind to know. Her master owned everything about her and therefore her only hope of saving Jase was blindness and ignorance.

He had run her down, of course. His vampyr's form outstripping her sleek cat form in the artificial jungle created of his dark intents. A dozen teeth, a hundred, a thousand sank into her heaving body as she collapsed to the green floor, tangled in vines. Her haunches aching from the running, her cat muscles screaming out from the exertion, could do naught but yield to the wounds, maddeningly small. Drip, drip, drip went her blood.

And with it the last vestiges of autonomy. His breath was very hot on her. A shaft was inside her female hole, one of the vampyr's tendrils. Another buggered her ass. Her mouth, too, was filled, completing her humiliation. Broken, trapped, pinned down, Cassandra waited for it to take its fill, praying

it would not find a way to use any part of her against Jase.

Her eyes. Her mind. Her heart. She must shut them all down. Above all she must not remember. For in memory lies the link to eternal connection, one soul to another.

But Tristans was clever and patient. He waited on top of her a long time, probing, digging. At long last, he found what he was looking for. A single memory not yet excised or burnt to ashes. A live ember in the burnt-out hearth of her freedom. A viable link to who Jase was then. And where he was now.

Cassandra attempted to hold it back from him and for this she was punished, her mind slapped cruelly down. As the slave whimpered, the tyrant Tristans unwrapped his tiny glowing gift.

The memory of Cassandra and Jase at the Court of St. Bathos on the night of High Festival, some three seasons before the fall of the kingdom. It was a time of great merriment, and also of remembering of the exploits of their forefathers. As part of the celebrations, there was a formal ball, in which each participant donned the mask not of his own shifting form, but that of one of his brothers or sisters. It was a time of tall tales, of light-hearted ribbing as werewolves would poke fun of wereboars, and wereboars would ridicule the vampyrs, and so on.

As was often the case at such functions, Cassie and Jase had slipped away to the garden, underneath the stars they loved so well. Lying upon their backs, her in her gown of shimmering gold and him in his velvet suit, him with the mask of the wolf and her with that

of a cat, they had counted the heavenly objects and tried to chart their futures. There was no seeing anything clearly that night, for both were drunk on green spring wine, and also on each other. It was love, though neither would call it such. They were still young, and naïve, though each had nearly two centuries of life already accounted for.

"That shall be my star," declared Jase, picking a particularly bright one.

"That's the North Star, it's already taken," she teased.

"By whom?" He wanted to know.

She admitted she wasn't sure, but that it must be, or else why would it already have a name?

"A name means nothing," he declared. "Or else we'd all be owned, too, by whoever picked our names."

That led Cassandra to speculate as to why they couldn't pick out their own names.

"Why not do that ourselves?" he enthused. "I'll pick one for you and you'll pick one for me."

She had gone first, and without hesitation had picked Jase, the name fraught with such meaning in their language. And so very prophetic as well. At the time she had meant it in the more elegant form, meaning he who precedes law or custom, which would be a pioneer. But in time he would claim for himself the second definition, he who breaks the law.

"Now you do me," she said.

"I must look at you first," he decided, sitting up on his elbow, hip to the ground.

Cassandra turned likewise and they were face to

face. She found the position both peculiar and strangely arousing. They had never before looked at one another so intently without talking. This went on several minutes till she could stand more. "Well?" She demanded. "Are you going to moon over me or name me?"

"Both," he whispered, and that was when he leaned forward and stole a kiss. It was their first, long and deep and passionate, their tongues saying things they had both been holding back on for such a very long time. They fit together, too, perfectly, and as their mouths molded seamlessly, there seemed little reason to ever end it.

Except that there'd been other things they'd been putting off as well.

"Jase, we shouldn't do this," she'd whispered.

"Why not?" he pulled at her shoulder straps to bare her breasts. "You're not married, and neither am I."

"But the king has not chosen our blood mates."

"Maybe that's for us to decide and not the king."

She shook her head, fearful of the blasphemy the words bespoke. To this day she was still eaten apart with the guilt of knowing it might well have been her actions that night that had turned the gods' favor away from their people. Perhaps her act of lust had spelled the ruination of their kingdom.

At the time, though, she could feel nothing but his hands on her body, his clever, eager lips, so anxious to explore each and every part of her. Their clothes seemed to melt away like icicles on a spring day. The grass was their magic carpet, cushioning her body for

his as he parted her legs, very, very gently. For beings half beast and half human it was amazingly soft and slow, this first taking.

Virginity's soft sigh, the amazed looks upon their faces as they behold each other's anatomy, pink and white in the cool evening air. They need no bed, no canopy but the field of stars. Jase rises above her, almost floating then sinks again, finding her center with his very first attempt. She sighs, for he has struck true. An arrow piercing her girlhood, plucking from her the naiveté of childhood.

Their orgasms come quickly, beside the point almost to the splendid reality of their contact, the total changing of everything between them. And yet it is not changed, too, for afterwards they will still laugh and joke and hold hands, in the old way. And they will not marry. Nor have children. They might have in time, oh god, they might have, had they not been wrenched so cruelly apart.

Jase, I chose life for you. For you I held out hope and took the mantle of slavery thinking we would meet again.

And meet they did, though it would never be the same. How could it, in the cynical world of exile, in the hidden times of skulking and self-hatred? For those would be the days of the Code and the fearing of the Guardians and their bottomless wrath.

Again, the song is sung in her heart. *For you. I chose slavery for you. I alone, of all my company that day had something to live for. And I still do...*

Too late did Cassandra realize she had broadcast this message, sending it upon the winds, straight to him. It would find him, too, as surely as sunlight

finds the earth, as surely as the rainbow bends back upon itself. And Tristans would follow it, using it as his means to capture her true love.

"No," she cried miserably. "Let me die...Tristans, let me die."

"The choice," he reminded her, "is no longer yours."

And with that he was gone. On his way to hunt down his rival. The only shiftling yet alive who could stand against him. Allowing herself the briefest glimpse, Cassandra peered into his mind.

Jase was racing over the desert. Or was that his heart racing? Oh, gods, he was hurtling to disaster. An enemy was with him. A greater one than even than Tristans. What could this mean? By everything sacred to shiftlings and humans alike, what could it mean?

* * * *

Jase heard whispering in his ear. At once he thought of Cassandra, something he hadn't done in several days. It was like she was right there with him, shadowing his heartbeat.

He thought of that night they'd laid together in the garden, when they'd kissed and given each other names. He'd never picked one for her. It was an oversight he'd regretted ever since and sometimes he told himself that was the cause of them being separated for all those years after the invasion. What had happened to her in no way lowered his respect for her, and he'd told her that, though she never

really believed him. In her mind she was tainted goods, a human's slave, no longer fit to be a shiftling blood mate.

"You're so tense, darling," Nyte kneaded his rock hard thigh from the passenger seat of their latest stolen vehicle, a late model El Dorado. "Let me relax you."

She put her lips on his cock, and the connection, whatever it was, was broken. He was pretty sure it was Cassandra, trying to communicate. But there'd been another presence, too, trying to hone in.

Tristans, perhaps?

If so, then he was damned lucky Nyte had acted when she did or the vampyr would have been on them already.

"Nyte, baby," he breathed. "Let's just forget this next robbery and just head to Mexico. We'll be safe there."

"No," she came up for air. "We have to rob that store. I want to."

He gripped the wheel, feeling all together helpless. Why did this girl have such a grip on him? He was her sexual superior. She still took her spankings and let him kick her to the floor when he was done fucking her. But she had her own special ways of domination, deep and subtle and very, very black. More and more he found himself thinking like her, wanting like her. At the last robbery they'd very nearly killed a young couple just for hugging each other so tightly during the robbery.

"I'm not going to get you off," Nyte announced, abandoning his cock mid-suck. "You need your

edge."

Jase was still hard and throbbing when they pulled into the parking lot of the well-lit store. Green and blue striped roof, fluorescent lights everywhere, like a glass and steel Mecca, the promise of a million cheaply packaged products inside and endless rivers of petrol outside, waiting to be pumped.

"Take this and let's go," she handed him the last of the tablets, trucker's pills they'd taken from the last hold-up.

Jase swallowed down the pure caffeine. "There's people in there. We should wait."

Her eyes were wild, darker than he'd ever seen. "You wait," she hopped out of the car with the shotgun in tow.

"Son of a bitch," he muttered, hurrying out after her.

Nyte walked right up to the store and aimed the gun at the glass doors. She fired a single blast, shattering them both.

The clerk dove for the floor, along with the handful of customers.

"Nyte, are you fucking crazy?"

She just waltzed right in, paying him no mind. "Everybody down," she said sweetly. "This is a robbery."

Jase hurried in after to check on the clerk. Jumping over the counter, he found the man cowering on the floor. He wasn't armed and didn't appear to have tripped off any alarm. "Get up," Jase ordered. "Hands behind your head."

"The rest of you get out here. Don't make me come

get you," hollered Nyte.

They came in ones and twos. A pair of elderly gentlemen in khakis and baseball caps, a young couple in their early thirties, suburban looking, the woman very pregnant and, last but not least, a pair of teen boys, around Nyte's age.

"Oh, I can see we're gonna have a lot of fun," Nyte crooned, eying the pretty pregnant woman with the auburn pony tail, her belly filling out her short maternity dress quite nicely. "How about you two," she asked the teens, typically dressed in baggy jeans and oversized sweatshirts. "You players underage?"

"W—we're eighteen," the skinnier blonde one answered.

"Too bad for you. Should have said you were seventeen. I'd have left you alone. Now you have to strip for me."

The two boys looked at each other and then at Jase.

"Forget it, Ny—" He caught himself before using her real name. "Just get their wallets and we'll get the fuck out of here, okay?"

Nyte whirled on him, leveling the shotgun. "I told you already, Jase, stop being a pussy." She pulled the trigger, sending him and the clerk both down to the floor.

"You nearly hit us!" Jase screamed.

"Oh, well, I'll try harder next time. Now, how about you two?"

The two boys didn't have to be told again to get naked.

"Put your clothes over here," she pointed to the counter. "And make it snappy."

They hustled, doing just as they were told.

"Now I want you over by the ATM."

Jase was rifling their pants pockets. They had a grand total of eight and half bucks and a penknife between them. "This is fucked up," he told Nyte.

"How many weeks along is she?" Nyte asked the pregnant woman's husband, who was still wearing his business suit.

"Thirty-one," he said, crouching beside the flushed looking mother to be, whose back was against the freezer.

"Is that close? I don't even know."

"Getting there," said the husband. "Please, can you just let her go? She can't take this kind of stress."

"Hey, it would be a lot worse if she wasn't pregnant already. Then she'd have to spend the rest of her life wondering which one of these assholes in here is the father of her baby. Hey, Dickhead Twins, get over here."

The two young men, looking like they wanted to throw up, trotted quickly over to the young couple.

"You're gonna be fucking our proud little Madonna here. Any questions?"

They looked at each other like the answer was on their foreheads.

"Um, we ain't never done a pregnant chick," said the blonde.

"We don't want to hurt her," the other added, a taller brunette.

"All right," she shouted to rest of them. "I want everyone's motherfucking clothes on the counter. Now."

"Even us?" asked the elderly gentleman.

Nyte fired the shotgun at the fluorescent light just above the freezer. There was a popping explosion of glass followed by an arc of electricity. "Does that answer your question?"

Clothes started piling up on the counter, the people shuttling back and forth, meek as rabbits.

"You're pretty hot," Nyte said of the pregnant lady. "I can see why he knocked you up. Hubby, help her get on all fours. Hey, you two geezers, can you still get it up?"

The senior citizens were on their knees praying.

"What about you, Jase, you up for a piece?"

"Nyte, stop it. Give me the gun and let's get out of here." He got as far as a foot away, at which point she aimed the gun at his chest.

"You're pissing me off, Jase, and you really don't want to do that."

Jase held his ground. "The gun's empty, Nyte. You already fired both shells. Remember?"

Nyte's eyes flashed as she squeezed the trigger, quite impossibly, four times in a row, each time producing a new hole in the ceiling above their heads. It was worse than he thought. Already the laws of time and matter were ceasing to apply to her. Could it be she was becoming a stronger vampyr even than Tristans?

"Let's not do anything rash," he stalled for time.

"Glad you're seeing things my way. How about you go first? You'll take a blowjob, won't you? Or are your morals too high for that?"

Jase could taste the fear in the air, electric,

intoxicating. It was difficult under circumstances like this not to convert over, changing to his wolf self. In that event, given the morose, evil nature of their situation, he would end up tearing these people limb from limb. And he could only imagine if Nyte showed them her true colors.

"Too bad you're not lactating yet, we could get everyone a drink," said Nyte, directing her next to caress her own husband. The man stood stone still, his face revealing no emotion. If the experience was meant to shame him, it seemed to be having the opposite effect, hardening him with an eye to some terrible vengeance.

Nyte wasn't backing down, though and Jase feared she had an even greater malevolence in mind. Maybe if he could distract her, get her horny for him.

"Come on, baby, we can take a ride in the desert, do it under the stars," he reached for her.

The shotgun was on him again, this time pressed to his dick. "Give me your gun, Jase."

"What?" He laughed nervously.

"I warned you about fucking with me, and you didn't listen. Now you're one of them as far as I'm concerned. So give me the gun and get naked."

"No, Nyte, I'm drawing the line."

The little bitch was pulling the trigger, aiming it right at his guts. He saw it in slow motion and had just enough time to react. The blast was deflected, pulverizing the bread and chip aisle. Jase easily knocked the shotgun from her hands and grabbed her arm, holding her in a vise-like grip. "Now," he said definitively. "We get the fuck out of here."

"Sorry, dear," she purred, indicating the rapidly approaching sirens. "I think it's a little late for that."

Jase swore under his breath, calling her every name he could think of. She was right, though, it was too late to get away. The cops were coming from both directions, barely a thousand yards and closing.

"We're going to have to hole up here," he said.

"Oh, goodie, hostages. Can I have my gun back now?"

"Cut the bullshit, Nyte, and get them all against the back wall. You," he indicated the clerk. "Help me get these display racks against the door frame."

"Mister, that ain't gonna keep out shit."

Jase cocked the revolver and aimed at the man's head. "When I want a fucking critique of my defense plans, I'll ask for it. Got me?"

He nodded rapidly and moved to help with the racks. He was right, they were still sitting ducks, but with the hostages, they'd at least buy some time.

Within a minute a dozen cruisers had rolled into the lot, guns pointing right at them.

"This is the sheriff," they heard a minute later on the bullhorn. "We have you surrounded..."

"This is bullshit," said Nyte, sounding surprisingly bored. "Why are we even bothering with this? I say we change over and kill every last motherfucker out there."

"We're not animals, Nyte, regardless of what you learned from Tristans."

"Tristans taught me to be a woman," she countered. "It takes a real man to do that."

"I'm not going to let you get to me. Not now, in the

middle of all this."

"Get to you? Honey, you're as good as gotten already. Don't you know that?"

He opted not to ask for clarification. Instead he tried to tune back into the amplified droning of the local sheriff.

"...and you won't be harmed. You have my word. But we need the hostages now."

Nyte put her shotgun to the head of one of the old men. "Let's let him see one of them right now, in about a million pieces; what do you think, Jase?"

"No. No bloodshed. That's an order, Nyte."

"You don't own me," she defied. "You're a fraud. I see through you now."

"Nyte, so help me," he growled, not daring to turn his head from the tiny opening in the makeshift wall he'd been peeking through. "Defy me one more time and I'll rip you to shreds with my bare hands."

"Promises, promises," she taunted, though she let the old man go anyway.

"We're going to give up one or two of them. To show good faith," Jase said.

"Sure," she said sardonically. "And why don't you just hand over your testicles, too, just so they're clear it's a ball-less wonder they're dealing with."

Jase ignored her and signaled for one of the two old men to come forward. At least someone would get out of here alive. Pulling aside the display racks with the help of the clerk, he made an opening large enough for the man to fit through.

"Tell them we want to negotiate," Jase told him.

The man was sobbing, nodding and smiling all at

once. Like a drunk man, he staggered out into the sunlight. They were just pushing back the rack when Nyte opened fire, hitting him full in the back. The blast pushed him forward, sending him face first onto the asphalt a dozen feet from the door.

Jase was beside himself. "What the fuck was that for?"

"I'm not sure," she pinched her dark brows seriously. "It just seemed like the thing to do."

He had no idea which of the two was worse—the act itself or the totally blasé attitude she'd adopted towards an act of cold-blooded and entirely unnecessary murder.

"Just get out of my face, Nyte. Watch the hostages and don't look at me or talk to me unless it's a fucking emergency."

"How long for?" She wanted to know.

The girl was unbelievable. "A long time, Nyte. Pretty much like forever, if it's all the same to you."

She gave him a look, indicating he'd moved to her lower than shit list for good. "Fuck you, Jase."

He waited for her to go back where she was supposed to then turned his attention out the front door. Men in heavy armor and shields were moving up to recover the body. They were SWAT, trained rescuers and killers both. At the moment they were retreating, protecting the downed victim but you could bet the next time they approached it would be with guns blazing.

For a brief instant he thought of suicide. But that would leave Nyte with these people. No, he had to find a way to get them out safely, even at the cost of

his own life. That was, after all, the difference between him and Nyte. He would never stoop to murder.

At least he hoped not.

* * * *

Tristans had crashed most ungracefully in the middle of the desert. He'd been sailing along quite nicely, following the beam of Cassandra's thought, the fine filament of longing and yearning leading him straight to the enemy. But at the last possible second it had broken off and he was left in the middle of nowhere, cactus needles imbedded in his ass.

He strongly suspected the little bitch, the pseudo vampyress, of foiling him. She was getting more vexing every moment. Instead of killing her or making her queen, he decided, he would make her a slave—which is what she should have been in the first place.

The question for now was how far away were they and in which direction? Clearly this was not the time to search alone. Every passing second put him potentially further away from his prey. With a stretch of his arms, Tristans called forth his minions, the growing rag tag army he'd been assembling. Shiftlings of every stripe, from stalwart wolves to brave eagles, even elusive owls and hyenas. And of course his inner retinue of fallen vampyrs, young bucks as poisoned against peace as he was, sick to death of cowering in shadows and ready to take their place of command in the sun.

A place of rule over both races.

"Listen carefully," he stood in their midst, upon the floor of the stony desert, shiftless and unforgiving. "Our hour is at hand. Only this one obstacle remains; that removed and all will join us, or else die in their resistance. Find our enemies now, and we shall indeed reign, all of us as brothers."

A fine speech, though he himself was now and always would be king. As soon as he was secure and in place, with new even more nefarious moon forces at his disposal, he would relieve these very listeners, smoothly and definitively, of the burden of their lives. Owe nothing to anyone and never rely too long upon a single armed constabulary, lest they learn to rule without you. That was a lesson Tristans had taken from one of the few human leaders he'd had any respect for, Adolf Hitler.

"The rogue werewolf," Tristans proclaimed. "And the abomination of a hybrid, the human turned vampyress—bring them both to me. Alive."

"All hail to the king," proclaimed Rolarz, leading the cheer. "Tristans the Invincible. Tristans the Noble. Tristans the Merciful!"

"Merciless," he snapped. "Can you get nothing right, you fool?"

"A thousand pardons," he begged, with a steep bow.

Tristans extended a single finger, a talon, really. "Not enough," he said.

In a flash, Rolarz was gone.

"You," he said to another vampyr, who named was Bathsimea. "You are promoted. Now get this rabble

out of here.”

I do love myself, he thought, vanishing in the cold night air with great dramatic flair, only to reappear beside Cassandra, whom he’d left a thousand miles away. She was still face down on the bed, exhausted from his having of her — mind and body both.

He crawled in silently beside her, his forms still somewhat less than human, dust covered, winged and many clawed.

“Do not change,” he ordered as he nibbled her softly awake.

This would be her punishment for letting the enemy escape—to be taken in her human form by a vampyr, to feel the terror, degradation and utter skin crawling humiliation of being possessed by a demon.

Swiftly, he put her to her back, arranging her as he liked, savoring every inch of her vulnerable flesh. Such an amazing thing was this humanness beneath him, this complete nudity, hairless and scale-less. How could one endure such a form without respite? Surely one would go mad.

Lightly pricking at her skin, one place after another, Tristans drew blood, then dabbed it dry, just as quick, each time with a different tongue. It fascinated him how she could be so repulsed by his touch, so instinctively petrified and yet so easily aroused at the same time. He had only to play upon her nipples, to blow foul air on her soft belly, to release his slime between her legs and she would respond to him, animalistically, lost in the passion of the beasts of the forest.

What a joke, this humanity! And they dared call

themselves superior? They should only be so lucky as to have the noble characteristics of animals. It was no wonder they spent so much of their time imitating the beasts, lauding and fearing and, most lately, slaughtering them wholesale. In every tribe, life centered around pretending to be what they themselves could not. Wearing masks, dancing around fires, painting the images of the things they hunted. Using everything from the juice of berries to the dust of colored stones, they press and impress on every surface the images of the creatures of air and sea and land. Animals upon rock caves and animals on clothing and domiciles and on shields of every design.

Even the shiftlings had their rituals. The High Festival, for example. Yes, he, too, remembered that night when Jase and Cassandra had discovered their lust for one another. Unbeknownst to them, there'd been a witness to their lovemaking, namely himself, hovering, just out of sight behind one of the exquisitely sculpted bushes for which the Court of St. Bathos was famed. He had been following, intent himself on an opportunity to make a play for the lovely Cassandra. His belly hot with wine, his cock hard, he'd been quite merry and randy in his owl's mask.

And then he'd seen them, yes, he'd seen every last detail, though Cassandra thought she'd hidden it, and so had Jase. His heart had crashed as he saw them fall to the ground in a heap, already as lovers as they turned eyes to the stars upon their backs. He knew even before they did what would become of their

seemingly small talk, of the touching of hands, the giggles and faint whispers.

And the pet names. How he hated these most of all. His prick remained stiff, though, and the gods help him, he masturbated, stroking himself in time to their own motions, his penis at one with their own twisting limbs. In the end, he did not expend himself. That would have been too innocent, childish even. Far better for him if he had, for that might have put him on a road entirely different. He might have stayed their friend, or at least a part of their world. As it was, the Court and all its splendor died for him that night, long before the human invaders, the soulless barbarians came to sack it.

It might have been chance, his meeting up with Merisinia on the way back to the ballroom, though as he thought of it now—and he had a million times run these events through in his mind—it must have been that he, too, was followed and that he, too, had a would be lover in the form of that fair young maiden, barely into womanhood.

Yes, Merisinia loved him. That mere slip of a girl, so exceedingly radiant and beautiful. Her voice could charm and soothe the very beasts and her long auburn hair, running in curls and rivulets, could well have been home to angels, weary and craving silk repose. She was wearing that night a gown of green and upon her tiny, perfectly formed face she had, of all things, a vampyr's mask.

"Cousin Tristans," she employed the common court address, managing a shy curtsy as he nearly bowled her over in his hasty retreat from the garden.

"It seems we are at cross-purposes."

He blinked, barely having seen her. Some excuse was mumbled on his part and he brushed past, though she remained quite persistent, as little, beautiful women tend to be. He at last relented, the blood pounding in his ears as he was led, hand in hand upon what he could only assume was to be a walk in the garden. He'd agreed to this, though he had no memory of her asking or his answering.

Merisinia spoke to him of many things and all the time he kept on thinking, what does she want, and why is she not Cassandra? Something was terribly wrong in his heart, and he feared he would not be able to control it. At last, somewhere near where the other two had lain, he stopped her. Taking her by the shoulders, he looked down into her eyes, the palest green, their color faintly illuminated by the beams of the moon. For some reason he took her pink lips to be mocking him, though in retrospect surely they were not. At the same time he remembered thinking to himself how remarkable it was that in a community of hybrid creatures, each with the untamed soul of a beast, there were, to his knowledge, no incidences of rape.

"I am hungry, Merisinia."

"I know," whispered she, whose true nature was the owl.

My mask for hers and hers for mine.

"We are very far from the party," said he, his soft grip having turned to steel. "You will not escape."

"I will not try," said she, her eyes unflinching.

Tristans tested the limits of his power with a kiss.

The frail woman was not so frail, pushing herself against him, indicating some hunger of her own.

"Have you done this before?"

"Only in my dreams."

"I will be the first," he marveled.

And the last, though he did not yet know this.

"Remove your dress," Tristans said, trying his hand at command.

Merisinia stepped back. Her eyes did not leave his the entire time. He thought it mere obedience at the time, though it was truly love which gave the steadiness to her hands, the sureness of purpose to each motion. When the gown of green was at her feet, upon the grass, he ordered her to stop.

Her hands paused, having been prepared to remove the chemise as well.

"That is for me to do," he told her, as though he had done this a hundred times.

And he tore it from her body, white and pale in the moonlight. In truth it was not his hundredth time, or even his tenth. He had known but one female before this, a friend of his mother's who had initiated him when he was barely a century and a half old. Merisinia was the first female of his own age, and also the first girl of his own choosing.

Naked now, Merisinia could no longer stand. "My lord," she breathed, falling to her knees.

He allowed her to open his breeches and remove his pulsing organ. He did not know how it would fit inside her sweet mouth or even that he should try, but she was quite determined. He nearly lost it as she held him reverently, rubbing his manhood over her

face, across her sculpted cheeks as though it were some holy object. Any chance for tenderness was quickly being lost. He would take her and quickly, using her as he saw fit. Taking full advantage of her soft surrender.

And in the process, unjustly working out his anger against Cassandra. And Jase.

"Let down your hair," he said, and she did so, even as she bestowed ladylike kisses all over his cock. The tresses of her hair fell over her shoulders and down her back, the sight of it maddening his blood. There was no longer any holding back. This hair was made to be grabbed and pulled, this body to be abused and thrust beneath a man.

Winding his fingers in her luxuriousness, he prepared himself, gaining full control of her head and mouth "Take it," he said. "Take all of it."

And take it she did, surrendering her lips to every last inch of his throbbing, pulsing dick. She was soft and vibrant, her mouth as alive as the pussy of the woman he'd fucked before. He could only imagine what it would be like when he finally got inside the sex of this one.

Merisia's tiny hands settled on his buttocks, encouraging him to fuck her face. She made no complaint along the way, nor did she show signs of gasping or choking. More than anything he wanted to spill himself down this fine gullet, to make her swallow every drop, but he wanted to fuck her, too.

Resisting every impulse to take his pleasure now, he pulled himself from her willing mouth and gave fresh instructions. "On your back. Legs spread, hands

over your head."

Merisinia put herself immediately into submission, her thighs gaping. He marveled at the pink lips, tiny and glistening. The girl's sex was swollen, the virgin hole eagerly awaiting his penetration. It should have been the most natural thing in the world to fill that void, to cover her over and wrap her, if not in love, than at least in lust.

Instead, the sight of her, so weak and trusting, angered him to no end.

"I can see I shall have to reconsider my opinion of you," he said coldly, standing above her, still fully dressed, his cock yet at attention and wet from her tongue. "I had thought you a lady, but now I see you are a slut. Looking at you now, I can see it was a lie. You are no virgin, that much is clear."

"I am," said Merisinia, her eyes slightly wounded. "I would not lie to you, Tristans."

He snorted in disgust. "What good is the word of a naked slut who spreads on command? Likely I am not even the first one tonight, let alone in your whole miserable little life."

There was confusion in her voice now, and pain as she replied. "Why, Tristans? Why do you say these things when you know they aren't true?"

"Silence, whore. I will hear no more from you."

Merisinia shivered, her nudity converted into sudden, shameful nakedness.

"Do you take your lovers in your ass as well? Never mind, I know the answer to that question as well. Turn over, bitch. You will be fucked on all fours, like the animal you are."

The girl obeyed, but still this was not enough. Tristans made her crawl along the garden paths, berating her all the way as a lazy pet, kicking her with the side of his boot when she slowed down too much. He wanted her sweaty and broken.

"We will find dirt," he declared, mindful of Cassandra's romp in the lush greenness. "Grass is too good for you."

No words were spoken by the girl. He no longer knew where her mind had gone and he did not care. This was an exercise in pure force, pure cruelty. He'd arouse her later, mechanically.

What Tristans found was a patch of mud, the result of melted spring snow.

"Better still," he shoved her forward, his boot heel on her ass.

The delightful, cheerful young girl, the best of singers and most beloved at the Court of St. Bathos landed face first in the mud.

"Crawl around a bit. Get yourself a nice bath."

She sobbed, trying to get her footing.

"On your belly," he ordered, striking her with a stick. Tristans watched her move, the animal in her revealing itself. He could wait no longer. Ripping off his own clothes, he leapt on top of her, thrusting himself into her vagina. She took him in a single motion, a cry escaping her throat indicating that she was indeed a virgin, just as she had said.

Ignoring this evidence, he pummeled her without mercy. "Is this fast enough for you, or would you like more?"

She shook her head, whimpering. He grabbed her

breasts, finding her erect nipples.

"This turns you on, doesn't it? Admit it," he demanded.

She said nothing and he punished her by pushing his dick up her other hole.

"Better relax," he taunted, working into the narrow tunnel. "There's a whole lot to shove in there."

Merisinia moaned aloud, a rhythmic pained chant.

"Touch your pussy," he ordered. "Make yourself come."

And she did, writhing under the moonlight, covered in mud, the man's cock invading her most private place.

"You see?" He cried triumphantly. "You are a whore! You are!"

It was only once the fever of his orgasm passed that he realized what he had done. Collapsed before him, unmoving, lay the body of the one who should have been his lover. He turned her to her back and heard the sound of her breathing. Very faint, barely audible. Quickly he ran through his mind the scenarios, the implications. If she denounced him, he would face banishment. And she herself would live in disgrace, never fully trusted by any one, never loved, and most certainly scarred deeply from within. She would face the same if he ran away. Suppose instead, she met a merciful end, here and now? His life would go on—and he would atone afterwards, he promised himself that—and she would have the only real peace available to her.

It was logical. Frighteningly and coldly reasonable. And so, with only the moon as witness, and the silent

lonely stars as jury, he, the future judge and Chief Guardian, carried out his first sentence of execution.

The girl died quietly, smothered in his arms. He whispered sweetly to her and told her not to be afraid. Afterwards he took the body, along with the clothes and arranged a quite plausible scene of natural death. Simulating the puncture wounds and claw marks of a wolf was easy enough, given his diverse changing power as a vampyr. No one seriously questioned his story, especially as he'd managed to give himself a few gashes and also to produce the corpse of a large, freshly killed wolf that he claimed to have destroyed in the battle.

Once or twice as the people gathered that night to discuss the matter, he thought he saw something in Jase's eye. A questioning, maybe, or a tiny bit of suspicion. He hated Jase for that, as he did for his general sanguinity and, above all, for his having fucked the beautiful Cassandra.

Although Jase did not marry her as he'd expected, he remained bitterly jealous and as each of the final years passed before the invasion, he became less and less open to the spontaneous feelings of humanity. At the time it seemed a curse—his crime and the subsequent hardening of his soul that had resulted—but now he looked upon it as a great gift. For the trial had made him ready to battle humans and to separate himself objectively as a Guardian.

Statistically, Merisinia would have died anyway, or wound up a slave like Cassandra, so again his action had more plusses than minuses. A good contract in the end and one that would pay off ultimately in the

kingship itself.

"Bleed, my sweet," he sucked the essence of Cassandra, his vampyr's form overwhelming her human one. "Bleed for me...now and always."

And that, he thought, dryly, is what you call making up for lost time.

He was still taunting his golden haired prey when he received the news. Jase and the little vampyress had been located.

"You are certain of this?" He asked the hawk man standing before him.

The shiftling tried not to appear too terrified in the presence of his multi-headed, multi-tongued lord, women's come and blood dripping from every orifice. "Quite certain. Several mouse people were inside the building to confirm."

Tristans coiled a tendril round the feathered neck of the messenger. The werhawk's wings spanned seven feet, his noble beak sloping dramatically into a mouth of war. "What manner of building? Speak or die?"

"It is called a 'KwikKarry'. Comestibles are purchased and fuel for motor vehicles. The enemy is inside, the building is surrounded by human police. A great number of them."

"So," Tristans whispered, savoring the greatness of the moment. "Than it is really over. Excellent. I shall fly at once."

"Shall I accompany you, lord?"

Tristans considered for a minute. 'No, I should like you to remain here. I want you to take your fill of that slave over there, and then, when you are fully

expended, I want you to kill her."

"Yes, my lord."

Tristans paused long enough to kiss the neck of the prone Cassandra, still lying motionless, broken and savaged. So much evidence, he thought back to Merisinia, so much to hide. "Farewell, my sweet," he said. "It has been my great pleasure to know you."

"And I you," she surprised him with the gentle sincerity of her answer. "Master."

Tristans frowned. Never in a million years would he understand women. "Fuck her," he ordered the hawk man. "Be quick about it, then slit her throat."

Tristans could hear them as he flew out the window, the sounds of incipient lovemaking. Blocking it out, he thought only of Jase and Nyte. And of revenge.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“Damn you, Jase, if you’re not going to do something, I will!”

Nyte was in his face, demanding action. She was right, they didn’t have much time before the SWAT team came in shooting. Killing them first and all the others besides, like she wanted, however, just didn’t seem a very viable option.

“The hostages deserve to live, Nyte. We can’t drag them down with us.”

He saw the coldness in her eyes, the contempt on her face. She was more Tristans’ child than her own mother and father’s now. With every outburst, with each action, she drew closer and closer to the point of no return.

“Life’s a bitch,” she spat in contempt, “and then you die.”

It was then he realized the girl was out of time, too. One more change over to vampyr form and she would be too far-gone. She might assume the form of a human being after that, but she would never be human. Only a heartless predator, like Tristans.

Quite an interesting equation for him to solve,

really. How to save the hostages and the human soul of Nyte both. There was one answer, though it was not his first choice.

"Life is more than days of bitterness," he countered. "It's sacred."

"You're weak, Jase. I'm going to have to take command." She was stretching out her arms, the shotgun still in her hand. The gesture meant nothing to the cowering, naked hostages, but to him it was the final encouragement he needed to take decisive action.

He must not let her turn again into a vampyr.

"Nyte, don't!" Jase rushed to gather her in his arms, but it was already too late.

"Fool," hissed the vampyress, holding his human body in its clutches. "You attack me as a human. Very well. You will die as one, too."

She bent his head back, a tendril wrapped around his head. With another, she bared his neck in readiness for her teeth. It was to be a decisive bite, a complete blood taking.

"Nyte, if you have any feelings for me at all, anything left of your humanity, do not let your soul die," he cried.

It had been a noble gamble, using his own human vulnerability to appeal to her compassion. Unfortunately, she had none left.

Nyte spit acid upon his lips, fusing them shut. "You will die a slow death...werewolf...over a thousand years. I shall hang you in my trophy case, your dear friend Tristans beside you."

Jase was losing his strength. She was sapping him

dry. Even Tristans would not be able to fight her. But what exactly was she? Her shape, her form, her power were all unprecedented in the annals. What had Tristans released into her bloodstream? With whom had he been dealing to unleash such a force upon the world?

"You are my slave," she licked at his forehead, sending excruciating agony to his brain. "You are all my slaves."

Jase's cock was very hard. The vampyress was stroking him, playing intimately with his constrained body.

"You may beg me to come," she said.

It was sex and violence and colored screams, mixed on a palate of melted, copulated flesh.

"Please," he croaked, unable to move a muscle. "You are driving me wild...please, let me."

"First you will satisfy me," she pushed him down.

Her pussy appeared in his face. A great gaping maw, spitting fire. He was unsure if he was to kiss the chasm or be swallowed up by it. At one moment it seemed small and he leaned forward, but as he did so, a hand or some other appendage pushed him from behind and he found himself falling, turning over and over, screaming the whole way. It was pitch black, and he could hear nothing but his own echo. He was sure he would die on impact, but to his amazement, he impacted on something soft and rubbery.

He felt about on his hands and knees, unable to see anything.

"Master," whispered a girl, her hand reaching for his cock.

"Master," called another, her chains rattling as she kissed at his ass.

"Master," said a third, pushing her hot, dry lips to his.

Jase allowed himself to be pulled down by the hands, which were multiplying by the minute. They were females, hot and naked, all of them chained, begging his touch, his tongue, his cock. He thirsted and hungered for them, wanting to have it all at once. The breasts, the cunts, the asses, swollen with welts and marked by brands. And yet he could see none of them. They were beautiful, they had to be, from their silky hair and slim bodies. He must possess each and every one.

But he could not reach a single pussy, not one mouth, or even an asshole. There was only the spinning over and over that came with every try; a kind of slow motion wrestling that brought him closer and closer to relief but never over the edge.

And the chains holding the slaves were holding him, too. With every heartbeat they grew ever tighter, like a net. If only he could see something, anything. His limbs were growing so tired, he was going down, down to the floor, or whatever it was sustaining them.

In a flash the soft surface lit up, consumed by a pale green flame. It enveloped everything but did not burn. He could see himself in the light and the girls, too. Only they weren't girls at all, but jackals, with sleek human bodies. They snarled, clearly unhappy to have been exposed.

Baring fangs, their mouths drooling red foam, they

came at him, from every side. To devour him whole. He watched his own limbs being eaten, the skin torn off in a surrealistic haze. Was this hell – the beginning of an eternal laundry list of agonies?

Then he remembered Nyte's words, about how she would make him die over a millennium. So this wasn't the end, just the beginning.

Not so bad, he mused, watching the skin reform itself on his body, just in time for a hot rain of acid from above. This time it hurt and he had no qualms about giving into the cries of agony all around him.

When in Rome...

* * * *

"Where is he?" Tristans demanded.

Nyte was leaning over the freezer of the pathetic human convenience store, picking out an ice cream bar for herself. She was ground zero of a scene of destruction worthy of a Hollywood movie. The building was a shell of its former self, the roof blown off, the walls half standing, like broken teeth, in a whitewashed row.

Outside, the police cars were twisted wrecks, crushed almost beyond recognition from having been lifted a hundred feet in the air and dropped on their noses. The police officers themselves were in pieces too small and nondescript to be recognized. Inside, where the hostages were, there was only the dust of their incinerated bodies.

For a hundred-mile radius, things looked much the same.

It was a power Tristans himself had no access to. Along the lines of a small nuclear warhead, to be precise. Concealing his discomfort, he repeated the question to the wriggling bent-over ass, butt naked, fishing in the freezer for frozen confectionary like she was still some ordinary teenager.

"I said, where is he," he repeated the question.

"Damn," Nyte popped her head up and flipped back her hair. "There aren't any more fucking ice cream sandwiches. What the fuck is wrong with these people?"

Tristans wanted the girl like he'd never wanted a female before. She was small and dangerous, and more powerful than anything he'd ever encountered. "Do you ignore your king?" He probed, trying to determine her loyalty.

She looked at him, smiled and returned her head to the freezer. He waited for her to come up with the proverbial Popsicle. "King, huh?" She peeled off the paper and ran her tongue over the cylindrical red object. "Sounds sexy. You got a queen?"

Tristans stiffened. "Yes," he bluffed.

She licked her lips. "Liar, liar," she teased. "Pants on fire."

The vampyr king had had enough. "I will not play games with you, young lady. As you recall, it is I who gave you your powers, and it is to me you must answer."

"Ooh, I'm scared." She blew him a kiss that registered as pain, a slice of a Samurai blade to his midsection. Doubling over, he sought to keep the wound from severing his very soul.

How in the name of the ancestors had this little upstart gotten so strong, and who the hell was she? Was this the doing of the dark lords beyond the moon or was it bigger even than that?

It was time to test her for real. Raising his arms, he made the change, at once calling for his minions to back him up.

Tristans was half away across the wrecked store when time stopped. He looked down and saw himself hanging in mid air, caught between his two forms. Several others who had just swooped down in the king's defense found themselves similarly stuck. It was like they'd been stuck onto a giant sheet of fly paper, invisible and stronger than steel.

Worse still, he was still in his human form.

Helpless, he watched her stride over and unzip his pants. "Is this for me?" She pulled out his thick cock. "You're too kind."

Tristans gritted his teeth, trying to stay strong. It was too much, though, and after just a few light caresses, she had him whimpering and begging.

"Time for you to meet your cellmate for the next thousand years," she decided, levitating her pussy over his mouth.

He tasted the juices, like a heavy wine, intoxicating to the core. Next thing he knew he was falling headlong into a very black, very deep hole.

* * * *

Cassandra accommodated the width and breadth of the werehawk's cock inside her pulsing sex. He was a

passionate lover, slow and sensitive and she sensed in his heart that he did not have it in him to kill her.

"Tristans is mad," she declared as he stood over her afterwards, the knife in hand, hesitation written all over his sharp, intensely serious eyes. "You know he is."

"I follow my orders."

"Since when do vampyrs rule the air...bird man?"

He bristled at the implied insult. Though vampyrs flew, they were not pure air creatures and thus were resented by those with true, feathered wings. "Tristans is the king. That means something. At least to those of us who value their own freedom."

She deserved the returned barb. "Yes," she met him head on, "it is true. This body you see has no rights—I have no rights. I belong to free men. But will you stay free under Tristans' rule? What of his time as Chief of the Guardians? What has that brought us? And where is the legitimacy? Who has crowned him, except in his own mind? Who props him up, but his gang of fallen bat men?"

The hawk man paused, indicating he had not really considered these questions. Nor, it seemed had the rest of her people.

"I ask nothing for myself. I will wear chains the rest of my life. But I do beg you, oh newest master of mine, to let me go and face Tristans. Let me say to him what I must. Let me speak the words our ancestors cry out to voice."

It was a good case, particularly when laid out to one such as this, a shiftling of the sky, for whom life is lived as a pure, mysterious thing, like the air itself,

and every ripple and disturbance to its harmony is a thing to be abhorred.

"If the ancestors are not pleased, they must be allowed to speak," the werehawk rendered his decision after several moments of deep thought. "For if any piece go unspoken, then the kingship will not be balanced."

"Take me, then. Convey this naked slave to the presence of the king."

That I may kill him, she thought, though judiciously she kept this last part to herself.

"It shall be done," pledged the werehawk, lifting her into his strong and domineering arms.

Cassandra melted at once, praying there was time for him to love her once more. But there was a war to be fought. A king to be deposed.

* * * *

"It is you," said Tristans as he materialized from out of the sulfur air beside his naked, chained enemy.

"Yes," Jase replied, hanging from his wrists above the smoldering rocky surface of this world within a world, this inner sanctum forged from the deviance of Nyte's new, limitless mind. "It seems we share a common homeland once again."

Tristans gripped the handle of his sword. He'd been excruciatingly lucky to find it sticking out of the soft, marshy ground when he'd landed here in the first place. With it he'd been able to defeat the jackal women illuminated in the pale green light, allowing him time to run for cover before being hit by the acid

rain.

"Indeed, though once again I have wound up in the superior position," Tristans pointed the blade to his throat.

"For the moment," agreed the dangling prisoner.

"For always, Jase," he corrected. "Alas, now, I must slice you open. No hard feelings?"

"None taken. Although, you may find your task not so easy to accomplish. In fact, you may even find the sword was left for you on purpose, to tease you."

Tristans considered the possibility. It was true he was in a world of sorcery created by the vampyress, but he was still manifesting strong signs of control. "No. I think it merely shows us which is the stronger mental force, yours or mine."

With that Tristans' sword wilted in his hand.

"What's the matter?" Jase smiled. "Having trouble keeping it up?"

Chains materialized on Tristans' wrists. Operating in concert, they lifted him off his feet. "You can't do this! I am king, I am king!" He cried.

A whip appeared and struck his cock.

The naked Tristans, hanging a foot off the ground, cried out in pain. The whip attacked again, and this time he constrained himself to whimpers.

Jase grinned, his own body already covered in scars. "As I said, she likes to tease."

"This is your fault," bellowed Tristans. "You coddled the little bitch. You encouraged her."

"Perhaps," he concurred. "But I'm not the one who poisoned her blood."

"She won't get away with this! Do you hear me,

you black-hearted cunt, wherever you are?!”

The sky cracked with lightning, a green snake-like dash across the sulfur heavens that eventually found its way between Tristans’ ears. For the next several seconds his screams became the landscape of the world, a hurricane against which Jase had to brace himself.

A thousand years, he thought. In the company of this blowhard. Now that will be hell.

* * * *

Nyte enjoyed Jase’s little joke about hell immensely. He was her special doll, in her little dollhouse. Just like when she was a girl and she had all that power over her tiny figurines and all their worldly belongings. She could giveth unto them and taketh away. They could sit at their windows and wait for their daddy, and maybe he would come back from the sky and maybe he wouldn’t. They could laugh and play and share with a happy mommy, or she could be too sick and dizzy, slurring her speech or sleeping it off, which is what the grownups called it when you got too tired from drinking too much.

Except now she didn’t just have one dollhouse, she had many. Dollhouses within dollhouses. Yes, she was very strong and she could even fly, high above the world, high above the stars. She used to dream about that, flying like Daddy, and now she could really do it. Even if she was a scary old monster that would make people cry. It was the blood in her, the blood from Tristans, she supposed. For a long time

she had been feeling funny. Jase called her a vampyr, which was like a vampire, only a lot more complicated.

There were a lot of questions, the biggest being why was she so strong? And where would she go and what would she do now? One time she remembered sitting in church, when she was very little and mommy and daddy would take her to the chapel on the base, just sitting and thinking, wondering what it would be like to be God. At first it seemed very cool, and she made a long list of things she would do, from tossing Billy Johnson in the pool for throwing rocks at her to making blue and green puppies. By the end of the service, though, she ran out of ideas and it occurred to her that maybe it might get very dull being God, always doing whatever you wanted with no challenges, and maybe it was even a bit lonely too with everyone just wanting favors all day.

So Nyte, who was still just plain old Michelle back then, prayed a different prayer than everyone else, a prayer for God and not to Him: Dear, God, I'm sorry, it must be hard for you. I wish you could just get to live a regular life, too.

He never said anything back, and as for watching over her the way everyone said he did, she was pretty sure that was a lot of nonsense, because he never once saved her from anything bad, not even from Hank, as bad as he was.

As Nyte stretched her wings over the world, she wondered if maybe her prayer hadn't come true. Maybe she was taking God's place, letting him go free. But she couldn't be sure. This was all very

complicated, like she said. And how could she be God when she'd killed a lot of people and when it seemed a lot of fun to her to be mean, just as much as it did to be nice?

Wings over the world. The incarnation? The religions always say that, don't they? That God comes back in new forms?

Why not a teenage discipline problem who wasn't even going to graduate high school?

Suddenly the world seemed very far down. A tiny, scary blue marble. With a single talon she reached for it.

I think I might just smash it, she thought.

* * * *

Cassandra studied the problem. The ancient puzzle of the world. Its timeless shifting, the troubles building and building until there needs to be some release and an individual has to come along to be the focal point, and that person has to die. Sometimes it's a great religious teacher, or a politician, other times it's some nameless victim, kicked to death in an alley or shot, and no one even knows what it meant. Call it bloodletting from an infected wound, or a simple practice of sacrifice to appease invisible gods. However you looked at it, the results were the same. Assassination. Martyrdom.

This girl was the latest candidate. With her extraordinary mental powers, awoken by the vampyr's kiss, but representing something much more powerful. A new kind of changeling, perhaps. A

creature capable of slipping from human form into something vastly superior.

Divine, even.

But she was unstable. That, too, was clear. Which presented yet another reason for her elimination. The world could not handle her, and she could not handle it. Caesar, Hitler, Gandhi, Jesus, Napoleon, none of these could have been allowed to see their visions to fruition. Good, evil, in front of the moon, behind it, from earth or space, human or vampyr, wherever it began, the results would have been the same.

Insanity. Schizophrenia.

Nyte was going mad. This was another true thing. You had to go that way sooner or later at that level, the whole world your toy and no one to play with.

Nyte had to die.

And Cassandra would be her killer.

A slave to slay a god.

The golden hair to kill the raven.

The cat to bring down the vampyr.

And all without a blade, no sharp point of any kind, or even a fist.

But only the one word. Spoken truly.

* * * *

The vampyress saw the light below, a single flash and she was curious. Thirsty and desperate to relieve the boredom. Was there anything she did not know? Was everything not remade in her image? Expecting a wolf, or bear, some male enemy, she was most surprised to find the groveling female.

A shiftling. The first of her race to be enslaved. And proud of the fact, it seemed. She smelled on the blonde woman her humility, the raw and naked sexual openness. But also an utter lack of fear.

This was either the most reckless woman Nyte had ever encountered or the bravest.

The thought that she should remain slave seemed to Nyte most unjust, even immoral.

"Do not hide yourself," the vampyress lifted her chin. "You of all creatures may look me in the eye."

Cassandra shook her head. "No, Great One, I am not worthy."

"That is for me to decide."

"But there are sins inside me."

"I am the source of these, your sins, and also that which you count not sin. Therefore, you owe to me all that is within you."

"But do you not grasp already all that I know? And if not, why not simply steal my truths from me?"

"I would hear it all again, from your lips, and behold it on the platter of your soul. I will not force myself inside you."

"You are too marvelous for me," Cassandra conceded. "Lean closer than and I will reveal all."

Such fancy words, thought Nyte, momentarily suspicious. They do not sound like me. Is this still a game of my invention? There is something familiar and unpleasant about this coming closer business...like the spider speaking to the fly.

"Closer, vampyress. Closer still."

Nyte beheld the golden lips and wanted them, and the rest of the body of the slave, too. How delicious

she would taste.

"Oh, mistress," sighed Cassandra. "Please, touch me."

Nyte pushed the girl back onto the ground and thrust her hand inside the waiting yellow thatch. It was wet and warm. Nyte wanted to rub her pelvis against it. She wanted to dab with her tongue and have the girl's tongue inside her, as well.

"You will lick me until I come," commanded the vampyress, turning herself about so their sexes were positioned at each other's mouths.

Cassandra began obediently licking, relaxing and gaping her thighs for the invasion of the mistress' tongue. More than primed from the stimulation the slave was providing her, Nyte set about driving the slave mad with desire. Her tongue was a cruel, stabbing weapon, taking as it pleased, plucking from her moans and screams, but holding her back again and again from the release she craved. Nyte took her own orgasms, though she would not allow herself to be distracted from her main function, which was winning the sighs and moans of the pretty blonde.

Pretty, like Joanne.

Nyte felt a momentary deflation, thinking of her old friend. She'd not gotten to be a goddess out of all this. And Hank, he'd lost his life. And Ezy G. And a lot of others, too.

I'm cold, she thought. It's windy up here on this mountain or wherever we are.

"Mistress, " called Cassandra to her.

Come to me, little girl, for a secret...

Nyte went to her ear, trance-like to hear what it

might be, eager as Christmas morning.

A word, yes, a word. Whispered in her ear.

Nyte froze instantly. Frost bite on her ear lobe, the chilling kill moving over her skin and into her veins. A virus downloaded into her godhood.

She tried to break away, but Cassandra held her fast. She was stronger than Nyte had expected. Still, it was not yet over.

"Not so fast, bitch," hissed the vampyress.

Cassandra released her own sound, that of the cat, claws bared. Talons locked. A fight to the death, rolling over and over, to the very bottom of the world, down to the very black hole where she'd put Jase and Tristans.

The sounds were horrific, the bodies grappling in the soft silt. At last the light went on, a single torch and the world beheld its new divinity.

* * * *

Nyte propped her foot up on the wall of the Shop And Run, the dingy, mismatched bricks tickling her leather-clad ass. Another night in paradise, she thought hoisting the paper bag with the forty-ounce malt liquor can in it.

"What the fuck we gonna do tonight?" Jimmy Chang wanted to know, running his hand through his red spiked hair.

"Fuck if I know," she handed him the crinkled paper covered cylinder, the kind you can only find in the black neighborhoods.

They paused to watch a cop car roar by, red lights

bleeding into the night.

"Wanna fuck?" asked Jimmy Chang, who wore a neon green jean jacket, orange canvas shoes and surfer shorts.

"Fuck you," she replied, revealing yet one more distinct use for that ever so popular four-letter word in a conversation.

"You wouldn't say no if I was Jase," he grouched.

"Jase is a real man, Jimmy. No offense."

Jimmy snorted, consoling himself in the bottle. "No real man I ever saw had fur and two-inch fangs. Oh, did I forget the tail and the four paws?"

Nyte unfastened her leather collar, revealing the bite marks, clean and sweet. "This is what he does to me, Jimmy, and you have no fucking idea what it feels like. So as long as he lets me be his bitch, I'll come crawling every time. Any time, anywhere, I'm his."

"That's why I hate those motherfucking shifties. They get all the hot girls."

It was true, most human females did prefer to get their loving from one of the animal men that now walked the streets freely thanks to the new peace accord. But there would always be a place for human cocks, too. Certainly the lady shiftlings enjoyed the variety. It was all a little hazy for Nyte. She'd woken up in a field somewhere, about a hundred miles from home, stark naked. A trucker had given her a ride in exchange for her sexual favors. She was more than happy to accommodate, bobbing her head on the guy's dick like one of those cutesy dolls you put on the dashboard.

The guy was pretty good looking, although his mustache tickled. It was weird that she didn't remember so many things. The last clear thing in her head was Jase sinking his blade into her palm and taking a sample of her warm blood between his tingling lips that night in the alley after he rescued her from those bouncers. She was in love with him after that. Jase told her not to worry about the rest of it. It freaked her out a little when he told her he was a werewolf, but now that he was free to come out of the closet, everything would be fine.

This whole peace treaty deal was pretty cool. The president had gotten on television with this werehawk—that's right, an actual hawk man—and they'd talked about how the two species were finally going to work together after centuries of being enemies. Jase was supposed to be this big shot in the government, but he'd declined the job, saying he wanted to experience being a private citizen, free to mix with human beings.

It was she and Joanne who convinced him to become a ghetto pimp, and they made a pretty good living selling the girls' asses on the mean old streets. He was sweet for a pimp and they had to badger him just to get their asses whipped every now and again. Like she said, it was in great fun, though he'd made them promise they would go to college in the fall.

Spoilsport.

The only downer was when he took his little trips. Jase never said where he was going, but it was probably to see another woman. That was cool. He was, like about a thousand years old, after all, so he

was bound to have a few old attachments. She just wished he'd leave her someone to be in charge of her. Somebody who'd boss her around, so she wouldn't have to hang out with Jimmy all the time.

No offense.

Although, maybe she could make a convert of the boy yet. Turn him into a bad ass.

"Jimmy, how do you feel about spanking?"

"Spanking who?"

She rolled her eyes. "Me, you dumb ass."

His eyes widened. "You serious?"

Nyte turned around and lifted her wicked short skirt. She was nude underneath. "You tell me?"

"I'm thinking yes."

"Me, too. So where's it gonna happen?"

"Your place?" he took a shot in the dark.

She shook her head. "Too far away. How about there?" she pointed to the hood of a black sedan, the occupants of which were inside buying beer.

"Are you crazy?"

Nyte laid her stomach over the car, holding the leather up for him. "Hell, yea, which means you better do this fast before I get back in my right mind."

To her delight, she didn't have to ask twice. And Jimmy was a natural, too. Just a few awkward beginner's swats and he was on her like a pro, turning her white, cool behind into a glowing pink canvas of handprints.

"How's it look?"

"Good enough to fuck," reported Jimmy Chang.

"Go for it," purred Nyte.

"Fuck, yea," he chortled, whipping out a very nice

sized dick.

"Oh, yes," she moaned. "That's it, honey."

Just what she needed to tide her over till her wolf got home.

* * * *

The prisoner stood with his hands behind his back, tied to the pole. His eyes were covered with the white cloth, the traditional blindfold given a man about to face death by firing squad. He considered the death to be a singular honor, especially as the judge had assured him the squad members would consist of elite troops of the army of the Little Emperor himself, the dastardly clever Napoleon Bonaparte.

It was possible to do this thing—summon men from the dead for short periods of time—because the judge in this case was the same creature who held sway over all creation, here and the beyond alike. Once she had been simply Cassandra, but now she was Cassandra Regina Gaia et Ouranos.

Cassandra, Queen of Earth and of the Heavens. For an age, she would reign and another take her place. A new avatar. A new supreme changeling. Such was the way of things, the way of the Power above Good and Evil.

It was right that he himself be executed. For far too long he had ignored the patterns of nature, wreaking havoc and seeking naught but his own personal gain. The results had been near calamity. By his hand the wrong one had been elevated, the charming dark-haired human girl Nyte, singularly ill equipped, as

was he, to hold the scepter of the cosmos.

She had been spared, pardoned of her guilt and even of her memories. His peace would come, too, with the spilling of his blood. Sleep, he thought, and at long last, forgiveness. From himself, and, if he should happen to be admitted to heaven, from Merisinia as well.

Yes, he thought, bracing himself. It is a good day to die. A good thing to have a life to lay down to right the wrongs one has committed. There was only the small matter of these last few intervening minutes, the remaining heartbeats he must yet endure in his anticipatory state.

Truth be known, it was taking longer than he'd expected. Longer than by rights it should take. Even from beyond the grave, soldiers are mustered quick enough by the right command.

But what was this? His bonds were being undone. A soft, feminine finger to his lips was forbidding him protest and now he was being led, by that same hand to some unknown destination. Was he to be shot elsewhere? In a dungeon or against a wall? Or had a new means of execution been chosen?

The stones beneath his feet shifted after a while to grass and now he was really puzzled. This no longer felt like death, but something worse...the fear of a life that might be handed back to him, though he had no use for it.

He was left standing in place. What madness was this?

His ears strained to hear. There was a breeze in the air, the buzzing of a bumblebee. Everything teemed

with life. Even the sun could almost be heard to cry for joy as it spilt upon his shoulders, his white silk shirt providing a gracious and gentle shield against its rays.

Breathing; he heard human breathing. Almost as if...a couple were making love. Impossible!

"Mm," sighed a female voice, confirming his suspicions.

This was too incredible! Was there no end to the ignominy?

"Tristans, don't look so glum," teased Cassandra, far more girl than universal queen. "Take off your blindfold and see what you are missing."

He did so and there was the woman, naked in the embrace of Jase, the pair side to side, facing him. So that was it, they wished to torture him. Very well, he could endure anything they dished out.

"Once before, you witnessed us," Cassandra reminded.

He stood as a soldier. "It was a crime, I admit it. The precipitating factor of many more, beginning with unspeakable abominations committed against Merisinia. I demand my sentence of death, for my life has been a fraud, an effrontery to the honor of our species."

"Yes," she said dryly. "Lord knows you've made us all miserable. Yourself most of all. So are you ready to wash your hands of it and come join us, or what?"

"J—join you?" His mouth barely formed the words.

"Don't look so moonstruck, vampyr," teased the very erect Jase, his hand on the golden mound of

Cassandra, who in turn was caressing him. "You're being given a chance to fuck us both. You'd think you would leap at such an opportunity."

"But...but my firing squad."

"I'll call them back if you like. We just thought maybe this might be more to your liking," she offered.

"Oh, it is, it is," he hastened. "It's just that...I'm not sure I can..."

"Follow through, you mean? Looks like your cock votes yes," Jase pointed out.

Tristans shielded himself, feeling almost boyish shame. "I've been such a fool," he lamented.

"We'll take it out of your hide with a good spanking, vampyr. Now come here and suck my tit, that's an order from your queen."

"Since you put it that way," he grinned.

Tristans did not need further convincing to strip off his clothes, his intended outfit of death. Beneath, his skin tingled, in anticipation of their touches, and of his touching of them.

"Lie back," Cassandra soothed as he crawled between them. "Let us work on things for a bit."

He reclined, allowing them to kiss and nibble and bite at him. The touch of the male was every bit as arousing to him as the female and in fact he had a great urge to suck Jase's long and beautiful cock.

The werewolf obliged, sliding himself up to Tristans' face. He took the cock gratefully, swallowing as much of it as he could. He wanted to please Jase, to let him know he was genuinely sorry for all that had happened, for all his crimes. Jase's sighs were enough

to warm his heart and let him know he was on the right track.

The man's penis was silky, smooth and powerful. He wanted the squirting come, but he knew he must wait for it. There was much still ahead, and it would be wrong to try and jump the gun.

Meanwhile, Cassandra had gone to work on his own cock, applying her skills as a former slave; hot, wet service enough to make him buck and writhe, feeling fully the playful subjugation they had put him under. Not only his cock, but his feet were under attack, too, as she tickled the bottoms with lightly brushing fingers. It was all too glorious and sensual and best of all, it proved he was not alone. He had been accepted at long last by these bright and happy lovers. Centuries peeled away and he was young again, and it was more than mere desire, for he could swear he saw her face, Merisinia, smiling down upon him nodding, yes, at long last, let go my sweet; you are not a god and you never were, nor are you above forgiveness, for our emotions rule us all too often, and did you think me entirely innocent, coming to you as I did, knowing your state of mind? It takes two for any action.

Or in this case three, he thought with amusement.

The only question now was how everyone would get off. A delightful solution was arranged by the queen. She would lie upon her back, Tristans would lick her to fulfillment, while Jase took him from behind, using his hand to masturbate his old enemy. They fell quite naturally into their places, bodies eager and strangely familiar. Perhaps if they'd come

up with this idea all those centuries ago, the world might have looked very different.

Tristans groaned in deep tones, feeling the sweet fullness of a man's penis sliding in and out of his ass. To show his pleasure, he translated each stroke into a fresh brushstroke of his tongue upon the canvas of the woman's pussy, all the while greedily enjoying the gripping fingers of his anal lover upon his own most needy cock. It was paradise, a speechless, seamless rhythm, guaranteed to end in tripartite bliss.

Three orgasms in one.

Cassandra was the first to cry aloud, lifting her hips into the air, pushing her sex into Tristans' frantically working mouth. For his own part, he humped the air, building the maximum friction from the tightly circling fingers. Jase did well to manage the act all while bugging, sinking deep down with long, hard thrusts, rendering Tristans' body giddy and weak and sexually radioactive.

They moved so fast in the end, it was like their bodies were going to fuse. They couldn't be any closer, but they were trying, wanting the heat and the touching to never end, for their fused flesh to shut out the world, to end every possibility of a bad thing ever happening to them again.

At long last, when there was nothing more in them, no fluids, no feelings, nothing left unspent, they collapsed in a heap, limbs inter-twisted, hands petting one another, making it smooth and good, helping each other down from the soaring heights that might leave a person insane with lust.

"Now that," purred Cassandra, "is what I call

working off a sentence."

"Am I free to go?" Tristans asked, still scarcely able to believe this was really happening.

"Do you want to go?" Asked Jase.

Tristans put his head on Jase's chest. "No," he admitted. "I do not."

Cassandra crawled on top of him and began to lick his ass. "Good. In that case, I sentence you to life."

"Yes, ma'am," he kissed his way down Jase's handsome chest. "My pleasure."

They continued this way, making love in every position they could think of till the sun finally set on the horizon. It was a new horizon, one promising a new peace, but also providing challenges that would no doubt tax them to their limits. For there would always be evil in the world, dark lords beyond the sun, the moon their portal. And darkness, too, within every heart, even that of the avatar herself.

Cassandra had no fear, though, for she knew she'd been prepared in her heart since her birth. And even the seeming tragedies, the loss of her family and friends in the attack by the humans and her subsequent slavery only strengthened her position, proving that she could indeed be a divinity of suffering and understanding.

A deity of peace. And, of course, of kinky sex.

* * * *

Nyte finished her cigarette in a hurry, taking a last puff and grinding it under her heel. Jimmy Chang was calling her back, wanting her in the driver's seat

of his friend's SUV he'd just picked up so they could finish what they'd started over the hood of the sedan. Talk about a quick study—the Taiwanese-American surfer king was a player in less than an hour.

"Don't keep me waiting, bitch," he pushed open the door. "Or I'll be very unhappy."

"What will you do, Jimmy?" She rubbed his cock.

He considered for a moment, a twinkle in his eye. "What would Jase do?"

She leaned across and snapped at his neck. "He'd grab me by the jugular, rip out my throat and drain me dry."

"How about another spanking and a milkshake?" He suggested instead.

"That will do," she giggled, climbing in back to take off her clothes. "For now."

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reese Gabriel is author of over fifty erotic novels, exploring the more delicious and darker sides of human lust. He is happily married, widely traveled and believes in life long learning and growth. He believes in the spiritual centering power of the ocean and prays daily for a more sane and liberal world order.