

Doing Desi

Dakota Cassidy

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With much love and admiration, I dedicate this book to my two partners in crime, Isabella Jordan and Michelle Hoppe. Two of the best friends a girl could ever have -- even if they love booze and glitter far more than any two women should. You are my shoulders to cry on, my doorsteps to leave my fears and worries upon. I owe you both so much more than I can ever express. It is with a humble heart I offer back my respect, friendship and heartfelt gratitude always.

With love,

Dakota ☺

Chapter 1

Desdemona Smitrovitch was in a pickle.

Yup, no two ways about it, she thought plainly. A big, fat bind.

Literally.

Desi wasn't afraid to admit this was not a situation working to her advantage. She didn't like it, but she could admit it. She was defeated.

For now.

Fury rose in her again when she thought back to why she was here. Damn all of her kind to hell, she swore silently and damn *him*.

Him being Jarrod Stanislavski, best friend to the man whose Life Mate Desi had tried to kill. He was a vampire hottie and avenger of all things bad.

Bad like murder.

Desi lay on the strange bed, staring at the ceiling. She heard his feet outside the door and her pulse began to race wildly.

What the hell was the matter with her, behaving like some lovesick fool? Desi didn't love anyone.

Well, except for herself.

And that was the only worthy investment in her mind. That he made her breasts swell and her nipples tingle should mean absolutely nothing in the scheme of things. It never had before.

Jarrod was obviously proving a point here. Point being, he could tame Desi and bring her back to her fold, apologetic and remorseful for what she'd done to Claire Treemont, his best friend's Life Mate.

Like an apology was going to make everything right as rain when it was murder she was apologizing for...

A lot of murder.

Centuries' worth.

She had no understanding of why she'd begun her odious vendetta against Claire the way she had so long ago and with such ferocity. Other than the fact that Claire had Zach and Desi didn't. He'd become her obsession for many, many years as a result. Zachariah Kowalski was all she'd thought she wanted. Desi had done everything in her power to make that happen. Now, it seemed rather distant and blurry.

She had no earthly idea why she did the things she did because of that fact. It just happened and Desi didn't think about the whys until later on -- after she'd done it.

Murder, Desi. That's what you done, girlie. You committed murder, thus wishing death upon another.

Desi scrunched her eyes shut to block out the hateful word, but there was no denying it. Okay fine, *murder*, she flung back at her conscience.

It's a bad thing, Smitrovitch. If you were human, you'd be a lifer, teaching your fellow lifers the fine art of sheet tying.

It was true, she'd gotten away lucky. Desi winced. Her family had virtually given her to Jarrod so he could squirrel her away and keep her from harming anyone else. Had humans gotten a hold of her, she'd be frying like a Kentucky Fried Chicken drumstick in the electric chair.

So she was here. In the sticks somewhere, awaiting whatever Jarrod planned to do to her, aside from sexually frustrate her like no one before him. She heard the rattle of the doorknob. The place between her thighs began to gather the customary moisture and her frustration spiraled out of control.

She wanted to scream loudly, pitch a big old temper tantrum right here in the middle of freakin' nowhere. Not that it mattered. It wasn't like anyone was going to save her. She had burned her bridges with almost all of her family members, she was sure. Desi sighed in frustration. If he would just do it and get it over with everyone could go home.

Ah, but you have to have a home to go to, don't you, Desi, and you don't have one of those anymore.

Okay, so she didn't have a home either. That had been confiscated by her clan when she'd committed... *Murder*, her conscience whispered. *Murder, Desi. Say it with me. Acceptance is the first step on the road to recovery.*

Desi shook her head and repositioned herself on the bed.

The door swung open and Jarrod's bulky frame filled the room. His scent drove her mad. Her ultra-sensitive vampire nostrils were inflamed with his musky fragrance.

Saints alive, he was hot.

Oh, hell, had she just thought that? She groaned at the delicious tingle of heat that wound its way from her toes to her nether region. Never failed, the minute he walked into this room, she had to fight the wild urge to beg him to take her in any damn way he wanted.

She would not beg.

Desdemona Smitrovitch didn't beg anyone to screw her. They begged to be screwed by her. Eyeing Jarrod from beneath her lashes, Desi stifled a moan.

God, he was fantastic. His thick T-shirt clad chest was broad, the perfect expanse for a girl to lay her head on. Why hadn't she ever noticed that before? And those thighs. She chewed her bottom lip as she thought about what hung between those thighs. She knew it had to be thick and hungry by now. Desi licked her lips. Why the hell hadn't she noticed *him* before?

She'd only known him for what? Like centuries.

Jarrold stood silently at the foot of the bed and Desi held her breath, waiting. He grabbed her by the ankles and pulled her toward him with a jerk rough enough to send her pulse skittering with excitement. Desi took a long, shattered breath and prayed for patience. Something she didn't have much of.

His hold on her wasn't hurtful, but forceful enough that it sent a thrill up her spine. The long T-shirt she wore rode up her back, leaving her panties exposed. Jarrod knelt at the end of the bed and hiked her calves over his broad shoulders. His brown

eyes bore holes in her when she met his gaze. She watched anxiously as he lowered his head to nip her thigh. His teeth lightly grazed the smooth surface while his hand followed closely behind.

Desi gasped when his hot tongue swiped at the overheated flesh of her inner thigh. His brown eyes turned dark when he questioned her. "You like that, don't you." It wasn't a question really. It was a statement and it pissed her off.

She refused to answer him. Instead, she gripped the quilt on either side of her trembling body and bit the inside of her cheek. His grip tightened on her thighs, massaging her toned flesh. Her ass ground into the bed as she fought to control the impulse to slam her hips into his face. Lightly, he trailed a thick finger to the top of her panty line, skimming the tender flesh of her belly. Slipping his index finger inside the lace fabric, he brushed the top of her cleft. Her hips bucked upward in an unwilling, seemingly unstoppable response.

"Do you want me to touch you, Desi?" Jarrod growled, low and resonant. He ran the tip of his finger lightly over the outer lips of her cunt, making her thighs tremble with fierce quivers.

Jarrod didn't wait for an answer. He *told* her what she was feeling. "I think you do. I bet your cunt is wet and waiting for me. Wouldn't it feel good if I slipped my finger inside you?" His words tore through her ears. Desi whimpered as her nipples beaded into impossibly tight knots against the heathen cotton T-shirt she was forced to wear.

He grazed his thumb over her swollen clit, her calves tightening around his shoulders as he did it. Desi gritted her teeth when he withdrew his finger. He clucked his tongue. "You know the rules. You have to ask nicely." His brown eyes gleamed wickedly.

"It will be a cold day in hell, vampire," she spat back at him, when what she really wanted to do was drag his thickly muscled body over hers and ram his thick cock into her -- hard.

"Oh, I don't think so. I think before long I'll have you eating out of the palm of my hand, while my head is buried between your thighs, and my tongue is in your hot cunt. Too bad it won't be today." Jarrod removed her legs from his shoulders and leaned forward, holding himself inches from her body, bracketing her head with his hands. His eyes were dark as he looked into her fury filled ones.

He nipped her lip with enough force to cause a jolt of fire. It rippled through her as his breath fanned her face. Running his tongue over her lips, he licked her fangs. Desi battled a scream, her throat tight with frustration. *No, please*, she shrieked mentally, *anything but the fangs*. God, she loved a man who could lick a good fang.

"See, Desi," he whispered hoarsely in her ear as shivers raced up her spine. "You know you like that. Why won't you just say so?" he taunted. "You've been lying to yourself and everyone around you for too long. I'm going to teach you about what you *really* need."

Well, okay, she would go with the lying part. She was guilty of lying and not just little white ones either. Big fat whoppers. So? A fragment of remorse tickled her insides. Oh, for crap's sake, this was ridiculous.

So she was a bitch. What of it?

Desi's eyebrows rose. "You couldn't give me what I needed if someone else held that cock of yours for you," she spat, raising her head and staring him down with defiance.

Jarrod's eyes narrowed. "That's not what your body is saying, is it?" He tugged a nipple confidently and it puckered in spite of Desi. Jarrod's fangs grazed her lips and moved with lightning speed to inhale her nipple. Sucking forcefully, he swirled his tongue over the pebbly, swollen flesh. Desi's hands wound in his thick hair as an involuntary moan escaped her full lips. Jarrod ground his cock between the apex of her thighs. She met him halfway as the throb in her pussy pulsed. He let go of her nipple with a pop and attended to the other, swirling his tongue over the elongated bud.

"Tell me what you want," he whispered around her nipple, his hot breath fanning the heated point. Desi bit the inside of her lip and battled the intense need for

Jarrood over her wounded pride. He laved her nipple with slow strokes of his tongue, pressing his rigid bulge to her soaking pussy. Desi dug her nails into Jarrood's head, straddling his thigh. The friction of his jeans between her legs made her dizzy as she rubbed frantically.

She felt the tingle low in her belly as Jarrood's lips suckled her. She was going to come, she thought wildly. Her breathing was rapid while she pressed Jarrood's tongue to her breast and felt a wave of heat work its way upward, settling heavily in her groin. Thank God, she thought as the pressure grew. She was so close...

A cool blast of air settled on her nipple as Jarrood pulled away and lifted off her. Her chest heaving, she stared up at him. The damn fool was grinning.

"Oh, no, Desi, you have to tell me what you want, or there'll be no satisfaction. Not from these hands anyway." He smirked.

Desi launched off the bed, grabbing the nearest heavy thing she could find. A lamp could cause some serious damage, she decided. She'd like to see it wrapped around his tonsils while she jammed it down his arrogant throat.

"Get out!" she screeched at him, her fangs gleaming. "Get out before I clock you in that big, fat head of yours."

Jarrood shut the door quietly behind him, chuckling just as the lamp smashed against the door, shattering in a thousand pieces.

* * *

Wow, she was a handful, Jarrood thought with a grin. He had come close to giving in, but Desi had to come to him willingly. She wanted him, that was absolute, but he wouldn't be just another substitute for desire. He intended to have Desi, but as his Life Mate for eternity, not just some sexual toy, and he would make her beg him to take her in the process.

Desi was a lowdown bitch, he thought wryly. She had wreaked havoc in his clan for centuries, but her reign of terror had ended when Jarrood had trapped her. Now, it was up to him to help her redeem herself. Not just to the clan, but to herself. She was selfish and spiteful and she stopped at nothing to get what she wanted. It only made

him want her more. Rather strange if one paused to think about it, but somewhere in Desi was a woman who needed taming.

Jarrold planned to be the one to do that.

Jarrold's cock throbbed as he undressed and headed for the shower. He turned the water on full blast and soaped up. He had been hot for Desi for a long time and he knew she liked her sex a little on the wild side. What he hadn't known was she liked murder too... But he'd found out quickly enough after she'd tried to kill his best friend Zach's Life Mate, Claire.

And now here they were.

Desi was banned from the clan, unless she could prove her redemption. Not gonna be easy, he mused.

Jarrold chuckled to himself as he thought about how fired up she got, her eyes flashing fire at him, yet she ground her hot cunt into him without reserve. His cock twitched as he remembered that sweet cunt. He ran a big hand over his shaft and leaned back against the shower wall.

He let his soapy hand glide along the long surface while he thought about Desi's hot tongue doing the very same. Jarrold groaned, imagining her cupping his full balls with her small hands as her wickedly sharp tongue licked him.

His hold became tighter and his strokes grew more rapid. He could almost touch the mental image of her bent over the bed as he pumped into her wet pussy, her ass high in the air and pink from the strokes of his flogger.

The slick tunnel of his hand and the image of her lush ass pressed against him as he fucked her blind made Jarrold come with fury. Thick jets of his seed shot wildly into the spray of the shower.

They'd better get busy soon. He didn't know how much longer he could hold out.

* * *

Desi shook with rage as she flopped back on the bed. She hated him. He was a pig. How dare he keep her holed up here like some damn caged animal? Like she had

anywhere else to go, she thought miserably. She was banished from her clan and they had confiscated her fabulous house.

All over a little murder.

Desi took a deep breath. But it had been in the name of love, she defended herself mentally. Well, okay, she'd thought it was love.

Maybe more like a severe case of lust.

Lust that had gone on for awhile.

Oh fine, centuries long, she admitted to herself. Everybody makes mistakes, don't they? And she supposed Jarrod was going to be the one to teach her that.

Like bloody hell.

Her body could self combust before she'd admit she wanted him. It might just do that too, she figured. Every nerve she possessed was on fire, raw and painfully aware of the slightest touch.

Desi smothered a scream in the pillow as visions of Jarrod's thick cock -- a cock she hadn't even seen yet -- swam in her head. She tugged her T-shirt over her head impatiently, and ran her fingers lightly over her breasts. Her nipples hardened as she remembered Jarrod's tongue on them. Her thighs grew damp with frustration.

Desi sighed longingly, thinking of his head buried between her legs. Jarrod's tongue lapping voraciously at her slick flesh made her squirm.

Her hand drifted to her thighs. What she wouldn't give to have BOB now. Desi's fingers crept to the curls between her legs, trembling at the thought of Jarrod's thick fingers invading her flesh. She traced her nail lightly over her clit and shuddered. Jarrod's fingers were thick and callused. Imagining them inside of her made her hips writhe in a circular motion as she slid her fingers into her wet passage. Thumbing her clit, she drove into herself, thinking only of Jarrod's thick cock replacing her fingers. She cupped her breast and tugged her nipple. Her hips arched upward and she came with a short yelp of satisfaction.

Desi pulled the blanket around her just as her eyes began to drift shut.

Who needed Jarrod anyway?

Fucktard.

* * *

Desi felt the cool air pulling her from a deep sleep. She reached blindly for the blanket, looking to ward off the cold and go the hell back to sleep. Groping blindly with her eyes still closed, she heard, "Desi, get up." A finger traced her nipple. It responded by puckering tightly.

Crap.

Desi refused to open her eyes. Instead, she rolled to her side and scrunched up into a little ball, brushing away the hot finger as though it were an annoying fly. That finger traced a path down her spine, tingling and hot, stopping at the cleft of her ass. Desi tensed when warm lips soon followed. Groaning, she felt herself reluctantly lean into him. She heard Jarrod's chuckle, confident and knowing. Her cheeks flushed and she opened her eyes to the dim glow that pervaded the room.

Christ, she needed to get laid big time.

Well, wasn't this just pathetic?

Her nether regions said screw pathetic as Jarrod pressed his fully clad body along hers. She shivered when she felt the rasp of his clothes scrape her skin. His tongue inched a path along her spine until he reached her ass, nipping the well formed globes of flesh. Desi trembled as his tongue delved into the cleft, lightly licking her.

Maybe she should just give in? It wasn't really like begging, she figured, more like a good fuck between two agreeable adults. Right? All thoughts fled as Jarrod worked his way back up her body and pulled her tightly to him. His fingers splayed over her abdomen. She groaned deep and low, reaching upward to cradle his head. His fingertips traced the outline of her ribs, making her arch into him. The thick bulge of his cock pressed firmly into her ass and she pushed back at it. Jarrod cupped her breast and tweaked her nipple. Arrows of heat shot through her. Licking her lips, she prepared to go in for the kill.

"You know you want to fuck me, Jarrod. So let's get on with it. Get it out of your system, lover boy." There. That was done. No more pussyfootin' around. Yet somehow,

Jarrood didn't seem like the kind of man who was responsive to being pressured. It was becoming as clear as the day was long, Jarrood would take her in his own sweet time.

Jarrood laughed, husky and low in her ear, getting up off the bed. Again leaving her cold and... Well, she couldn't define what she felt. His lips pressed to her ear, he jabbed his tongue in it, swirling it around the shell.

"I think I'd like dinner first. I'm starved." He chuckled while he rubbed his hard abdomen, heading toward the door. "C'mon, it's your turn to do the dishes." His laughter rang in her ears long after he'd gone.

Chapter Two

Desi glared at Jarrod from across the small table. She hoped he didn't expect her to eat this slop. She toyed with her spoon, stirring the thick brown goop. Her stomach grumbled loudly.

"Eat up, Desi. It's stew. Ya know, meat and potatoes, a vegetable or two. Haven't you ever had stew before?" His grin said it all. He was mocking her. She felt that big knot of fury twist tighter in her stomach. Stew? Her nose wrinkled in distaste. She ate caviar and lobster, escargot. Not pig slop.

Or stew.

"Hey, quit insulting my cooking," he demanded, reading her thoughts as he quite happily consumed the slop, mopping it up with bread. Sometimes this vampire gig really sucked. The whole reading your mind thing could become sooo intrusive. She would have to pay better attention to his Vulcan mind melds in the future and learn to block them. They'd need to get to know one another much better before Jarrod could have that kind of intimate access anyway.

A ripple of uneasiness shot up her spine at Jarrod knowing her thoughts as of late.

Forget that. Food was calling. No matter that a heathen had prepared it and it was fit for a Neanderthal. She had to supplement their blood supply with something. Jarrod had small bags of it tucked away in the fridge, but he made her eat human food for whatever purpose he hoped to derive out of it. Maybe his intent was to humble her? Fat chance. It disgusted her that vampires had become so humanized these days that it was quite possible for them to gain some sustenance from food.

Or pig slop.

Desi cringed, looking at the bowl, but the call of hunger was wild. She pressed the tip of the cold metal spoon to her lips and licked it tentatively.

Oh.

Her taste buds exploded. It had to be because she was in dire need of nourishment. It sure as fuck wasn't because it was good. She dipped the spoon into the bowl and took another bite. Smothering a sigh of contentment, she dug in, finishing it all. She refused to look at Jarrod. She knew he'd have a smug smile of satisfaction on his stupid face. Curling her fingers into her palms, she sat quietly, damning him to hell. Jarrod pushed his chair away from the table, taking his bowl and plopping it in the sink of soapy water with a splash.

"C'mon, Desi, the dishes are calling you."

Dishes? Hah! Desi didn't do dishes.

"Desi does do dishes because it's her turn," Jarrod said as he loomed over her. He held out his hand. Desi slapped it away impatiently. Didn't a maid factor in here somewhere?

"No maids," he growled in her ear, pulling her up. "It's just you and me, sweetheart."

Desi squared her shoulders and headed toward the sink.

The degradation of it all.

She cringed to think of what this would do to her nails. Rolling up the sleeves of one of Jarrod's very long, borrowed flannel shirts, she thrust her hands into the sink with a frown. Jarrod hovered behind her, his presence a hot, all male distraction.

"Don't forget to rinse," he chided softly, brushing her hair from her neck and licking her heated skin. Her nipples tightened immediately. Disloyal and needy, they beaded instantly for him.

Desi once again gnawed on the raw spot she'd created in her mouth from keeping it shut and did her best to ignore him. His hands swept under her shirt, whispering over thighs, and then kneading them. He moved to her breasts, cupping the

full globes, letting the weight of them rest in his hands. Soapy hands and all, she let the last dish slide back into the sink as she laid her hand over his with a groan.

"It feels good, doesn't it?"

Good schmood.

Jarrood turned her to face him, his hands on her waist. "Take your panties off," he demanded. His eyes were serious and darker than their usual hazel.

A ripple of excitement shot through her at his command. Desi swallowed hard as she slid the scrap of lace down her legs and kicked them off her feet.

Jarrood picked her up and set her on the edge of the counter. He lifted the flannel shirt over her head, dropping it on the floor.

Desi's breath became edgy and ragged. She wanted to touch him, run her hands over all of those damn rippling muscles.

Jarrood stood between her thighs, his palms searing the skin of her legs, and looked at her.

Desi held her breath when he planted his mouth firmly on her lips. She fell backward, almost hitting her head on the cabinet. She braced her hands on the smooth countertop as Jarrood thrust his tongue into her mouth.

Desi matched his thrusts with her own tongue, groaning as he cupped her head and plundered her lips. Her libido kicked into maximum overdrive when he tangled his hands in her hair and pulled her head back with a demanding tug. Her neck arched invitingly.

If he would just bite her.

What the hell was she thinking?

Who the hell cared while he was running that hot tongue over her skin?

Jarrood pulled his lips from hers and took long, lengthy swipes at the smooth column of her neck. That fabulous tongue swept along her skin from the base of her ear to the tip of her nipple. Jarrood circled the pebbly surface only to stop short of wrapping his lips around it.

Desi arched her back, tempting him with the tight bead. Her naked, overheated flesh throbbed with an ache she had never experienced before.

"Please," slipped from her lips, unbidden and shaking with need.

Screw dignity.

Jarrood stood to look at her, his hand still wound in her thick hair. "Say it, Desi. Tell me what you want and I'll do it." Letting go of her hair, he braced his hands on the counter and took her nipple in his mouth for a brief moment only to let it go.

"Is that what you want?" he whispered harshly against her tender flesh.

Say it, just say it and get it over with.

"Yessss," she hissed at him with a ragged sigh. Jarrood enveloped her nipple, wrapping his lips around it and swirling his tongue over the throbbing tip. Her hands came up to clutch his head and she thrust her breast into his mouth. Her cunt was on fire, dripping and needy as she writhed beneath his tongue.

His hand cupped her other breast, pushing it up and kneading it, twisting the nipple gently with his fingers. Jarrood cupped the creamy globes together, laving each nipple as Desi's hands tunneled through his hair and she wrapped her long legs around his waist.

She ground into his hips, letting the fabric of his jeans rasp her clit. Jarrood pulled his lips from her breasts and took her mouth again, suckling her tongue. His large, callused hand reached between them and cupped her cunt. Desi jerked with surprise when he spread her soaking flesh and inserted his fingers into her slick passage. Just as quickly, he pulled back out, leaving her needy and closer to begging.

He wiped his finger, moist with her body's essence, over his lips. Desi groaned, watching with fascination as he licked his finger then offered it to her. She swept her tongue over it, feeling his body tense as she took it in her mouth. She tightened the hold she had around his waist, pulling him flush to her, letting her nipples scrape his flannel shirt.

"Lay down, Desi," he ordered in a gruff tone.

She frowned. "Here on the counter?"

"Do as I tell you. Don't question me," he commanded, his eyes intent and dark as he swung her legs around and slid her body upward. Thank God the counter was wide enough. Desi felt the cool tile at her back and Jarrod's hot gaze on her nakedness. She felt exposed and vulnerable, something Desi wasn't used to.

Desi always maintained the control in all of her sexual relationships. She crossed her arms over her aching breasts to cover them, but Jarrod took her wrists in one big hand and held them over her head. His grip was light, but firm.

"Don't ever hide from me... ever. I want to see those luscious nipples, ripe and ready for my tongue. I want to look at that hot, dripping cunt and know that whenever I want I can lick you and you'll willingly spread those legs open to me. Don't ever question me. All you need to know is that I would never hurt you, but if you deny me I'll walk away." Desi's gaze was riveted on him. As his lips moved and his honeyed tone washed over her she felt her insides melt. Her chest heaved and her head swam with voices tugging her in every direction. She'd never wanted any man like this. The intensity frightened her, another emotion she wasn't accustomed to. Desi felt no fear of Jarrod physically, only the fear that his body would take her to a place she wasn't willing to go.

Jarrod's hot tenor prodded her as he held her arms above her head and locked his eyes with hers. "Open your legs, Desi." Desi spread her trembling thighs and closed her eyes. It wasn't good enough for Jarrod.

"Tell me what you want, Desi," he pressed, hovering above her, his hot breath bathing her face.

"Lick me," she squeaked, scrunching her eyes closed tighter.

"Look at me when you ask," Jarrod ordered as his fingers trailed over her nipples, tweaking them.

For crap's sake! She didn't think she could do it. *But what choice do you have?* a voice whispered in her head. Desi groaned. The choices were few, that was for sure. She could burn up with the need to have his face buried in her or she could ask him to bury

it there. Fuck it. If he didn't ram that tongue of his into her this very second she would die.

Desi opened her eyes, her gaze direct and clear. "Lick me, damn you," she ground out through clenched teeth.

Jarrood chuckled. "Say please..." he demanded, licking at her lips and swiping her fangs. Her nipples beaded tightly and her cunt contracted, throbbing and swollen.

His demands would drive her mad. She warred internally with the very idea of saying please.

Well, she reasoned, it was only one little word.

"Please," she shouted clear as a bell and... Okay, with a hint of desperation. Jarrood's eyes glistened with confidence, but he said nothing more as he dipped his head to her belly. His hand let go of her wrists and swung her hips around so they bracketed his head. He slid his big hand under her ass and using the other, he spread her flesh wide. Desi gripped the edges of the counter, holding steady to keep from thrusting herself to his mouth, her back arching upward toward his hand.

"Look at me, Desi," he whispered from between her thighs.

Jesus Christ in a mini skirt, would this man never stop toying with her? Desi lifted her head a smidge and groaned at the erotic image of Jarrood ready to plunge his tongue into her.

"I'm going to lick you. It will be like nothing you've ever known. Slow and long."

Desi almost shrieked with frustration. Do it then! Her thighs twitched in outrage.

"I'm going to make you come, long and hard. I'll lick you until scream for me to stop. Do you want that, Desi?"

Frustration and longing bubbled wildly throughout her body. She couldn't take it anymore. Her hand reached out to clutch his hair, yanking his head up, and she stared into his eyes.

"Yes, damn you, Jarrood. Lick me, make me come," she spewed in a rush of words tight with need.

Jarrood's head bent and his tongue dove into her spread flesh, hot and like raw silk. Desi's hips bucked upward at the jolt of fire that licked her insides. Flashes of light flew across her closed eyelids as his tongue raked a path over her cunt. He flattened it, taking a long, slow swipe, leaving a simmering trail of moisture in its wake. Her clit was an agonizing throb of needy flesh when his lips fastened to it.

Jarrood's low groan reverberated about the room. His hand squeezed her ass forcefully, holding her tightly to his mouth. Her hands tore at his hair as he laved her while running his finger through her slick folds. Desi felt nothing but his tongue buried in her, wiping at the swollen flesh with fiery swipes. She tightened her thighs around his head and her ass ground into his hand, loving the feel of his big hand clenching her so tightly. She writhed beneath his laving and a growl of pure carnal pleasure ripped from her throat. The climax was swift and furious while Jarrood lapped at her. Her lungs screamed for air, inflating then deflating with short choppy rasps.

Jarrood continued to bathe her with his tongue and mouth, with whisper light kisses while she settled back. Desi whimpered weakly, letting go of his hair to run her fingertips over his lips.

Oh, those lips.

Her fingers collided with his tongue and he caught them in his mouth, bringing them to her soaking cunt. Nudging her, Jarrood encouraged her to glide her fingers through the folds. She ran her forefinger along the tender flesh of her clit, as Jarrood wrapped his mouth around it. Desi tried to pull her hand away, but Jarrood's large hand held it in place securely, suckling her clit and finger. The combination sent her rocketing to another orgasm and fire shot through her veins. She screamed his name, breathless and dizzy.

Jarrood's head lifted, taking his mouth from her soaked flesh. He kissed his way to a throbbing nipple, inhaling it into his mouth, stabbing it with his tongue of raw silk. He moved to her lips and kissed them briefly while his hands roamed her body.

"You taste like honey," he whispered against her lips. She groaned into his mouth. "I could lick you forever and never need anything else. Can you taste yourself on my lips?" he asked before driving his tongue back into her mouth.

Desi could do nothing but grip his shoulders weakly, trying desperately to press her aching body against him. Distantly she was aware that he was right. No one had ever made her come like that. How could that be if she hated him? Lust and pride battled with one another to be on top.

"It's not over yet. Do you want my cock in you? It's hard and hot," he said as his fingers found her passage and slid inside. Desi consumed his tongue, tightening her legs around his wrist, squeezing them together as he plunged into her. She heard the suction of her flesh and felt the thrust of his slow, precise strokes while he thumbed her clit. Desi met his thrusts, digging her heels into the counter for leverage. He suckled her lower lip and Desi reached down to press her hand to the hard, rigid line of his cock. He growled against her lips, sucking in his breath with a sharp hiss.

"Can you feel my cock?" He pressed his groin into her hand as she kneaded the bulge straining against his zipper. "I want it in your cunt the way my fingers are in you right now."

She would explode if he didn't stop this torture. She wanted it all. Jarrod's balls slapping against her while he was deep inside her, ramming into her so hard he made her eyeballs cross. But only after his tongue had been in her slick flesh and she had sucked his cock dry. Jarrod pulled his lips from her. Standing over her, he watched her while he thrust his fingers inside of her and tugged at her nipple.

He bent back down to lick her nipples and she did just that. She exploded with waves of tingling heat and flames licking a path to every nerve ending in her body. Tears stung her eyes as release swept over her with wild abandon.

She clung to his head when he laid it on her breast, removing his fingers from her body. Her breathing was quick and short.

Jarrod caressed her limp form, lightly kissing her hot skin in all its exposed places with a tenderness Desi had never known. Sex in any form had always been

something she used as a weapon or to her advantage. She felt an unfamiliar stab of something unrecognizable in her chest. Turning her head away, she squeezed her eyes tightly. What she'd just shared with Jarrod left her weak and trembling, but it also made her feel something she wasn't able to identify.

Vulnerability was not her strong suit.

"C'mon, baby, I think it's time for bed," Jarrod said, sitting her up gently and cradling her in his arms.

Desi sighed with pleasure and rested her head on his wide shoulder, hating the security she felt and loving it all at the same time. She was too tired to fight him and weak enough to derive a small amount of pleasure at his use of the endearment baby. Jarrod threw her arms over his shoulders and scooped her up, kissing the top of her head.

"Wrap your legs around me and I'll tuck you in," he coaxed. His words were a soothing balm of hot chocolate. When he spoke with that deep tenor, it made her throat tight. She wrapped her long legs around his waist and hooked her hands behind his neck. As he headed to the bedroom, she felt the firm press of his cock scrape against her tender clit. She raised her head, her gaze collided with his.

"I... you... we didn't..." she trailed off, unable to express her concern. Concern? Where the hell had that come from? What did she care if Jarrod came? Or went or anything in between. Desi clenched her hands into fists. She did care. She needed to know if she could arouse every nerve in Jarrod's body as he had hers.

Crap.

"No, I didn't come, because when I take you and make you mine, I won't just be fucking you. I'll make love to you. And you'll never forget it's my cock driving into you."

How do ya like them apples? Desi was too weak to argue as he laid her down on the bed, but when his warmth left her she felt cold and alone. Her hand grabbed his.

"Jarrod?"

"Yup?"

“Will you stay with me?” Was that her voice meek and fearful? She sounded like a big honking baby, but somehow in the dim, early morning twilight it didn’t matter.

“Yes,” he said simply, pulling his hand from hers. He began to undress. Dropping his clothes to the floor, he left on his boxer briefs. His thickly-muscled thighs bulged as did the thick shaft that lay between them. He climbed into the bed beside her naked form and tucked the covers around her.

Desi burrowed close to him, her head on his chest as she drifted off to sleep. Jarrod’s arms wrapped around her, holding her tightly to his side. Lulled by the warmth of his arms and the scent of his skin, she slept.

Chapter Three

She woke at dusk, her body pleasantly sore... Fulfilled.

No, damn it! There will be no warm fuzzies.

Jarrold's solid form was still beside her. He slept the sleep of a vampire, the sleep of the dead. Desi's eyes swept over his muscled frame. God, he was so fabulous. She covered her mouth with her hand to keep from saying it, biting down hard on the heel of her hand just for thinking it.

His broad chest was smooth and thickly rippled with muscle. His flat nipples brought thoughts of her tongue scraping over them, making the flesh pebble. His belly was rigid and firm she'd found, while running her fingers lightly over it. The same chestnut hair on his head could be found just below his belly button, narrowing as it disappeared under his briefs. God, she wanted to ram her hand into the waistband and latch onto that enormous bulge. Her eyes flew open and she stifled a groan. Shit, what the hell was wrong with her?

She'd never wanted anyone but Zach. She'd thought she never would. Anyone she had met up with while attempting to attain that goal had been incidental. She'd used men for a purpose but her soul belonged to Zach.

Or so she'd thought.

Jarrold made her feel things Zach never had, and he didn't even have to lay a single finger on her to do it. But when he did put his hands on her... Her thighs grew damp. Oh, so what! He's a good looking guy who can make a little magic with his tongue.

A little magic is not what you experienced while you wiggled your ass around that countertop last night, girlfriend.

Desi sighed with resignation. Okay, so he was freakin' fantastic. His tongue was rapture itself and his hands were big pleasure machines.

There.

Happy?

What had he said last night? He wouldn't fuck her, he would *make love* to her. No one had ever wanted to make love to Desi, but then she hadn't wanted them to either. A quick fuck, maybe a flogging or two and they were history. No one left her wanting more the way Jarrod did. She had to get away from him, she decided firmly.

And go where?

Shit. There was nowhere to go, was there? Tearing her gaze from Jarrod, she crept out of the bed and went to the window. A whole lot of trees and mountains was what she encountered. And not much else. Her clan wouldn't be welcoming her with open arms anytime soon. She nibbled her nail. Holding her hand up to the fading light, she cringed. Ugh, there was nothing worse than shabby nails. She needed a manicure and a pedicure and a good fucking... Her nipples stood at attention, eager and ready.

She'd settle for a shower instead and some clothes.

Taking one last look at Jarrod, she almost smiled. Almost.

He really was fabulous.

* * *

Desi stood beneath the hot stream of water, easing her sore muscles. She rolled her neck from side to side, working out the kinks. Leaning on the wall with her arms bracing her body was how Jarrod found her. His cock was tight and his balls full with wanting her. Her long auburn hair fell almost to the cleft in her lush, full ass. An ass he wanted to clutch tightly while he plunged into those wet depths. Those damn legs would be the death of him, long and slender. When she'd wrapped them around his waist last night he'd almost come in his jeans.

Her scent made him insane. Her breasts drove him out of his mind with lust. But it wasn't just her body that made him want her. It was the wicked bad girl in her, needing to be tamed.

There wasn't much Jarrod didn't like about Desi, except her crappy attitude and the fact that she'd murdered his best friend's Life Mate.

When she'd asked him to lick her, he was almost grateful. He would never force himself on her, but his tongue was hungry and when he swept it along that hot cunt of hers, he knew she was meant to be his. His cock nodded with agreement, bobbing madly as he stripped off his briefs. He'd meant what he'd said too, when they came together it would be because Desi loved him and she was *willing* to be his Life Mate. Not before. That, of course, meant he was destined for a severe case of blue balls before this was over.

Stepping into the shower, he pressed his body to hers and dragged her against his hard cock. Desi yelped then relaxed against him as he brushed her ass with the stiff length.

"Are you going to make yourself useful and wash my back, vampire?"

"I'll wash every last inch of you," he growled in her ear as he soaped his hand. He felt her shiver and smiled when her nipples beaded. His hands swept over her body, lathering her with the sweet smelling soap. Jarrod made her gasp when he threaded his fingers through her pussy. She arched her back and pressed her ass into his groin.

"Your turn," he said, turning her around and handing her the soap. Her eyebrow cocked, but she rubbed the soap around in her hands.

"Turn around, Jarrod," she purred.

Jarrold faced the wall and, for the first time, prepared to have Desi's hands on his naked flesh. She began at his back, rubbing her hands in a circular motion moving slowly toward his ass. Her hands seared his skin when she knelt to scrub his legs. His muscles tensed, waiting as she skirted his cock, bypassing it completely. It throbbed for her touch. He gritted his teeth in a determined effort to keep from prying her pretty mouth open and shoving it inside.

He surprised himself with that thought. He'd never felt so primal about any woman like he did over Desi. She ran her small hands around his ass and over the tops of his thighs.

Witch! She knew what she was doing and she would drive him insane while she did it. She ducked between his legs, her breath grazing his throbbing cock as she sat on her haunches facing him. He watched from above while she licked her lips and eyed his stiff shaft.

Was that anticipation? Indecision? He held his breath when her hands reached upward tentatively to cup his balls. She lightly massaged them while she ran her thumb over his heated flesh. Jarrod's hips twitched and his stomach muscles clenched. With both hands she surrounded the thick circumference and swiped at it with her tongue. Jarrod felt a bolt of lightning scream up the length of his swollen cock. Clenching his teeth, he fought back a groan.

Desi slid up his body, letting her nipples scrape his wet thighs and belly, still holding him firmly in her hands. Her skin was hot and silky against him, but he didn't touch her. She tunneled his cock, soaping it with the glide of her hands, and he found himself plunging toward the friction. Her lips found his nipple and suckled it, swirling her tongue over the flat disc.

Moving up, she smiled at his reaction as she took his lips and tongue with her mouth. Tugging him forward she ran his cock through the soft folds of her cunt, sliding it over her clit as she sighed into his mouth and their bodies pressed together. Jarrod might have smiled at that sigh, but his cock was engulfed in a silken heat so delicious he couldn't think straight.

Her tongue toyed with his and she clasped his cock between her thighs, letting it glide through her saturated folds. Jarrod slid through the satiny flesh, thrusting his hips rapidly and cupping her breast. God, what he wouldn't give to plunge into that sweet cunt, but the waiting would make it so much sweeter.

Only when she is mine, he warned himself.

Desi wrapped her arms around his waist and met his rapid strokes as Jarrod reached down to fondle her swollen clit. She suckled his tongue and it was over. He exploded in a tornado of thick spurts as her nipple beaded under his thumb and she

tightened her creamy thighs. He felt her gasp into his mouth as her tongue tangled with his and the wet slickness of her desire dripped to his cock.

He leaned down and licked her nipple and she responded by arching upward into his mouth. Jarrod chuckled against her breast, nipping her lightly.

"Can't get enough of me, can you, Desi?" he teased. She grunted at him.

"You're a good lay, Jarrod, or should I say, a potentially good lay?"

He cupped her jaw in his hand and wiped the moisture from the tip of her nose. "You've had a good lay before, Desi, but you'll never have another better than me. You'll never have another *after* me." He watched her dissect that statement, mulling it over in that wicked head of hers.

"Talk is cheap, vampire."

He pulled her tightly to him and held her again, hard cock in his hand, rubbing it through her slick flesh. "There is nothing cheap about me. I come at a higher price than you know."

Desi wrapped her leg around his hip, draping an arm around his neck. "Then let's get to it," she enticed him.

"Sorry, sweetheart, I have firewood to chop and you have dinner to cook." He swatted her ass with the palm of his hand and stepped out of the shower.

"Oh, and don't tell me Desi doesn't cook, cuz she does now." He threw a towel at her and strode out of the bathroom.

* * *

Desi toweled her unsatisfied, achy body dry. When she'd gotten a bird's eye view of Jarrod's cock she almost passed out from joy.

The delirious kind.

He was as fabulous there as he was everywhere else. She'd wanted to wrap her lips around him and never let go. The small taste she'd taken was just enough to make her crave more. But she was hesitant. Maybe she wouldn't turn him on the way he turned her on?

Insecure?

Another unwanted emotion. Desi shivered. She could almost hear the evil music playing in the background. Jarrod made her insane with lust. She was the lust maker not the other way around.

Squaring her shoulders, she searched the bedroom to find some clothes. Her own clothes hung neatly in the closet, but somehow they seemed pretentious in this setting. Hell, most any kind of clothing was pretentious in this setting. It was rustic to say the least.

Desi fingered her silk shirt, now stained with blood, and cringed with embarrassment.

Whoa.

That was deep and not a Desi thing at all.

What's to be embarrassed about? She'd been fighting for the love of her life. At least that was the notion she'd harbored all of these centuries. Looking back now, it seemed stupid to have clung to the hope that Zach would give up Claire. He hadn't wanted Desi from the beginning and now, her clan had banished her for a little lack of anger management.

If one was brutality honest with themselves, they would admit they had issues with anger management, hence the whole murder/attempted murder thing. Where had this voice in her head come from? She stuck her finger in her ear and twisted it around.

Time, distance and perspective was a scary antidote. She couldn't remember when she hadn't been consumed with winning Zach. Now, she couldn't remember why she'd wanted him in the first place.

Because he'd wanted someone else? She sighed, well there was that. And she'd wanted to merge Zach's clan with hers, but she couldn't even remember the reasons why that coup had been so important either.

How was she ever going to go back home? Would she ever be allowed back home? She felt something she couldn't explain gnaw at her gut.

Damn, penance was a bitch.

Maybe if you just behaved yourself instead of acting like a rip-roaring, first class bitch all of the time, penance wouldn't seem so hard to achieve.

Bitch? She jammed her finger back in her ear.

For lack of anything better, she threw on Jarrod's shirt and stomped off to the kitchen. Her stomach growled, agreeing it was time to eat. Desi scrounged through the cabinets and found a can of corn.

Creamed corn.

Ick.

Wasn't there a phone to call for takeout? Desi looked around the sparse cabin. Nope. Well, now what the hell was she supposed to do?

Cook.

Desi sighed. Cook. Pots and pans? She located them in the bottom pantry and found a can opener and some big wooden spoons. She was busily opening the cans and dumping them into the pots when Jarrod came in carrying a load of firewood. Desi eyed him suspiciously.

"Why do you bother chopping wood? In case you didn't notice we're vampires. We rarely feel the cold," she reminded him.

"It's a good workout and I like the ambiance it provides. What do you have against anything remotely mortal?"

Desi snorted. "I'm not human, Jarrod, and neither are you. I'm not going to pretend otherwise. I like being a vampire. It has some definite perks."

"Well, some of those perks are what got you here, Miss High and Mighty. I wouldn't be too proud of that," he reminded her right back. Desi turned her back on him and furiously stirred the corn.

"What do you have against being a vampire, Jarrod, was the question, I think?"

"I'm proud of who I am. I am a vampire. But it doesn't mean I can't live with mortals. They exist. Adjust."

Desi stuck her tongue out at him while continuing to stir the corn. Mortal-schmortal. They were useless.

"Mortals are a nuisance. They're afraid of us and we outlive them. There's no point in getting to know them because they all die off. They whine about our need for blood and they act as though we're disease-ridden," she scoffed at him.

"So this would be why you tried so hard to kill Claire, because she's mortal?"

Damn him and his reference to that night. She didn't owe him an explanation. All of this self discovery was downright droll.

"Claire's alive and well, so no, I don't see what the problem is."

"That's exactly the problem. You don't see trying to kill someone as a problem."

Well, when you put it like that, it sounded... "It was in the name of love."

"Is that what you call love?" Jarrod probed her mind as he spoke, his voice short and harsh. "Love doesn't usually involve killing off someone, Des. If you'd loved Zach as much as you thought you did, you would have left him alone. Love is about allowing the one you love to make the choices they want. Not hunting them down and killing their Life Mates."

"Okay, Jarrod, I get it. Bad Desi," she yelled at him, hearing the catch in her voice. "Look I'm cooking here, okay? Do you want to eat or do you want to fight? Save the lecture for someone who gives a rat's ass."

Jarrod came up behind her shoulder and peered in the pot. "Um, Des? Are we just having creamed corn?"

Desi flashed him the look that usually sent most men screaming. Jarrod just smiled his wicked grin.

"Listen, Emeril, you wanna do the cooking? I couldn't find the phone to call for takeout and this was all I could find in the pantry." Jarrod's deep chuckle sent goose bumps up her arms.

"Next time check the porch, Des. A man cannot live on creamed corn alone, you know," he taunted.

Desi screwed her face up into a smirk. "You're a vampire. You should be living on blood alone!"

"Please. Would you get off the 'I'm a big, bad vampire' kick? I like human things. I actually like stew and I like creamed corn. Wanna hear something really freaky? I like a lot of things that are human and there's nothing wrong with it. There are more of them than there are of us. Live with it."

"Yeah, you know why there are more of them than there are of us? Because we haven't properly utilized our control over them. If we did, we'd rule the world."

Jarrold rolled back on his heels and gave Desi his "for shame" look. "What's the big deal about ruling the world? What can you possibly gain from it? Will it allow you to drive a better car? Have a bigger house? You have all of those things already. I don't get it. So why don't you explain."

She didn't have an explanation. In essence, Jarrod was right. She couldn't pinpoint why she wanted to control everything anymore. Her emotions were a jumbled mix of confusion and lust and her head was in the same shape. "Oh, really? Good for fucking you, Jarrod. Why don't you go off to human-ville and leave me alone, then?"

"We're going to get to the bottom of this hatred for humans and anything remotely decent, Des. I don't believe you were just hatched evil. Your father and mother could hardly be considered cruel. You come from a long line of nuts, no doubt. You Russian vamps are a cold blooded bunch, but your father's worked hard to change that. So where did this come from?"

Desi's gut clenched when she thought about her mother and father. Whew, she'd done them proud, eh? Yet, they'd still bargained on the off chance that Jarrod could save her from herself. That was hope. "What difference does it make? I am what I am and I won't apologize for it. It's not like I can take back *murder*, even if the stupid human did turn out all right. I kept Claire from Zach for plenty of centuries by whacking her. I doubt anyone in my clan, or Zach's, is going to forgive that anytime soon. Can you just see us all at Christmas gatherings? Claire cringing in a corner, afraid to eat the fruitcake I brought because it might be poisoned." Desi's laugh was sharp and bitter. "Somehow, I don't think you're ever going to be able to help redeem that. No

matter how long you keep me here in the woods. No matter how much you torture my libido. So go do those human things you seem so fond of and leave me alone!”

“There’s a reason you do these things,” he persisted. “Call it gut instinct. Maybe the same instinct that told me you were the one responsible for killing Claire all these centuries, but there’s a reason you’re a snake and I plan to find out what it is and learn to temper it.” Jarrod’s voice remained calm and reassuring, but insistent upon this lame redemption he thought so possible.

Dipshit.

Desi turned to face him, dropping the spoon in the creamed corn and gluing a hand to each hip. “That’s a lovely and impassioned speech, Oprah, but I don’t think anything you do or say is going to change how my clan or for that matter, Zach’s clan feels about me. I’ve resigned myself to going it alone, you should too.” Did that sound as pathetic to Jarrod as it did to her own ears? Lord, where was this coming from? Self-pity, remorse, it was all too much in one sitting for her.

Jarrod closed the small space between them and looked down at her. He smiled complacently while pushing a loose strand of hair back behind her ear. “Ya see, right there, when you said, ‘I’ve resigned myself to going it alone’ is where I have trouble believing you. You don’t want to go it alone, Des. I can hear it in your voice and read it all over your face. Again, I say, adjust. You want to be a part of the clan, as much as you want to be a bitch. Your people skills suck, but I’ll teach you.”

“So what’s next, Jarrod?” she yelped up at him. “We all hold hands and sing ‘Kumbaya’?”

His cocky grin got cockier and he kissed the tip of her nose for emphasis. “Maybe.”

Ohhhhhhhhhhhh! He made her crazy. Desi decided food wasn’t what she needed. She needed to clear her head and get the hell away from Dr. Phil here. Stomping off to the bedroom, she plucked her old skirt out of the closet and threw it on, slipping into her heels and stalking back into the kitchen of the small cabin.

She gave Jarrod one last look of death over her shoulder, which he merely chuckled at, and flung the door open, stepping right out into a snowdrift.

Brrrr.

Chapter Four

Hookay, so there had to be a way out of this dive, she mused while traipsing through ankle deep snow. She scanned the now dark horizon, but there wasn't much to be seen besides hills and trees. Many tall trees on a moonless night, with a sky that stretched for an eternity.

Fuck.

Where the hell were they, and why the hell didn't she fly on outta here?

Because there's nowhere to fly to, nitwit.

Again, there it was -- the ugly truth.

No one wanted her back home.

She could always go somewhere else and start over.

Well, that's certainly optimistic, Des. But doing what? Do they have jobs that actually pay you to be head bitch somewhere?

So her job skills weren't exactly desirable in today's market. Okay, then. No waitressing at the I-Hop. Peachy.

Finding a tree, she decided sitting might be better than wandering aimlessly. That was just what she needed. To get lost in the wilds of wherever the frig she was and die of hunger. The very thought of having to drain small animals had her intestines in a knot. Blech. No rabbits and squirrels.

Plopping down in the cold snow, she crossed her legs at the ankles and let her head attempt to find peace.

However, peace wasn't what was going on inside her noggin. A constant onslaught of words at war with one another made it almost impossible to keep a thought straight.

Putting her hands to her temple, she massaged them, trying to gain control of the swirl of confusion by closing her eyes and resting her head in her arms.

So, what's next, Smitrovitch? You have nowhere to go, nothing to do but attack Jarrod's plan for your redemption. Be a good girl and try to help him.

You could kill him, much like you killed Claire. That's always worked before, a low snarl offered.

Who the fuck?

Don't play stupid, Desi. You know who the fuck I am. You're just a little brainwashed from that zealot do-gooder Jarrod. For some reason, he diminishes my communication with you. But you're here now and that's all that matters.

Her head popped up from its place on her arms and her vampire eyes scanned the horizon. Nothing. No one for miles.

So, let's get back to the issue at hand. Killing Claire and Jarrod. In any order you prefer.

"Kill Jarrod?" she repeated the words in astonishment into the darkened night with hushed reverence that bordered revulsion. "I don't want to kill him! I -- I --"

You what? You want to screw him, but that won't get you the frig outta here. What choice do you have? I say we wait till he's asleep and drain him dry. Or maybe use some of that wood he's so fond of chopping and drive a stake through his heart, huh? I dunno, Desi, be creative. You're good at it.

Desi's head bolted upright, making her dizzy, and the landscape before her blurred. Where was this coming from? Who was she talking to? Was she that desperate to escape Jarrod that she'd created an alter ego in her head? Last time she'd checked her panties, she wasn't in any rush to hit the road and leave Jarrod, let alone kill him.

The voice in her head was obviously going to ignore that notion.

Okay, so here's the plan. You knock off Jarrod and go back home. We'll figure it out from there. Surely your house is still standing and if someone else is in it by now, we'll whack them too.

Desi pressed a hand in horror to her mouth. What the flying fuck was going on?

It's what's always been going on. You listen to me. Do as you're told and everything will be right again. We can find our way out of this the way we've done for centuries. Now, pay attention, Desi, just like you always have.

Always have?

Desi rose with shaking limbs. Hand over hand, she reached behind her and climbed the tree trunk, clinging to it for support. Her head fell forward while the insistent voice pounded in her ears.

Yes, Desi, you've always listened to me and it's about time you start listening again. I didn't think you'd ever get away from that simpering, spineless Jarrod long enough to feel my presence anymore. Now, I don't mind you gettin' your groove on, but I do mind if it keeps us from doing what needs to be done.

"Done?" she whispered, watching her breath fan out into the chilled evening.
"What needs to be done?"

Don't be an idiot, Desdemona. We need to kill Claire.

Desi dug her fingers into the bark of the tree. "Kill Claire?"

Well, yeah. That's always been our mission. But now we have the added hassle of Mother Teresa to overcome. So, he must be eliminated. Soon. Claire is a vampire now. Her strength grows by the day. She'll be able to hold her own and then we're fucked, but I finally figured out why she keeps coming back and now that she's been turned, we can really fry her ass.

"But I don't want to kill Claire. I don't want to kill Jarrod --"

Shut up, you idiot! The voice in her head cut her off with a hiss, its venom spewing like firecrackers shooting off into the night. *Of course you want to kill them. We have a plan. It's the same plan we've always had. Kill Claire Treemont and this time, kill her for good. So I can take my rightful place back.*

Desi's head swam with fear and loathing. Who was this voice in her head and why did it want Claire dead? She was going crazy. That had to be it. Living in the sticks and roughing it without manicures and facials was literally driving her insane.

You can have all of those things again, if you just kill Claire.

"I-don't-want-to-kill-Claire!" she screamed desperately into the crisp air, punctuating each word with a rasp of breath. The sudden realization of that statement lifted a weight from her entire being, freeing her. As if she were a boat finding the high seas again after having its anchor stuck deep at the ocean's surface.

Yes, you do, the voice coaxed with evil dripping from each word. Even if now, you can't have Zach, Claire still must die.

Desi pushed off the tree with a rough jerk, scraping her hands and stumbling forward into the deep snow, falling on her knees. The word *no* whipped around in her head over and over. No, no, no! She would not kill Claire.

Yes, yes, yes, you will! You don't have a choice. I make all of the decisions. Don't be stupid enough to think otherwise.

Desi was tinged with fury, weak with dark fear. Weak with the knowledge that something beyond bizarre was happening to her and it almost left her unable to move, but she gritted her teeth and sucked in some air before attempting again to stand.

An invisible hand refused to let her go. It pressed her spine to the ground and held her there with far more strength than Desi could ever have in all her vampire-ness.

Look, we've done this for a long time and you've never given me a problem, the voice spoke with a rough edge, melodic with menace. So don't start now. Get up off your ass and let's get the hell outta here. We need to find Claire.

Desi shook her head with the limited movement she was allowed, her long hair wet from the crusty snow, her cheek scraping the cold ground, but she was not backing down. "No," she whispered through compressed lips. "No, I won't do it." She had no clear thought as to why she was refusing whatever this was in her head, holding her to the ground. This entity, this invisible force that insisted she obey, but whatever the reason, she was refusing with a denial in her so fierce it frightened her.

Desdemona, Desdemona. I don't know why you're fighting me now, after all this time, but you can't win. Only I will win and you'll do my bidding, the voice cackled low and threatening.

"No," Desi refused again with lips pressed to the hard snow. "No-no-no!" she all but screamed with the last of the energy she had while she pushed upward hard against the cold talons of something unseen, claws that dug into her and left rivulets of spiked pain behind. Curving her spine, Desi slipped out from beneath whatever held her and began to run.

Running with the fear of this black, unknown force tearing at her heels, and she kept running, as though she could outrun whatever *it* was.

But it stalked her relentlessly, mocking her, laughing at her attempts to escape, whispering vicious, violent acts in her ear until Desi fell to the ground in a crumpled tangle of limbs and desperation.

* * *

Someone was pulling her from the safe place she'd finally found in her head and Desi wouldn't have it. Not after whatever that was out in the woods had gotten hold of her.

Christ, she didn't even have a good drunk to fall back on to explain the eerie happening.

"Des, wake up."

Jarrold's voice filled her ears, warm and soothing, comforting and like hot caramel on an ice cream sundae.

Oh, fuck no. She was not opening her eyes to that again. Whatever *that* was.

He brushed his hand over her forehead, callused from chopping wood. "Wake up, Desi, and tell me what you were doing passed out in the snow."

Well, I was talking to someone in my head, Jarrod. Someone who wants me to do things you say are bad. Very bad, in fact. So, do you have any Prozac, cuz I think I'm schizophrenic or maybe even bi-polar, but most assuredly not on the road to mental health. "I don't know," she answered back. Her lips were cracked and dry, her voice much the same.

"Well, you were wet and shaking and mumbling something about 'no, I won't do that'. So what won't you do, Desi?"

Kill your best friend's woman and just for shits and grins, you too. "I don't know," she replied, repeating the same stiff response she'd given a moment ago.

Jarrood rubbed a thumb over her lips and pressed a kiss to her nose. "You do know, Desdemona Smitrovitch, and I can wait until you tell me. I know you didn't just fall asleep out there. You miss your Egyptian cotton sheets too much to even consider giving up my K-Mart specials for some snow. So what's the deal?"

Desi fought to open her eyes and push away from Jarrood's hulking presence, leaning over her on the bed. She struggled to sit up, planting her hands on his big chest and giving him the eyeball of death. "Would you stop being so nice to me, Jarrod?" she said with narrowed eyes depicting her flash of irritation. "Jesus, you're like Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm and Mother Teresa all rolled into one. I tried to murder someone, your best friend's Life Mate, for crap's sake! So could we quit with the hopeful morality boosts and get off my back with the nice shit, okay?"

Again, she placed her hands on Jarrood's hard chest and pushed for emphasis, but he held his ground and the sheet that covered her fell away from her body. "What the hell?" Jarrod shouted, peering over her shoulder and moving her hair aside. "What happened to you? Where did those come from?"

"What?" she asked, alarmed at the tone his voice had taken. Reaching around her, Desi pushed his hands away and ran a finger over her spine. She shuddered.

Holy fucking freaky... there were gashes in her flesh, rough and puffy with jagged edges to them. She could feel they were beginning to heal, as a vampire was likely to do, but they'd left enough of an imprint to make her shudder again with a violent ripple.

Oh, my God. Whatever had happened, had really, really happened and her marred back was the physical proof of it.

"Desi? What the hell happened before you passed out? Did an animal attack you? I didn't see any blood. No carcass. Wanna tell me what's going on?"

Not a lot.

Jarrold held her by the shoulders, avoiding her back altogether and searching her eyes for an answer she didn't want to give. "I'll probe you. I'll read your mind. You know I can."

"Yes, you can, but if I choose to find a way to block you, I can keep you from probing me too deeply because you, in your infinite wisdom, didn't want to go *all the way* with me. So back off, Jarrold! I don't know what happened," she growled at him, digging deep within her newly fucked up psyche to find the Desi she knew and loved. The bitch from the bowels of hell, bent on seeing Claire dead and Zach hers.

She fought a sob. Where was that Desi? Who was the Desdemona that had so vehemently told whatever was in her head that she wouldn't do its bidding?

Her back ached from her imaginary friend. Raw and bruised, it throbbed now that attention had been brought to it.

Jerking away from Jarrold, Desi summoned some of that chutzpah she was so famous or infamous for and dragged herself out of the bed and over to the bathroom door, flinging it closed with a furious fist.

Boneless, she collapsed against the wood frame and took a deep, cleansing breath.

However, Jarrold wasn't going to be deterred. "Open the door. Open it now or I'll knock it down."

She knew he meant it too. "Could I just get a moment's peace from you, Dr. Phil?"

"Not until you tell me what tore up your back like that."

"Not until you tell me what tore up your back like that," Desi mocked with a whisper.

"I heard that."

Argghhhh! "Good, then hear this, vampire -- let me be! I'm in need of a shower and some dignity, if you don't mind. Now go off and do something human. That always seems to make you feel better."

"Desi..." His voice was a low, persistent hum of warning in her ear.

"Please, Jarrold."

She must have sounded desperate enough that Jarrod decided pushing her anymore was futile. "Fine. You get yourself together, but we're not done. Not even close."

Pushing away from the door, Desi turned to look into the cracked mirror of the bathroom, running a hand that trembled violently along her face. It was like seeing herself for the first time. Her eyes were tired and her face was drawn. Those green eyes staring back at her no longer held the fiery, furious glint they'd once possessed. They were dull and confused and she didn't even have the energy to work up a healthy pissed off over it.

That thought alone should be insane to her, but it was much like everything since last night.

Devoid of anything but utter confusion.

She *had* heard a voice in her head. No one could tell her otherwise. No one.

But who or what was this voice? Was it a product of her imagination?

Did she have an imagination?

The voice hadn't come back.

Was she losing her mind?

Was she losing the battle she'd been having with her conscience and her way to revolt against all things good was to create some sinister being in her head?

It didn't explain the welts on her back...

Only one question remained.

Who the fuck are you, Desdemona Smitrovitch?

Chapter Five

Jarrood stood outside the door, waiting to see if he could hear anything, but Desi remained silent. When he heard the water gush from behind the door, he decided to let her be.

However, he was not going to let whatever had done that to her back be. When he'd found her late last night, he'd been surprised to see her slumped in the snow. She'd looked defenseless and vulnerable.

Not the Desi he knew, for sure.

The Desi Jarrood knew and lusted for was anything but vulnerable, but when he'd laid her on the bed, she'd clung to him and whispered in a ragged voice, "No. I won't."

No, she wouldn't *what*? Cook? Clean? Eat pig slop? Conform to good versus evil?

Whatever had happened out there, he hadn't seen the result of it on her back until today. *It* was there and Desi certainly would never mar her perfection in any way, not without kicking and screaming all the way, despite the fact that she healed with rapid, vampire haste.

What wild animal could have left marks like that? The gashes were long and deep, spanning her entire back. Even if an animal had been responsible, why the hell was Desi so close mouthed about it?

One didn't forget an attack like that. He didn't sense any embarrassment from her about not being able to handle an animal attack either.

Sighing with exasperation, Jarrood wandered into the living room and threw some firewood on the fire.

He smirked. Desi was right; they couldn't feel the cold, so a fire *was* a romantic, sentimental *human* notion. But then, Jarrood liked human things and one of his favorite

human things was a fire with wood he'd chopped. He loved the smell it created. It was from hard work and a day spent without idle hands.

Did that make him a human-wannabe? Maybe sometimes it did. Jarrod didn't lie to himself about his desire to keep the human friends he'd made or that he missed some of the ways of past centuries.

Did that make him less of a vampire?

No. He didn't want to be anything he wasn't.

He just wanted to be.

Just being meant compromise in a world where humans were in the majority. His plan had been to teach Desi the very same thing. Tolerance. It wasn't a trait Desi possessed, but Jarrod believed, in all of his Dr. Phil-isms, that Desi could learn to care about something else other than herself. There'd always been a reason why she'd created such havoc, and inherent evil hadn't been one that had ever crossed his mind. It definitely should have been, but it'd never sat right with him. Yet, there had to be a reason.

Lust had been one of his. Jarrod had always thought he should feel far worse about wanting Desi. She had, after all, murdered his best friend's Life Mate over and over again. Yet, he didn't and the only explanation he had was his gut instincts. It was why he'd asked Zach to give her to him.

Now, he was more certain of his instincts than ever. Something had happened to her out there. Something that left her eyes wide with what he'd guess was fear and her body trembling and marred.

What could scare a woman like Desi? He'd have thought it might take the devil himself and even then, he'd suspected Desi would invite Lucifer over for cucumber sandwiches without the crusts and bottled Perrier while she plotted his eventual dethroning.

Jarrold chuckled to himself and sat in the big, comfortable chair by the fire.

Desi was torture every step of the way. She tortured not only his senses and his cock, but his patience. If there was a nerve Desi could jump on, she found it and then set about ripping it to shreds.

After last night, there was a whole new element to Desi that needed dealing with and Jarrod planned to find out what that was.

"Can I have another shirt?" Desi crossed the room, tightening the bath towel around her. Her slender body, tight and sculpted, couldn't be hidden by the towel, though it would appear she was trying. "The other one needs washing."

Jarrod smiled up at her. "Oh, yeah. We'll do that tomorrow. The laundry, that is."

Her face held surprise. "You have a washing machine in this dump?"

"Oh, no, no. We have a creek outside of this dump. I'm surprised you didn't find it last night in your moonlit adventures."

Rolling her green eyes, Desi flicked a finger at him. "Gimme the shirt, do-gooder."

Jarrod tugged off the flannel shirt he wore and handed it to her.

Her eyes narrowed. "This is all you have?"

"Until we do the laundry."

Yanking the shirt from his grip, Desi pulled it over her head and let the towel beneath pool to the floor. Sniffing the collar, she remarked, "What is it about you and K-Mart? You have plenty of money, why do you wear crap like this?"

"Because Giorgio Armani already has a yacht. I don't think he needs another one."

"Yeah? Well, I heard Calvin Klein wants another summer home. Help a guy out and stop wearing this cheap garbage."

Jarrod threw his head back and barked a laugh. "There's the Desi I know. The superficial power monger I'm used to. I don't know that I much liked the Desi I saw last night. It was sorta scary, you all whimpering like that."

Desi plopped down in front of the fire and leaned back on her elbows, allowing him the smallest glimpse at her pink cunt. "I do not whimper."

"You did last night."

"Did not."

"Did too and it was as clear as the day is long."

"Look, preacher boy, I don't whimper. I probably just belched. It was gas."

Jarrold leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees and watching the strange play of emotions on her face. "And a fine belch it was. It went something like, 'No. I won't do that'."

Desi froze and just as suddenly narrowed her eyes again, masking whatever was rolling around that head of hers with a snide look. "I probably meant, no, I won't sleep with a knuckle dragger like you."

His grin split wide across his face. "Yes, you will. You want it as much as I do and you know it. What you need is someone to show you exactly what it's like to submit to something other than plotting someone else's demise."

"Submit this," she taunted.

"Deal," he said. "Give me your hand."

"The hell I will."

Jarrold leaned in further and held out his hand, holding her eyes with his. "Give me your hand. *Now*."

"Are we going to play a new game, Jarrod? The old one where you torture me was getting stale. But as you well know, I loooove games, especially the kinky kind. However, I'm in charge of all things Olympic."

"Not if you want to play with me. See, it's like this, Des. We play nice and by my rules or we don't play. Now, give me your hand or don't. Your choice."

Her stubborn jaw lifted a bit and she took hold of his hand. Her acquiescence made it clear to Jarrod that Desi was curious. Jarrod took the opportunity to yank her up and throw her over his shoulder. "How's that back, Des?" he asked as she slapped against his hard shoulder blades.

"Peachy. I'm all healed up."

"Feelin' strong tonight, Des?"

"Than ever," was her muffled reply.

"That's good to hear. You'll need to be for what you're about to experience."

* * *

"See this?" Jarrod held up a flogger. The leather strips were black and red on a braided handle that he stroked lovingly.

"It's a flogger, big deal," Desi responded from her position on the bed as Jarrod looked down at her. Gooood answer. Nice and nonchalant. Desi was very familiar with a flogger. She'd used it many times on... on... well, on a couple of guys she couldn't remember, but had submitted to her nonetheless.

"Ah, but it's *my* flogger, and there's nothing more that I'd like to do than swat your tight ass with it."

Desi's panties grew wetter with each stroke of Jarrod's hand through the leather strips. Well, if that wasn't a total turnabout. She'd never given much thought to a lover using one on her. It was kinda hot just thinking about it. "Point here?"

"My point is this, Des," he said, smooth as a glass. "I won't use it without your permission and I won't use it unless we have a clear understanding that a flogging might be all that happens here."

Jesus Christ in a mini skirt! Would shouting "Do me and do me right" just blow her cover? Why wouldn't the man fuck her brains out so they could move on?

"Okay, so basically what you're saying is, we're going to play *that* game again. The one where you torture me until I beg for more. Could we get a new game, Jarrod? Or at least let me have a new playing piece." Very snarky, Des. You're doing a fab job of hiding your evident excitement.

Jarrod lowered the flogger to the opening of her loaned shirt, dusting it over her exposed skin. Desi fought a shudder of pure anticipation. "What I'm saying is, we play my way or no way."

Oh.

Well, then.

If you wanna be like that.

"Okay," she replied stiffly. She was afraid to say much more. The leather strips brushing across her skin were making her squirm with a need that was deeper than any she'd ever felt. It began in her core and spiraled upward with a slow, aching burn for something... Something more than she'd obviously experienced so far.

But what?

Jarrold's smile was anything but playful now. It was that of victory.

Whatever, she needed to get her freak on and if taking Flogger Road to get to Freak Street was how to do it, she was game.

His lips grazed hers and Desi found her mouth open with willing surrender. "Now we need a safe word."

"A who?"

"A safe word. It tells me when to stop. If I know you, you'd let yourself be beaten to within an inch of your life before you'd give in and that isn't what this is about. It's about allowing me to help me find your pleasure. It's about letting me have the control to do it. Thus, a safe word."

Oh, yeah. That word. She was vaguely familiar with it. "How about Martha Stewart?" she suggested. "Seeing as you're so fond of cooking and cleaning and K-Mart."

His snicker was jovial and light while his tongue traced the outline of her lips. "That's two words, Des. Martha will work." Pulling away, he stood again and let the flogger hang in his hand with a loose grip. "That's the word you'll use when you've had enough. The word you use when you want to back out. If you feel uncomfortable, if you feel like your comfort zone has been invaded. The *moment* you use it, I'll stop."

Desi lifted her chin to gaze up at him. His hazel eyes were virtually glowing. "Is this something you do a lot, Jarrod? Are you into, what is it called? BDSM, right? Like dungeon sex?"

Jarrood chuckled. "Some of it, yes. Not the heavier aspects. I don't want a slave or a submissive woman twenty-four, seven. I do like to have control in the bedroom. I like to play. Not always, but sometimes and that's what this is about. It's about you letting go of your control and I can see," he ran his finger over the soft swell of her pussy, "if this is any indication, that you're anticipating it too."

That would be an affirmative on the wet panty meter. Her flogger had always been something she enjoyed using in sexual play, but the idea of giving up her control to Jarrood sent shivers of a deep longing along every nerve ending she owned.

Again, I ask, who are you, Desdemona Smitrovitch?

Who cares? Let's get it on.

She forgot all about trying to understand this newest facet of her personality when Jarrood said, "Unbutton your shirt, and don't do anything else until I tell you to." His face was a mask of confidence with an almost serene calm to it.

Desi unbuttoned her shirt and let the edges fall to her sides, revealing her breasts and the swell of her hip. Jarrood took that opportunity to trail the flogger strips over her skin again. The cool strips against her heated skin left Desi breathless, arching upward and closing her eyes, allowing these new sensations to flow with free abandon.

The light thwack of the flogger on her breasts hit Desi's ears before it made the connection with her nipples -- now so hard they could cut glass. Clenching the sheets beside her, Desi arched off the bed, bowing into the leather that brought her such tingling pleasure. The slight sting made her cunt clench with almost unbearable need.

Cheerist, she wanted him to touch her. Run his tongue all over her. Place that hard, cut body to hers and ram into her.

He was going to kill her from wanting him.

Yet, he didn't touch her. He continued to draw the flogger over her skin, stopping occasionally to lift it and bring it down on various places of her body, never hurting her, simply setting her veins on fire with need.

Desi caught a quick glimpse of the bulge in his jeans and thought to reach out and caress him, but Jarrood had said she wasn't to do anything he didn't tell her to. The

Desi of old would have ignored those instructions and thrown down with him. However, the very idea of allowing Jarrod to steer her boat was invigorating and frustrating all rolled into one and she wanted to see where it led.

"Do you like that?" Jarrod asked in a hushed growl, climbing onto the bed to straddle her, still fully clothed.

Words escaped her when he draped the leather strips over her cunt, brushing her flesh, now swollen and desperate for contact.

"Do you like that, Desi," Jarrod persisted, stopping the delicious torture and lifting her chin with his hand to force her to look at him.

Desi's eyes widened. "Yes," she replied with only a hint of arrogance, a mere shadow of the former spitting fire and hissing venom, Desi.

His smile was approving. "Do you want more?"

Well, for crap's sake, yeah! *No, no, Desi, that's not the game you're playing here. It would seem demands ain't gonna fly, cookie. Answer nicely, try to be polite even.* "Yes," she replied on a ragged breath. Anything to relieve this burning ache.

The flogger snapped against her again, but this time, Jarrod's fingers followed, soothing her flushed skin behind it with strong fingers, whispering over each pointed nipple.

Desi whimpered at the touch of Jarrod's hand. His palm was hot and the skin callused from chopping wood. Her hands begged to run over the tight fitting T-shirt he wore, skim the bulge of muscles in his thighs, tensing and flexing with each movement he made. But Desi refrained, fighting the impulse to do something she hadn't been told to do.

As he drew the flogger over her yet again, he ground his hips against her pelvis, rolling them against her pussy, now weeping with a cry for relief. Bending forward, he snaked his tongue out to swipe at the underside of her breasts.

Her hips jumped off the bed, undulating against his tongue, molten and silky. He took small tastes of her, flicking his tongue here and there, along her ribs, across her pelvic bone, leaving wet trails of fire in its wake.

Desi's eyes rolled to the back of her head and she clung to the sheets beside her.

"Roll over," Jarrod commanded in a gruff voice. He lifted away from her to allow her room to turn to her stomach.

Desi's lust fogged brain followed the command, knowing he intended to do just what he'd said earlier and her throat was dry from it, her senses ablaze with anticipation. She felt him straddle her again, the rough fabric of his jeans encompassing her upper thighs, her ass high in the air.

"Hold onto the headboard, and don't let go."

Reaching her hands up, Desi grabbed onto the headboard spindles with hands that were nearly boneless and waited. She found her body arching up into nothing but air, seeking the touch of the flogger. Sweat began to pool between her breasts and her legs shook from silently begging him to use the damned thing on her before she exploded.

Jarrod nipped her ass with incisors that were sharp, leaving behind the sweet sting of pleasure mingled with a tinge of pain and then, he began to draw the flogger over her ass.

First, with a precise pattern, back and forth as though he was painting on a canvas, letting the cool strips fondle her, caress her ass. As if he was letting her adjust.

Desi clung to the spindles of the headboard, quivering. Her stomach coiled tightly, her legs quaking, fighting to hold her up. Yet she tried blindly to reach further into the strokes of the flogger, a silent plea for Jarrod to flay her with it.

Their breathing, harsh, forced, mingled, entwined in the silence of the bedroom.

When Jarrod took the first stroke of her ass, Desi was caught by surprise. It didn't hurt, rather the sharp snap sent fissures of pleasure to her cunt, stoking a fire waiting to burn brightly. Moisture rushed from her pussy with lightning speed and again, she whimpered.

Jarrod's hand clutched her hip and he lashed her once more, eliciting a deep groan as Desi, less surprised now at the enjoyment she derived, reveled in the sharp

stab of pleasure it brought her. With each rap of the flogger, Jarrod would follow with the caress of his hand, drawing it with a rubbing motion over her freshly flogged skin.

Her need became a sole purpose. To explore this desire. To luxuriate in it and forget everything but the stroke of Jarrod's flogger.

Again, he came down on her ass, this time with a more forceful swipe, and it left a dizzying rush of heady, wanton yearning behind.

"Do you want more?"

Jarrod's question seemed almost ludicrous. She was straining upward, moving toward something explosive and it must be obvious to him, but her desperate need to come outweighed the need to mock him. "Y-yessssss," was the most she could manage. A hiss of a word that burst through her lips like champagne from a bottle.

Once more, Jarrod brought the flogger down on her, his tempo rhythmic, delicious, with the slightest bit of force. Each crack of the flogger beckoned Desi, calling her to a place she'd never been, but wanted to find.

His hand left her hip to slip between her legs, finding the hot center of her cunt and stroking it with long fingers, alternating between flogging her and fondling her clit.

Swollen, desperate, needy, Desi climbed higher with each stroke. Her ass was hot from the flogger, her pussy inflamed and fraught with tension.

Inserting his finger into her slick passage made her lose the last bit of control she had and when he snapped the flogger over her one last time, Desi could no longer hold back. The combination of the thrust of his finger and the leather strips crashing against her was more than she could bear. It was carnal, sweet and rife with lusty abandon.

She lost her grip on the spindles. Burying her hands beneath her and arching into the easy glide of Jarrod's finger, she came. Long, hard, frenzied, frantic.

"Let it happen," she heard Jarrod say in soothing tones, coaxing her to come. It was vague and muffled with her head buried in the mattress, but she came.

Her juices flowed freely from her pussy in a rush of heat. A tidal wave of tension washed away with the final release of orgasm.

Desi heard her scream when the final push of relief came. Raw, needy and harsh, it thrust from her throat and left her heaving for breath. Every muscle in her body, coiled and tight, let go.

Jarrold came to rest on her back, pulling his finger from her and pressing his lips to her hair. His heavy weight soothed her, his hands caressed away the last bit of tension, and she relaxed against him.

He held her firmly against him, whispering words she would strain to hear if she had the energy.

Desi would have thought Jarrod would take perverse pleasure in what had just happened. He had, after all, just done exactly what he'd said he would, but instead, he was gentle, sweet in his ministrations.

Desi dragged a hand from beneath her and reached for his. Jarrod closed his bigger one around hers and she clung to it.

It was all too much for her to wrap her head around. The strange happening in the woods and now, this newfound desire to allow Jarrod to take control of her sexuality left her overloaded.

The only thing Desi could do was shut down. She let her eyes close, still clinging to Jarrod's hand and relishing the warmth his bulk brought her body beneath him.

Chapter Six

Desi.

"What?"

Get your freak on, did ya?

Desi froze in the middle of the bedroom. She'd thought it was Jarrod calling her, probably wanting to talk about last night. They hadn't said anything to one another afterward and Jarrod was big on talking. She'd had little time to go over it in her head, but what had happened between them was a significant turn of events for Desi. She'd never been meek in the bedroom, yet last night had proven to her that she wanted it, craved it...

Who knew Desi would like a good spanking?

Her head turned to look over her shoulder, preparing to have to yet again talk about her emotions, but it wasn't Jarrod. No one was there. Her eyes scanned the room and then, her hands immediately flew to her temples. The voice...

Yep, the voice. Okay, so now that you got your groove on, let's whack him and get the frig outta here.

"No," was her immediate response.

Don't tell me no. You and I, we don't have that kind of relationship. We have the kind of relationship where you do as you're told. Like, I'm the boss of you, ya know?

Sinking to the bed, Desi shook her head. As if shaking it would jar whatever was in it and make it go away. "No," she said again, with more confidence. "No, I won't."

Yeah, you will.

Growing a bigger set of balls by the nanosecond, Desi decided to dive into this madness and said, "Who are you? *Where* are you?"

The chuckle in her head bounced off the walls of her brain, echoing and leaving an eerie aftermath. *You know who I am, Desi. I'm your friend, your partner in crime, your accomplice in all things from the dark side.*

Oh, Desi thought wildly, that cleared *everything* up. "Why haven't I ever heard you before? What do you want from me?"

I dunno. Maybe it's because all of a sudden you've got Mr. Do-Good yakking in your ear. You used to just listen and perform like the trained seal you are. Nowadays, I really have to work to get your attention and I want what I've always wanted. To help you knock off anything and everything that gives you grief.

Help her? "I didn't know I needed help."

You'll always need me. Like it or not.

Okay, this was enough. The past few days had been a myriad of fucked-up-ness, a swirl of thoughts tearing her in a hundred different directions. She was filled with remorse, loathing, terror, caught between apologizing profusely for her past misdeeds and then, defying anyone to call her on them. "I don't need you. Whatever -- *whoever* you are! Leave me alone. Go hit someone else's brain up for space."

Aw, Des, you're just confused because your hormones are flipping out. Finish up with this sexual discovery baloney and then, kill Jarrod. You need to get the hell out of here and go get Claire for me.

Desi sprang from the bed and paced the floor. Again, she said, "No. I'm not killing anyone!" Her voice quavered and her hands clenched into fists.

Did a little spanking jar your common sense? No one defies me. No one.

The push of insanity gave her another shove toward the edge of this abyss, but she clung to the cliff. "No! I'm not killing anyone! I don't know what you want, but I won't do whatever it is. Oh, God! I'm talking to something I can't see. This is insane," she cried out to the empty bedroom, her pace more furious, her eyes wild with the unseen.

A sigh resounded in her head. *Yes, you will, Desi. You always do what I want and you'll do it again.*

"No!" she screamed. "No. You can't make me do it."

Oh, but I can, Desi, and if you don't, I will.

"Noooooooooooooooo," she roared. "I won't kill Jarrod or Claire or anyone anymore!"

If you don't, I will. If you don't, I will. If you don't, I will, the voice sing-songed, taunting her with its evil.

In the midst of her madness, a thought occurred to Desi. *If you can kill them, why haven't you?* "No, you can't!" she yelled with a wild cry. "If you didn't need me, you'd have killed them by now."

"Killed who?"

Desi whipped around, tears flooding her eyes, shaking with the phenomenon that was terrorizing her.

Jarrold stood by the door of the bedroom, his face hard and his lips compressed into a tight line. "Killed who, Desi?"

Wow, this was going to be tough to explain, huh? "Leave me alone, Jarrod," was her flippant response.

Jarrold crossed the room, his hazel eyes cold and unyielding, and grabbed her by the arm. "No. If you're talking murder again, there's no way I'm leaving you alone."

"I'm not talking murder, Jarrod!" she yelped, looking up at him and hating the anger she saw in his handsome face.

"Hmmm, that's not what I heard. I heard you say the same thing you said when I hauled your ass in from the woods. 'No, I won't,' but this time there was the word kill attached to it and I want to know what the hell you think you're up to?"

Desi brushed the wild nest of her hair from her face, trying to find some way to defend herself. "I'm not up to anything!"

"Okay, so who were you talking to?"

Oh, just this thing in my head. You know, like my imaginary friend? "I -- I --" She broke off mid-sentence to reach around her and rub her back. It ached as though someone had scraped it raw.

Jarrood flung her around and lifted her shirt. "What the fuck is going on?" he bellowed.

"I don't knoooooww!" Desi tore from his grasp and flew to the bathroom to find something to cool the raw, burning ache.

Jarrood pushed past her and wet a cloth under the faucet, lifting her shirt and pressing it gently to her flesh. His voice was tight when he spoke, "I can't help you if you don't talk to me. Something pretty screwed up is happening here. Tell me now, or I'll figure it out anyway. I did figure out it was you who was nailing Claire, didn't I?"

Had it been *her* nailing Claire all these centuries? Desi didn't know anymore. The one thing she did know was that this was proof she wasn't a loon. "I don't know, Jarrood. I don't know how to explain it without sounding like I need a head doctor," she gasped as he ministered to the wounds that had appeared out of nowhere. What was next? Was her head going to spin around on her neck? Spewing pea soup?

Jarrood sat her on the edge of the bathtub and looked down at her. "I thought you needed one before whatever this is started. It's no big surprise now," he attempted to joke.

Desi shook her head. "But before you just thought I was a bitch, Jarrood. I mean, I was a bitch -- am a bitch. Now, I don't know what I am anymore."

"Well, you can't be as bad as you'd like to think if you're not agreeable to more mayhem. So explain this thing on your back. What is it? Has it happened more than just once before?"

"No. It's never happened before the other night and now, today. But it does happen when..."

"When what?" Jarrood probed, stroking the top of her head.

When I hear dead people... "I know this will sound like I'm crazy and maybe that's what I am," she paused, taking a deep breath and then, throwing the words at him before she chickened out. "It only happens when I hear a voice in my head."

His eyes screamed skeptical, his words disbelieving. "A voice."

"Yes, Jarrod, a *voice*. A voice that tells me to do things I've apparently done before and it wants me to do again."

"A voice."

"What are you, deaf? Yes! A voice. A sinister, evil, horrifying voice that tells me it's always been with me and always will be and that I should kill you and then Claire!"

Jarrold sat on the toilet seat opposite her. "You know what's even crazier than that, Des?"

She didn't know what got crazier than hearing voices in your head. Levitation? "What?"

"I gotta believe you because I don't have any explanation for those marks on your back."

Relief washed over her and Desi had to chuckle at just how important it was to her that Jarrod believe her. "I don't know what's happening, Jarrod," she said with a sob.

"Your thoughts are a jumbled mess."

"Then stop playing in them, why don't you?" He was probing her, and whatever was in her head, toying with her last shred of sanity, wouldn't let him.

Cupping her chin, he said quietly, "I just want to help. Tell me what this voice says, besides telling you to kill me and Claire."

"It says all sorts of things, but mostly, it tells me it's in charge and I'll do whatever it tells me to. That I always have done what it tells me to."

"You know, I've always wondered this. When did you discover you had to have Zach? I never understood your attraction to him. He's not nearly aggressive enough for your personality, but then, maybe that's what you liked about him? That you could control him?"

Desi's stomach was queasy. Talking about Zach and what had happened, why it had happened, seemed like such a long time ago. "I can't remember when I discovered it. I don't even know why I was attracted to him now. He seems very far away. All of it seems very far away."

"So why'd ya try to kill Claire? Do you remember killing her century after century?"

Funny, Desi mused, there'd been a time when she would sit gleefully and go over every single moment invested in the effort to kill Claire, but now, she couldn't remember the details. It was as though she could remember the act, but none of the finer points. "I know this sounds completely made up, but I have no clue. I know I did it. I know I kept doing it in the hope Claire would never return, but I don't know why I did it." Even Claire's face was a distant sort of blur. "Look, I know I was angry and spiteful, but I can't even summon up the wherewithal to dredge that up. I don't feel angry anymore. Not over being here against my will and not over Claire having Zach. I feel fucked up and disoriented." And tired. She felt wearier than she'd ever felt before. It pervaded her bones and left her weak.

"Well, I guess it's time to find out then, don't you think?"

"Find out what?"

"Find out when this all began. The Zach obsession, killing Claire."

"And how do we do that?" Desi knew what was coming, but saying it out loud was something she couldn't do.

"We invite Zach and Claire to dinner."

Potluck, anyone?

Chapter Seven

Desi toyed with her auburn hair nervously, fluffing it and then running her fingers back through it again to smooth it out. Why couldn't she just hide in the bathroom?

Because she had to face whatever was happening to her, head on, and Zach and Claire were a part of that.

She'd searched every nook and cranny of her hatred to locate some for Claire, the old burning desire she'd had to see her rot in hell, but she just couldn't find it. Yet, the impending breaking of bread with the Kowalskis had her a nervous wreck.

The more time she spent pondering where her oomph had gone, the more she opened up to her vulnerabilities and she didn't like it much.

This was all part of redemption, right? It would give her a clean slate with which to write her lunatic musings.

"Desi! Claire and Zach are here," Jarrod yelled from the living room cheerfully.

Great, honey. I'll be right there. Lemme just clean off my AK-47 with Claire's name on it and we can snarf down some of that yummy pot roast before I whack her one for old time's sake.

Oh, God, had she knocked Claire off with an AK-47? No, that couldn't be. She'd drained her. That was it, yes. Her venom was the kiss of death to Claire when she was human.

Desi's stomach roiled. She couldn't do this. She didn't have to.

Oh, but she did if she hoped to thwart the voice in her head. First of all, he wasn't particularly friendly and to call him kinda freaky was using the word loosely.

Him. It dawned on Desi that she referred to this voice in her head as him. It did sound like a man. A man with a voice that oozed venomous wishes and wanted her to come along for a ride to evil.

Desi forced herself to leave the bathroom and then the bedroom, peeking around the corner to see her nemesis Claire and her own personal obsession from the past, Zachariah Kowalski.

Desi blanched.

"I really gotta give it to you, Claire," Jarrod said with a smile, his big arms enveloping her in a hug. "I didn't expect that you'd come and I wouldn't have blamed you if you hadn't."

Claire smiled and snuggled closer to Zach. "I'm a vampire now too. I can take care of myself. Desi can't hurt me and what you told us had me intrigued. The brain is a funny thing, Jarrod. Could be that Desi is having a nervous breakdown."

Thank you, Ms. Pathologist. Or was that forensic scientist? Desi couldn't remember what Claire'd been in this lifetime, other than it had to do with dealing with dead people.

"I, unlike my lovely wife, can't seem to forgive Desi, Jarrod. I know you think you've got her here and you're going to make the bad girl good, but I don't think that can happen in Desi's case. Making her humble with domestic chores won't change the color of the beast. She's a bitch on wheels and that isn't likely to change." Zach's jaw was set in stone and his handsome face hard. As Desi took in the large frame that was Zach, she noted that she didn't feel any attraction at all to him. He was an impersonal object in her mind. Just another man. How could it be that this was the man she'd so desperately wanted she'd been willing to murder his Life Mate? Where was the gnawing ache of need she knew she'd had for him, but couldn't seem to get a feel for now?

"I'm dying to hear what she has to say. I can't find any excuse, even a voice in her head, that makes up for keeping me from Claire."

This was going really well. Liver pate anyone? They were going to slaughter her and Desi could vaguely remember a time when she would have told them to bring it on, but now, she just wanted to crawl under a rock and be left alone.

"Look, Zach. You have every reason to hate her. She did some shitty things, but I'm telling you, there's a reason and having you here is a part of finding out what that reason is."

Zach ran a hand through his dark, shoulder length hair. "What is there to find, Jarrod? Desi killed Claire. She's a murderer."

Label, label, label, Desi silently mocked in her head.

"Zach, honey, stop," Claire cut his impending rant off. "I don't know that I can ever forgive her for keeping us apart, that's true. The last time I saw her, I wanted her dead, but then, she wanted me dead too and almost succeeded. That can't happen now. She can't kill me by the usual means because I can take her now. Whatever is happening to her, we're here to help *Jarrod*. Not Desi."

God, she felt like she'd been left out of the final picking for the soccer team.

Loser.

Jarrod smiled warmly at Claire. "Thanks, I appreciate the support."

Well, there was no time like the present to make new friends and influence people, was there? Desi took slow steps into the living room where they stood and cleared her throat. "I-I'm sorry I'm late," she stuttered.

Three heads in various shades of color whipped around and pierced Desi with their gazes. At least Claire wasn't in the fetal position, seeing Desi again after what she'd done.

"You? Sorry for anything? That'll be the day," Zach said, derision dripping from his words.

"Zach!" Claire admonished, but Desi cut her off.

"No, Claire. He's right. There isn't any reason Zach or even you should believe I'm sorry for anything." Wow. How odd that saying it out loud should feel so -- so cleansing and therapeutic. Crazy indeed, but there it was.

Suspicion was all over Zach's face and Desi saw Claire pinch his arm in the obvious effort to keep his yap shut. The arm she clung to while she gave Desi the look she'd known was inevitable. That look that no longer held as much fear as it once had --

or so she'd been told it had, but the look that said, "I don't think the mall is in our near future. However, I'll tolerate you as long as you keep a cool distance."

The silence filled the air, thick and pungent, stifling Desi and welling up in her throat. Did you just walk up to someone and say, "Hey, sorry I had a hit on you. Sucks to be me, huh?" No, apologies were never going to work here. Mere words didn't make up for trying to take someone's life.

Jarrold broke the silence first by saying, "Desi, come here. We're here to figure some stuff out and that's it, Zach. I'm not asking you all to be friends."

"Good," Zach snorted.

"C'mon, let's sit down," Claire said, motioning to the couch.

Desi moved with haste to take the chair by the fireplace. The bad girl, alone chair. She didn't want anyone to get cooties from sitting next to her.

Jarrold seated himself and Claire and Zach sat with him, albeit with stiff postures.

"Okay, so I need to ask you some things that I think may help me to figure out what's going on here," Jarrold said. "I know it might be uncomfortable for you, but just remember, I'm only asking because I have my suspicions about what went down with Desi and Claire."

Zach's mouth began to move, but Claire put her hand over it. "Quiet, blood sucker. Let Jarrold do what he needs to and you can bitch on the way home in the car."

Zach settled back and narrowed his eyes in Desi's direction, but he didn't say anything else.

Jarrold chuckled and it struck Desi then just how warm his laughter was. He was such an odd dichotomy of forceful and demanding, yet, good to the depths of his soul.

It couldn't be good for her to be thinking like that. Desi curled into the chair and shut up. It seemed any addition she might make would only throw some fuel on the fire.

Jarrold turned to Claire. "Claire? Do you remember Desi killing you? I know you've had some memories of the times you shared with Zach before. Have you ever had any memory of the actual murder itself?"

Claire visibly shuddered, but persevered like the trooper everyone said she was. "I really don't. Truthfully, I only know what you and Zach have relayed to me. The occasional memory that haunted me after I met Zach again in this life is all that I can recall and it never had to do with the murders. It usually was of us together in whatever century I was in. Sometimes I'd see us riding horses, sometimes waltzing."

Oh. Darn. No details. Desi wanted to be sorry for it, but she just couldn't work up any regret. Somehow, going over the details of what she'd done just didn't seem like as much fun as say, having your mouth washed out with garlic or drinking Holy Water.

"Can't Desi tell you what happened? I don't wanna throw stones at you, Desi, but you were the one who did it." Claire looked to Desi who remained properly cringing in her chair.

"Desi?" Jarrod looked at her with eyes that encouraged her to share. Warm, honest, genuine eyes.

Okay, now that was really enough of that. When had she ever felt anything warm? Jarrod's gaze probed hers and she knew she had to answer. "I don't remember and I don't know why that is now, but I really *can't* remember." That was the plain truth of it. Desi had wracked her brain and had come up dry since Jarrod suggested they have this powwow.

Zach exploded out of his place on the couch. His face was filled with fury and his fangs gleamed at her from across the room. "Oh, c'mon, Desi! Do you expect us to believe this is like some kind of amnesia? Or are you shooting for the Two Faces of Eve syndrome? You don't really expect us to believe that you can't remember killing Claire, do you? What kind of a moron wrapped in stupid do you take me for? You did it over and over. Ten times, Desi. Ten!" Zach held up his hands to memorialize the number ten, shoving them in Desi's face. "More times than I care to count and now, suddenly, you draw a blank? I bet you haven't forgotten all your pretty, expensive clothes or your hot sports car, have you?"

God, what a shitty thing to remind her of now. Her car was crazy sexy and she missed the hell out of it. No, strangely, she hadn't forgotten her *possessions*, just all the horrible acts of violence that brought her them.

Ten times... she'd killed someone ten times. The same someone over and over. Jesus effin'. Desi's gut was in a knot, making her pull her legs in closer to her body and rest her head on her arms.

"Zach!" Claire shouted. "Stop it, please. I'd like to know some of this too. It's as much about me as it is Desi. So sit down and put a sock in it already, big mouth!" Claire tugged on his hand and pulled him back to the couch. Zach glared at her and then, once again, at Desi. "Now, I'd like to know what you hoped to gain by winning Zach. Am I wrong in saying that your Life Mate is your Life Mate and you just sort of know something that intimate? If you knew he wasn't your Life Mate, what was the point?"

Oh, I dunno... I just wanted him and took it upon myself to determine that the fates were wrong about you because after all, Desi knows best. Desi's voice was scratchy when she answered. "I think, at the time, I thought I knew better. I couldn't possibly see how the fates could want a human to be with Zach and it made sense that our clans would merge as a result."

"But to what end, Desi? What would the Kowalskis and the Smitrovitches gain by merging our families? You make it sound as if we're some kind of dynasty, for Christ's sake," Zach growled.

Desi shook her head, lifting it to meet Zach's eyes. "I don't know. I don't remember my motivations." It was as honest as she could get and she hoped her eyes conveyed that when she took Zach's hate-filled glance head on.

"I find it all very convenient that you don't know, Desi. You can't remember," he scoffed, his voice mocking in tone. "You're starting to sound like a real politician."

"You know, Zach, why don't you just give her a chance and stop being such a shit. I'm trying to work this out, keeping in mind that we're friends. I've put myself in your place and if I were you, Zach, I'd feel the same way about Desi and what she did. I *have* felt the same way about Desi. But could you give me a little credit for having half a

brain? I wouldn't have asked you here and put the two of you in a situation that was even a little uncomfortable if I didn't feel in my gut something else was happening. In fact, something pretty freaky did happen and we have no explanation. It made me rethink this whole situation. It put a brand new spin on things," Jarrod intervened with that ever hopeful Rebecca from Sunnybrook Farm attitude.

Desi rolled her eyes. Ever the optimist.

"Really?" Zach asked, his tenor rampant with obvious doubt. "What could possibly have happened that would make me believe Desi was anything but a jealous, bitter bitch?"

Ouch. All this name calling was just not nice.

"We have physical proof that something is happening to Desi, Zach. Her back was covered in what looked like claw marks. It happened right in front of me and it was during the course of our conversation about this voice in her head. I'm telling you, man," Jarrod spoke with vehemence, "something pretty bizarre is happening."

If Desi had a heart, she would have felt that to the depths of it. It made her eyes sting and that was just not something Desi did.

Cry.

Over anyone or anything. So why did she feel like doing just that?

"Well, Jarrod, my friend, I think Desi's managed to do the same thing to you that she did to me. Fooled me. Again and again while she stabbed me in the back by taking Claire. I wouldn't put it past the lying bitch to find a way to make those marks happen. I can't explain how, but it sure wouldn't surprise me," Zach hissed at his long-time friend.

Jarrold's face conveyed his anger, a fury that was simmering just below the surface and Desi couldn't stand it anymore. If she ruined one more friendship with the mess she'd made, one more long-term relationship, she'd never forgive herself.

When Desi spoke, it was with quiet, hushed tones. Her throat was tight and her head pounded, but she stood up and faced each of them. "I'm sorry Jarrod brought you here tonight. It was done with good intentions, but it's obvious there's too much water

under the bridge for this to get us anywhere. I think I'd better let Jarrod talk to you and I'll hit the bricks."

Jarrold rose to prevent her. Desi knew he was going to tell her she was running away before he spoke the words. So she stopped him before he could. "I'm not running away, Jarrod. I'm not," she said with a conviction felt deeply. "I'd stay and listen if I thought we could gain anything from it. I can't remember what happened with Claire and I, and neither can Claire. So how will this benefit us?" she asked.

When Jarrod didn't answer, she continued making her point. "Zach and Claire think I'm lying and they have every right to. Maybe I am. I don't know. I only know that since I've been here, my head has been in a very different place than it was when I was back at home. I know the things I've done, but I can't remember them in detail. I know what I hear in my head and what happened to my back. Some might call that crazy, but then, some people call the idea that vampires really exist crazy. Yet, we do. So maybe the possibility of what I'm saying is true or maybe, you all think I'm just making it up. That's understandable too. Either way, I'll deal with it. Jarrod has no obligation to me and you two are safe as long as I'm here in this primitive dive. If whatever is supposed to happen here doesn't and I can't get my family to accept me back into the clan again, then I'll figure something else out."

Desi fought the impulse to run from the room. Certainly the old Desi wouldn't do that, but this new, voice hearing one sure the fuck wanted to and she wanted to do it as fast as her legs could carry her. Yet, from whatever place this was coming from, she refused to show her cowardice. Her last shred of dignity was at stake and she planned to cling to it like the only granola bar on *Survivor*.

Instead, she paused a moment and let the silence of their shock ring in her ears, took in the disbelief of their gazes before taking sure, steady steps across the room to make her way back to the bedroom.

Once there, she flung herself on the bed. Tears stung her eyes and Desi had to think, how odd that she should be crying over something as foolish as Claire and Zach's disbelief. When had she ever given a shit about who believed her?

Never.

Because she'd never told the truth anyway. The milk she spilled was often purposely.

Desi, Desi, Desi. You're hopeless. There is no escape from me. I've ruined you for anyone but me and I'll keep ruining you until I have what I want. Do you know what I want?

"What?" she yelled desperately into the pillow. "What do you want from me?"

I want Claire dead.

* * *

"Desi? You okay?" Jarrod nudged her with a gentle hand and climbed into the bed beside her.

From the haze of sleep, Desi struggled to open her eyes and acknowledge just what okay meant, but she was too tired. "Vampire, I'm sleeping. Go cook something and let me be. I think the Desi bashing is officially on hiatus for this evening."

Hooking an arm around her waist, Jarrod molded her to him and sighed. "I didn't mean for it to be an attack on you, Desi, but we have to find an answer to this. If it means that you're uncomfortable, I'm sorry, but it's what needs to be done. You did wreak havoc. Sometimes, the price you pay on the road to redemption is a little discomfort."

Yes, she had wreaked havoc. Yes, it had been uncomfortable to hear about it, but Jarrod had tried to reason with them. For that, she was grateful. He'd taken up for her. When she was with Jarrod, the voice didn't trouble her and she was grateful for that too. Desi sighed, too, at the comfort Jarrod's arms brought and the reminder of her persecution. "I know why you did it and I want you to know, I appreciate everything you tried to accomplish tonight," she said from beneath the arm she'd slung over her eyes. "I realize that as a result, Zach may be angry with you. He's just reacting right now. I'd imagine he feels like you're taking sides with someone who doesn't deserve the kind of support you've given. It's a betrayal in his mind. I'm sorry if I caused more grief for you."

Jarrood kissed her ear with tender lips, nuzzling her neck. "Wow, look at you, Desdemona Smitrovitch. You're reasoning and taking accountability for your past misdeeds. Hell, you even said you were sorry. Gimme a kiss, Smitrovitch. This is cause for celebration."

Desi gave him the corner of her mouth and then, turned quickly back to the spoon position they'd begun in so he couldn't see her face, beaming with ridiculous pleasure. Despite the fact that things hadn't gone terribly well, Jarrood had stood up for her. He believed in what she'd told him -- or at least, he wanted to. It warmed her and Desi wasn't accustomed to seeking anyone's approval and certainly not reveling in it.

Christ.

Who the hell was she?

Chapter Eight

"Desi? Desi! Wake up!" Jarrod's lush tones, spiked with uncertainty, woke her from her slumber.

"Don't you have weenies in a blanket to make? Some butter to churn?" Desi grumbled from under the pillow.

Jarrold grabbed her by her shoulders and hauled her upward to face him. "Who is Adzeekh?"

"I don't know? Some exotic dish Emeril whipped up on that cooking show of his?" she offered with a yawn.

"Desi, don't fuck with me! You were calling this Adzeekh's name in your sleep."

Lord. Was it possible to take a break from the wing nut thing today? "I don't know, Jarrod. I was asleep. Maybe it's my imaginary friend and he wants to come out and play with you. Hey, I have an idea. Why don't you invite the voice in my head to bake bread with you? Now, go away and let me sleep." Pulling away from Jarrod, she stuffed the pillow under her chin and closed her eyes again. Fuck her therapy session today. She was fried.

"Get up, Desi," Jarrod growled, dragging her pillow from her and pulling her on the sheet toward him. "Who is Adzeekh?"

Some guy she'd boinked from a foreign country? "I don't know who Adzeekh is!" she bellowed into his face that now hovered in front of hers, hard, chiseled with his jaw like an iron clamp. Yet, saying the name out loud made her clamp her hand over her mouth and her eyes grow wide. It was so familiar rolling off her tongue that she almost wished she could take it back.

"You do know who it is! Was it someone you screwed and threw away like yesterday's paper, Desi?" Jarrod accused with a roar back at her, ripping the pillow out

from under her and rolling her over to straddle her body. He pulled her hands above her head and stared down at her, his hazel eyes cold as icebergs. "Answer the question and answer it *now*."

Ya know, right here would be where I've had enough. It wasn't enough that she'd been forced into Martha Stewart servitude, dragged out to the cabin that Bob Vila built in the hills of Bum-fucking Egypt, dragged over the mud time and again for her misdeeds, but now, after all this, he was going to accuse her of keeping some guy's name from him? Oh, jealousy was an ugly emotion on Jarrod.

Her anger sent the words flying from her mouth before she could stop them. "Are you on crack? Why would I bother to hide anything from you now? Hellloooo? Wasn't it just me who sat through an interrogation *Dragnet* would be proud of? Isn't it me who's in this Lincoln Log cabin, letting you whip me back into shape, literally and figuratively? Why would I hide something from you now? If I say I don't know who Adzeekh is, then I don't know who the fuck-he-is!" Again, the name rolling off her tongue was familiar. Why, why, why wouldn't this stop? Voices in her head, welts on her back, cooking, cleaning, sticky emotions, floggers. Cheerist she was going to explode from all of this feeling bullshit!

Jarrod pushed himself off the bed. He stood in front of her with nothing on but a pair of boxer briefs. "You know what, you're right, Desi," he said through stiff lips. "I think we could both use a break. I have some errands to run. You stay put and I mean it. Don't move a muscle." As suddenly as his anger had begun, it turned to agreement now. Or was that defeat?

Jarrod turned his back to her and grabbed his clothes from the floor, leaving her with a heaving chest and half a mind to throw something at him. But she was too tired to fight. All she wanted to do was crawl back under the sheets and go back to sleep.

Like she could move a muscle when she was so tired. The niggle of worry that Jarrod was angry was pushed aside in favor of the abyss sleep brought. Desi pulled the rumpled sheets over her and covered her eyes once again with the pillow, falling back into the hard covered shell slumber brought.

Her last thought was *fuck it*.

* * *

Jarrood drove to his grandfather Henry's house in deep thought. Adzeekh. Who the fuck was Adzeekh and why hadn't he been able to drive the thought of any other man from Desi's dreams? Jarrood's grip tightened on the steering wheel and he clenched his teeth. His jaw ached from all the teeth clenching he was doing lately.

How could this maddening and infuriating woman be his Life Mate?

Jarrood was still coming to terms with it. He warred with what he knew in his gut was fate and what he knew in his head was utter insanity. Yet, she was in his every thought since they'd been together. As difficult and trying as Desi was, he couldn't see anyone but her anymore.

He pulled into his grandfather's estate and before getting out of his car, he let his head rest on the steering wheel.

Desdemona Smitrovitch would drive him bat-shit if he didn't figure her out. He needed to talk to the only person he had left in his family that could help him find his way through this thing called Desi.

Long strides took him to the old, oak double doors of his grandfather's home. Jarrood smiled when Jerauld, Henry's butler, opened the door. "Good to see ya, J. Grandpa around?"

Jerauld smiled and led him to the sitting room via the wide expanse of marble tiled entryway.

"Jarrod!" His grandfather popped up, spry as always, from his winged back chair and gave Jarrood an affectionate hug. "How are you? How's that awful Desi? Are you getting anywhere? If I could, you know I'd find a way to take her off of your hands, but fate is fate. What a lot in life having her for a Life Mate, eh?" his grandfather asked.

Hazel eyes much like Jarrood's questioned him. Grandfather had aged with slow progression over the past years; some might mistake him for Jarrood's father unless told otherwise. Jarrood and Henry had shared a bond from birth. When Jarrood's parents were

killed, his grandfather had raised him. "Yeah, funny thing, Grandpa. I need someone to talk to about her."

"Are you hoping to summon the Life Mate council for a rebate?" Henry joked.

Jarrold slapped his grandfather on the back. "No, believe it or not, I don't want that. What I do want is someone to talk to, Grandpa. Desi is a handful, but she's got some things going on that might explain what she's done." Jarrold shook his head. There was no point in telling his grandfather about the voice. No one was falling for that. Hell, he might not have if it weren't for Desi's back, clawed and raw.

"So sit with me and talk to me, boy. It's been a long while since we've done that." Henry's warm smile drew Jarrold into the embrace of family and it felt good to do something as mundane as sitting with his grandfather. "Talk to me, Jarrold. What troubles you? Well, besides the fact that you have some handful in Desi."

The name slipped from Jarrold's lips before he could stop it. Thick with jealous intonation, ripe with the fury that someone else was on Desi's mind. "Adzeekh," he said. "His name is Adzeekh."

Apparently, no explanation was needed. Henry's face turned paler than his usual milky white. "Oh, God," was all he said.

* * *

Up and at 'em, Desi. Your time here is done.

Desi woke with a jolt at the voice in her head, reaching for the pillow that had brought her so much comfort.

What she found instead was nothing but air.

Her eyes flew open, but she couldn't move. From her peripheral vision, she saw nothing but the top of the bedroom window she'd so longingly hoped to escape from not so long ago. A slight breeze wafted under her back.

"What the hell?" she tried to yell, but it came out a mere, hoarse whisper.

It's time for you to die, vampire. I'm tired of playing with you. You've become too hard to control. I'll miss you. We've been so close these last centuries. Who will I shop with now? the voice asked wistfully. *No one wears a new Armani dress like you do.*

Desi struggled to move, each muscle thwarted by whatever held her in a vice-like grip. Sweat dripped from her brow and into her eyes, but she couldn't wipe it away.

Jesus Christ in a mini skirt, she was floating.

Levitating.

Her head was fuzzy, as though it were stuffed with cotton, but she'd be fucked if whatever this was would take her wherever it wanted to take her without a fight or at least an explanation.

Gathering the last of her iron will, Desi spoke, "So, tell me. What's this been about and why am I doing *The Exorcist* thing here? Is this the best you could come up with?"

Quiet, Desi! I'm sucking your soul out of you. I can't think with all of this chatter.

Her soul? Her soul? Hookay, this needed some splainin'. All of her energy focused on forming a sentence. The muscles in her face spasmed, but she'd be damned if she wouldn't find out what the frig this was. *Who* this was before she kicked it. "Who are you? Why are you doing this?"

The sigh in her head was longwinded and rasped like fingers on a chalkboard with every cell it bounced off in her brain. *I'm Adzeekh Ladislav and I'm hurt you don't remember me. This Jarrod is a pain in the ass. When he's around, it's like I don't exist and I can't figure it. I really thought I was stronger, but not so, I guess. Look, Desi, here's the thing. You're my lifeline. My anchor to this world and I don't want to go to the Land of the Undead, ya feel me here? All these years I've possessed you, if you will. Think Linda Blair fetish. Anyway, you're my link to the living, but I gotta cut ya loose because I think I've found a way around this.*

Wasn't Linda Blair possessed? *Possessed?* She was fucking *possessed*? Of all the God damned bullshit. She'd been persecuted to the high heavens by her clan. Accused of murder and it was because she was *possessed*? "All this time, all that murder and it wasn't really me?" she yelped with indignation.

Nah. I made you do it. I'm not quite the devil, but if I could figure out how to waste his ass, I'd do that too.

Desi was too shocked -- too relieved -- too many things to know what to say. To find that she hadn't been responsible, not of mind or body, for what was done to Claire would have been euphoric, if not for the levitation thing. This was, indeed, a problem. She had to gather some mettle here. She had to tell Jarrod.

She had to get the fuck off the ceiling. "You killed Claire?"

Well, yeah. She's always been my problem. Zachariah Kowalski will take his rightful place as head of the Kowalski clan, and he and that whiny "oh, you're so mean to me" Claire are going to spawn a child. A child that will one day fuck up all of my plans for omnipotence.

Zach and Claire were going to have a child? Oh, my God. Calm, she must remain calm. Or as calm as you could be when freakin' floating. "So you killed her to prevent that? What do the Kowalskis have to do with you? You said you were a Ladislav. That's Romanian, isn't it? Not Polish."

I killed her and kept killing her to prevent Zach from turning her, thus procreating the eventual leader of vampires as we know them. I thought if she were a vampire my days would end. But I was oh, so wrong. She kept showing up and fucking it all up for me. Know why that is? Because she was human. A human can reincarnate again and again. A vampire? Not so much. When we go, we go big, baby, and we don't come back. I should have let Zach have her long ago and then killed her. Oh, and my last name may have changed, but I am a Kowalski, by some odd turn of boffing events. It's a long explanation, but the short of it is, my mother was a real Naughty Nellie.

Desi was weary, sleep threatening to take over. It clawed at her mind, drove her to do as it bid, but she fought it with every last ounce of energy she could summon. After all this, her entire life being a lie, she was not going down without a blaze of glory and she wasn't going until Jarrod knew he'd been right. "I don't get it. What can killing Claire do for you? There's still Zach..."

Yes, there is Zach, but not for long. At least not the Zach that everyone knows. Killing Claire means no baby. Dead Claire equals a very sad Zach. A sad Zach equals a weak Zach -- a

Zach who can easily be possessed by the evil that is me. You see where I'm going here? If I possess Zach, I can take over the clan and no one will have any say in it. Then, we can begin to bring back the days of old. You know, the ones where vampires behaved like vampires, not some cheesy human rip-offs? We'll rule, humans will drool. Got me?

Did this mean she was weak? Desi was a little pissed off about that. The very idea that weakness had to do with possession was irksome. "How long have you been doing the possession thing with me?"

Since you were very little, Desi. It's been tough to stick it out, but eventually, I was too strong for you and I won. Yay me. Now, I gotta do my thing before that pussy of a vampire shows up. Q and A is officially over and so are you.

"Wait! You owe me more than this!" Desi was grappling now, with a voice in her head for God's sake. Maybe she was crazy and this was all something she was making up in her twisted mind to justify her wrongdoing?

Um, Desi? Think floating. You're currently suspended above the bed. Now, I'd agree with you on the crazy thing if it weren't for that little factoid. You never could float. Fly, yes. Float without shifting into a bat, no. And floating sure would have come in handy a time or two in the past. So I gotta go with not crazy here, her conscience, weak and far underused, called to her with reason.

The voice of reason.

And where the hell had her conscience been for all these centuries? She could have used some help here.

Okay, no crazy. Hellifino. She wasn't crazy. After all this time... and then, a thought occurred to her. What would happen if Jarrod showed up? "What will happen if the pussy vampire shows up?" Desi asked, motionless and weaker by the second.

He can eliminate me and that's why I have to eliminate you, before he gets back. You called my name out last night, Desi. I mean, thanks, it was flattering, but I really didn't need Jarrod to know that detail. Now that I've been identified, Jarrod has the power to ruin centuries' worth of work and I can't have that.

“Ho-how can he eliminate you?” she squeaked on her last leg of effort. Her vocal cords felt like someone had yanked them and each word was sucking up her last shred of power.

Again, the voice sighed. This time with exasperation. *I guess it can't hurt you to know. Jarrod is a descendant of a long line of warrior vampires who took out those of us fighting the cause. It's a whole good versus evil thing. We wanted to continue to terrorize humans, Jarrod's people wanted to blend or some such politically correct bullshit. But they didn't take all of us out. I managed to hover between life and death. Until I had a body, I had no recourse, but I found a nice new one to inhabit so I can ditch you. She's lovely, really, just like you are, er, were... She's going to kill Claire for me. Anyway, Jarrod has the power to fuck me up. That's why his gut tells him you're not so bad after all, Desi. Turns out you're a good egg.*

Oh, Jesus. Desi's mind raced down the corridors of her confusion. He was going to ruin someone else's life! No, no, no! Desi couldn't let this happen. He'd kill Claire. Tears sprang from her eyes. “What about Jarrod? If he can stop you now, won't he do that again?”

He'll try, but I'll kill him too if I have to. Actually, I'll get my new girl to do it. She'll woo him after your death and he'll fall head over heels and then, she'll drain him. I've been around longer than Jarrod. I've had lots of time to think this over. Age really does have its advantages. It doesn't just mean I get a discount on breakfast at the I-Hop anymore.

Kill Jarrod. No! her head screamed. No, she would rather be dead than see Jarrod killed. This Adzeekh was going to drain her and kill Jarrod and wait one flippin' second... he was going to hook Jarrod up with some new chick? Oh, no. Not on her watch! Speaking of her man, where the hell *was* he? She could use a little support.

“I swear, I'll come back,” she threatened with a hiss. “I'll fucking hunt you down from wherever it is I go to and find you!”

Pain, in flashes of white hot, searing agony, slammed into her, tearing her skin, splitting it apart, but she fought the clawing misery it created. “Do you hear me, Adzeekh?” she sneered his name, screaming it with the microcosm of voice she had left. “I won't let you have Jarrod or Claire or some poor, helpless girl. I'll find you wherever

you are and kill you!" Her body was on fire, tearing and leaving gashes on her skin. The wounds opened and when the air hit them, she clenched her jaw so tight, her teeth threatened to crumble.

"Adzeekh!" a voice thundered.

Desi's body dropped like a sack of potatoes to the floor upon the calling of Adzeekh's name. She hit it hard, with a bone crunching thunk and without the time to brace herself. The pain of her torn flesh kept her immobile, but her ears heard the shuffle of footsteps and a soft hand wiped the sweat from her eyes.

"Adzeekh, I'll see you in eternal hell before I'll let you hurt her!"

Jarrold, oh, my God, it was Jarrold's voice! Wait, no, he'd kill Jarrold. Desi couldn't let that happen. Shoving the hand that touched her forehead away, Desi rolled to her side. Ignoring the protest of her wounds, she crawled on her side to the sound of Jarrold's voice. Her fingernails dug into the wood of the cabin floor, pulling her until she saw Jarrold's feet. "No! He'll kill you," she sobbed with desperation and fear. "Stop, Jarrold, stop! He'll kill you! Let him take me. Let him take meeee!"

Strong hands again tugged at her, dragging her weak body to them, but Desi fought, clawing at the hands that held her, fighting to keep from giving into the unbearable pain. She saw her flesh hang from her hands, but she didn't care. Nothing would stop her from getting to Jarrold, from stopping this horror. "Noooooooooooooooooooo," she screamed raggedly. "I won't let him hurt you!"

"Desdemona, stop it now!"

Zach. It was Zach. In her terror she was able to wonder, why the fuck was Zach here?

"Stop fighting me, Desi. You're hurt and you'll only make it worse." His words were short, harsh commands and his hands continually pulled her away from her mission.

"Give her to me, Zach. Help Jarrold," a female voice ordered with a curt yell.

Claire? Okay, now Desi *knew* she was crazy. Claire and Zach were here? Helping her? How much fruitier did it get than that?

Claire lifted Desi with the strength only a vampire possessed, inching her way into the bathroom, slamming the door with a foot and holding Desi close, shielding her from the ruckus outside the door. Each crash of furniture, each howl of an eerie, high pitched screech left Desi bereft, cringing against the one woman she'd wanted dead.

Claire rocked her and Desi found she couldn't stop the tears from flowing. Unmindful of the pain that sliced into her body, Desi cried. She couldn't help but burrow deeper against the comfort Claire's shoulder brought while she sobbed into it, repeating over and over, "No, please, pleeease, let him take me..."

Chapter Nine

"Hey, Smitrovitch, how ya feelin'?"

Desi smiled at Jarrod while he crossed the floor of her living room. He was so yummy, he hurt her eyes. His large frame captivated her senses; his smell drove her nostrils to flare in euphoria. "I'm great today."

Pulling her to him, he caressed her spine with a large hand. "You've healed nicely. It's been a long road, Desi, but you did it."

"It took a lot longer than I thought it would, but if not for you, I wouldn't have been around to heal."

Jarrood kissed the tip of her nose. "Yeah, I'm a real hero, honey, and don't you forget it."

No, Desi would never forget it. Not now, not in any century to come. Jarrod had learned the awful truth from his grandfather about Adzeekh Ladislav. His legacy of terror and Jarrod's ancestors' bloody battle to thwart it. Jarrod had summoned Claire and Zach to help him. According to Jarrod's grandfather -- who she had tea with once a week these days -- once they'd heard that Adzeekh had possessed Desi, they wasted no time in offering help.

Desi would always be grateful to Claire, who held her through the worst of the war Jarrod and Zach had waged with Adzeekh. They'd struck up a friendship of sorts, she and Claire, tentative, but worthy of allowing it to grow.

Desi ran a hand over Jarrod's face with loving tenderness. The small scar on his forehead still hadn't completely disappeared.

Jarrood hadn't left the battle in the cabin without his own scars, both physical, which of course had mostly healed, and mental.

Desi tugged Jarrod's shirt and looked up at him. "You are my hero. I mean, really, only you could turn an evil demon into a puff of smoke. It's all that do-gooder crap." Desi teased Jarrod often in the months since they'd left the cabin that he was too good for her. He had slayed the dragon that had ruled her life with such evil for so long.

Since they'd left, Jarrod had taken a different path to woo her. While she healed, he'd brought her flowers and candy and all of the typical romantic gestures she'd once thought were pathetic and now gave her warm fuzzies.

It had taken time to come to this new crossroads. To come to the point where she was able to accept what had happened and let go of the things that haunted her past, but she'd done it. Desi knew she wasn't responsible, but it had been her hands that had taken Claire's lives. Now, that thought was incomprehensible to her. Her whole world had changed so drastically that it was a learning process. Thinking for herself. Making choices that she wanted to make instead of choices that were made for her and without her consent.

Desi was no longer even remotely who she once had been and thus, her feelings for Jarrod had changed. They'd evolved, deepened without the constant struggle her mind had been in and she'd worried that now that she was this brand new turned over leaf, he wouldn't find her quite as exciting as the challenge she'd once been.

However, Jarrod came to see her every day and with each day that passed, she fell more deeply in love and she knew Jarrod had to.

With the *real* Desi.

The Desi who did have a good soul. The Desi who liked animals and children. The Desi who'd found she had a knack for gardening, but still hated cooking.

With unclouded judgment as her guide, Desi knew now Jarrod was her Life Mate. He'd known all along too, but she couldn't really blame him for not wanting to acknowledge it.

Who wanted Linda Blair for a Life Mate?

Yet, he hadn't expressed his desire to consummate their Life Mate status with the ritual of blood sharing. If it was because he was afraid it was more than she could handle because she'd taken so long to heal, Desi didn't know, but she didn't care anymore. Her desire for Jarrod hadn't waned one iota since their time in the cabin.

Desi decided it was time to take the matter of their final mating in hand. Jarrod moved at a snail's pace during her recovery and there had been times when she'd wanted to beg him to take her.

She was strong. She was ready.

Hell, she was horny.

"It's true," Desi said again. "You're my hero. So, I think we should celebrate." She wound her arms around his neck and settled in closer to him, hoping the cute skirt she'd found in the back of her closet would tempt him.

"What do you want to do to celebrate? You wanna cook?"

Desi threw her head back and laughed. "No, vampire. That part of the old Desi still rings true. She still hates to cook. However, the new Desi has other things she'd like to utilize in celebration." Pressing herself to him, Desi sucked in her gut at the rigid bulge of his cock, rubbing tantalizingly against the cleft between her legs.

"So, a chaste kiss isn't going to cut it, huh?"

"No, Jarrod. No more chaste kisses. I say we go all the way." Lifting her eyebrows, Desi wiggled them at him.

"But what if you can't take the mating ritual, Desi? You seem strong, but I could never allow you to fall back in your progress. Not when you've come so far."

Desi saw the concern on his face and it touched her, but she wasn't taking no for an answer today. Placing his hand on her breast, Desi said, "I'm fine now. See? I'm healed in body and getting really close in mind. So if you don't mind banging a still kind of crazy, non-possessed Life Mate, I say we hit the sheets, stud." Not bothering to hear his protests about her health, Desi grabbed his hand and yanked him into her new bedroom.

Her modest bedroom in her brand new, post terror wreaking Desi apartment.

Jumping on the bed, Desi giggled. "C'mere, vampire. Our consummation is long overdue."

Jarrood's hazel eyes glittered with wicked glee. He landed on the bed with a whoosh next to her. "I'm all yours," he whispered, capturing her lips and slipping his tongue into her mouth.

Desi arched into his strength, running her hands over the body she'd lusted over for months. The smooth planes of his thighs, the hard sinew of his back, the sigh he drew from her, were all things she'd waited what seemed a lifetime for.

All at once, they couldn't get close enough. Even the prospect of shedding clothes didn't keep them from driving their needy bodies against one another. They struggled with the urgency to mate, just long enough to remove their clothing, and when finally naked, Desi sighed at the cool of Jarrood's skin near her own. Her senses roared to life, singing, ablaze with sensation felt tenfold because she was a vampire.

Jarrood's breath was heavy as he wound his fingers in her long tresses, pulling her head back so he could taste the flesh of her neck.

Her cunt throbbed for relief, begged for his touch and Jarrood wasted no time in offering it to her. With the tongue of a master, he laved her skin, nipping at it, tugging on a nipple to swirl his mouth over it, only to leave it and caress her body with his mouth. Over her hips, grazing her abdomen, Jarrood left a wet trail of kisses before delving into her pussy with a swift tongue that struck out in small flicks over her clit.

Desire, fresh, alive, sweet and sharp welled up and left Desi weak from wanting. She clung to Jarrood's shortly cropped hair, wrapping her thighs around his neck, lifting her hips to get closer to the mouth that brought her undefined pleasure.

The rapid thrust of Jarrood's tongue pushed Desi over the edge of orgasm with such haste, she cried out, digging her fingers into Jarrood's scalp. It torpedoed through her loins, the sweet, hot release of her juices and Jarrood finished her by driving his tongue into her passage, fucking her with the rough silk of it.

Her hands reached for his shoulders, dragging his heavy body upward to lay over hers.

"I have to take you, Desi. Now. I need you *now*." His words were short, crisp and demanding as he positioned himself between her legs and let his cock, hard and thick, slip through the folds of her wet cunt.

Desi heard his demand; she yielded to it, welcomed it by jamming a hand between them and stroking his shaft with frenzied passes.

Jarrold drove into it. Holding her wrist, he yanked it away and drew it up over her head.

Squirming beneath him, she relished the possession Jarrod took of her body. The total knowledge that he was in charge left Desi aglow.

His entrance was painstakingly slow and scintillatingly frustrating. His body let Desi know he'd take her at his own pace. The first thrust of his cock was forceful, jamming her upward, but Desi clung to his hands, determined to find an end to this clawing need.

"Christ, I've waited forever for this, Desi," he murmured from above and it made Desi smile. There was no denying the bond they shared. Now it would be sealed with their mating. The tension in his sculpted body was palpable and ready to snap.

Hiking her legs up around his waist, Desi ground her hips back at Jarrod, tempting him, teasing him, driving him to drink from her.

It was his inevitable undoing. His growl of satisfaction told her that, along with the drive of his cock, long and thick, taking her, owning her, making her completely his.

They locked together, hips sealed with the perspiration of their combined heat, bellies clinched in a dance as old as time. Desi's cunt contracted around the hard length, milking it, swallowing it until Jarrod let her hands free and bent to her neck.

Wrapping her arms around his neck in a tight embrace, Desi let the sharp sting of his fangs carry her to orgasm. It screamed through her while Jarrod drank from her flesh. Her hands clawed at his back as the incessant movement of his hips drove her to the place that she'd longed for.

The place that meant she was Jarrod's for eternity.

Jarrold tore his mouth from her neck, his fangs gleaming in the moonlight that streamed from the bedroom window, and jerked within her. He rocked against her, driving one last frenzied thrust of his cock before spilling his seed.

His silhouette was hard planes and rigid muscle against the backdrop of light and Desi smoothed her hands over him to soothe the strain of his release.

The culmination of their finally mating left them both weak. Jarrold's arms shook, his muscles quaking when he collapsed on top of her.

Desi burrowed beneath him, savoring this new energy that coursed through her body. The silence between them was one of peace and an end to the tumultuous beginnings of their sometimes volatile relationship. "Wow, honey. You're a real stud," Desi joked. "Had I known you were that good in bed, I'd have wooed you into my web muuuuch sooner."

Jarrold's laughter shook his hard length. "It's been a long time, Desi. I waited a long time for this. I told you once, when I took you, I'd make love to you and it would be because you were mine."

Desi stretched beneath him with satisfaction. "Yeah, I remember. So now I'm yours. Lucky you, huh?"

"If you could only cook... you'd be the perfect woman," he lamented.

"So what you're saying is, you object to a perfectly good, albeit once possessed woman who doesn't cook? I have other talents, you know."

He smiled against her cheek. "You know, Desi, I never did tell you how incredible you were that day. You fought like a wild woman. Torn to shreds, kicking and screaming, you kept going. I don't need a woman who can cook if she can fight like Mike Tyson."

Desi would never forget the desperation that drove her that day, not for as many centuries as she was granted. "Well, all of that bitch on wheels attitude had to go someplace, right?"

"You shrug it off, honey, but you came full circle and it wasn't even your fault you ended up where you did. You're an amazing woman, Desdemona Smitrovitch..."

Desi pinched the cheek of his sculpted ass. "And you love me. Don't stop now, vampire, you were just getting started."

Rolling her over, he draped her across his chest and laughed. "Yeah, yeah. I love you. The Desi I've gotten to know during your recuperation is sorta okay."

Desi ran a finger over the hard slope of his cheek and chuckled. "I know you do. I knew it from the first box of candy you brought me. Oh, and the flowers. That cinched it, for sure."

"Thank God," he said with a sigh. "So I don't have to buy that crap anymore? You've been properly wooed?"

"Oh, no, no, no," she said with a grin. "A woman can never be wooed enough. After all I've been through, you'd better start watching Emeril. I deserve gourmet meals for life."

"That's a long, long time, you know. Life..."

"Oh, indeed I do know. I'm up for centuries' worth of your culinary skills. *Centuries*," she reiterated the word to remind him of how long they'd have to share.

Jarrold laughed out loud and said against her lips, "Again, I say, that's a loooong time, Life Mate."

Desi warmed to the phrase fresh from Jarrod's mouth. "Yep, it is, Life Mate. But that's how long you'll be doing Desi," she said with a wicked grin and a giggle, "for life, vampire. For life."

"Life," Jarrod agreed with a grin. "For life."

The End

Dakota Cassidy

Dakota Cassidy can't come to the bio section right now. Her fingers are bloody and raw because she writes a book a month for Changeling. She has no life... it's downright pathetic. Please contact her via e-mail (Dakota@DakotaCassidy.com) or visit her website (www.DakotaCassidy.com). Maybe you'll get lucky and she'll get better at using her tongue to type so she can answer you.