



The 7 Deadly Sins  
and Virtues

# CRIMSON DESTINY

Abstinence

Monica M. Martin



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Seven Sins and Virtues Series  
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CRIMSON DESTINY

SEVEN SINS AND VIRTUES SERIES

BY

MONICA M. MARTIN

*To H.  
My everlasting inspiration...*

*My thanks to...*

*God – For the gift of my fruitful imagination.*

*eXtasy Books and Tina – For having me on board  
with this project.*

*Martine Jardin – For her exquisitely beautiful  
cover art.*

*My readers – I hope you enjoy reading this one.*

# ABSTINENCE

*You yearn for a wife  
To treasure your eternal life  
To feel her love and delight  
A long deprived right...*

*Eyes blind to light  
Burn iridescently bright  
Hungering for her caress  
Escape through dreams to express*

*Feverishly you intertwine  
Uninhibited and divine  
Consummating an ancient rite  
With an everlasting bite  
Twin souls interlock perpetually  
Bonded for all eternity  
A dream that can never be*

*Cursed immortal knight  
Spread your wings in flight  
Soar tempestuously  
Through your crimson destiny  
Walk alone in endless night  
Abstinence your only right...*

Monica M. Martin 2005

## PROLOGUE

## THE CURSE

ACRE, JULY, 1191

They fought for hours outside the walls of Acre. Drago's shoulders and arms throbbed from swinging his sword and sweat trickled down his skin, soaking into his undershirt. What remained of his chain mail dragged against him, his overworked body feeling the strain. More cumbersome than useful, he wanted to discard it, along with the ragged surcoat, but there was no time.

The acrid smell of blood and seared flesh assaulted his nostrils. Fiery arrows, stones and other assorted missiles catapulted through the air, war cries and bloodcurdling screams flowed into each other, while metal clashed against metal and bodies fell all around. The gritty earth was soaked in human and animal blood, which drenched the thirsty soil, leaving traces of clotted crimson. His horse lay dead, its entrails spewing out onto the ground, its sightless eyes staring into oblivion. The entire scene was Drago's interpretation of hell.

Another warrior lunged at him, pure hatred glinting in his dark eyes. Drago leapt back, swung his sword in an arc and hit his enemy in the side of the head. Blood gushed from the wound, a pair of eyes fixed on him, a momentary look of horror raced through them before they glazed over, and then shock set in. His convulsing body fell to the ground. Drago stood over the dying man and quickly dispatched him, driving the weapon into his chest several times, not wanting his suffering to linger. His guts turned as the body continued to twitch and quiver. He wondered, and not for the first time, what the purpose of this war was. This atrocity couldn't possibly be God's will; it had to be man's!

Dying daylight began painting a crimson, orange and gold backdrop across the horizon. Before him, he could see the Saracens, on horseback and foot, wielding their scimitars, their lethal blades glinting in the light. He'd never seen weaponry or horseflesh superior to theirs, and their philosophical views frankly astounded him.

He moved forward, stumbled, and righted himself. He looked down to see what caused his slip and his stomach lurched. Firmly planted in an opened chest cavity of a knight, his foot was stuck. No matter how many times he saw the results of death, he couldn't get used to it. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath and then yanked and tugged until his foot came free. He stumbled on, wielding his sword with a practiced hand, not noticing day had turned to night and that fires dotting the battlefield were his guide.

Suddenly, he caught a glimpse of someone coming



at a rapid pace to his right. He turned and swung his sword and it shattered into pieces upon impact. What he looked upon was female, but it didn't appear human. For a moment, he wondered whether it was the angel of death. It was his turn to die. The realization dawned on him as the creature picked itself up off the ground. He lowered his head and sent a silent prayer up to God. When he opened his eyes, he caught sight of an arrow embedded in a body at his bloodied feet. He crouched and pulled with all his might, coming up with a broken piece of ash. The creature tossed its head and the abundant inky curls fell over the back of its darkly clothed shoulders. Its eyes glowed bright yellow as it smiled at him, its teeth sharp, the incisors growing to an incredible length. Drago lunged forward and thrust the arrow under its ribs and into its heart. The scream it emitted almost deafened him. It went into some kind of fit and then crumbled into the earth, leaving only dust. Another one appeared from nowhere and was upon him before he had a chance to defend himself. It shrieked loudly. It was an anguished cry. Drago felt himself sail through the air. He landed on his back, the wind knocked right out of him. It took him a moment to focus. A male version of what he'd just slaughtered stood over him.

"My name is Khalid, remember it well. The creature bent and squeezed Drago's neck with one hand, its dark eyes lighting to a bright gold. "You murdered my beloved bride. Now I am destined to wander alone for all eternity, and so shall *you*."

"I... I-I didn't know." Lame words indeed, but it

was too late to retract them, and Drago wasn't in the frame of mind to do so.

"Your punishment shall be suffering and self-denial. I curse you to drink the blood of your own for all time to come. You shall abstain from the sun's warmth and glow, walking only in the darkness. When you know the touch of true love, I shall slaughter her right before your eyes, after she has truly suffered.

The demon forced his neck back, bent over him and sank its fangs into Drago's throat. Blinding pain shot through Drago's body. He fought and squirmed until the thing sapped his strength and darkness pulled him into its welcoming abode...

## CHAPTER 1

### THE DORDOGNE

#### PRESENT-DAY FRANCE

"Thank you for coming."

"You left me little choice," Drago replied, not bothering to hide his irritation.

"I know you believe it's rude of me to drag you from that musty old crypt, but I do it for your own good." Khalid braced the balustrade and leaned over the balcony. The wind caught his dark curls and they floated backward, the light catching their inky highlights. "I must guard my fledgling." Drago knew Khalid loved to make him react and so he ignored his sarcasm. "I truly care what happens to you."

"You sound almost genuine."

Khalid gazed out into the darkness, his preternatural sight allowing him to see what mortals couldn't. "She is coming, you can sense her. I know you can. That is why you've chosen to go into hibernation so soon."

"You're speaking gibberish, Khalid. You know I hibernate often, not having the stomach for this mundane existence, which, no thanks to you, is eternal. You'd have done better to kill me."

"Then I'd have no decent company at all. You are somewhat dramatic, you know." Khalid sighed.

"So what did you call me here for this time?"

"I sense her with every fiber in my body. She is special." The six-foot two-inch tall immortal dusted his black silk shirt, turned and surveyed Drago methodically. "As your creator and grudging companion, I admire your bravado, Drago. Ah, *Daniel*," he corrected. "However, you cannot avoid your destiny. You imagine you can hide away from the world, but you cannot, fledgling immortal."

"Eight hundred years of immortality confirms I am not a fledgling." Laughter devoid of emotion answered Drago's words.

"You've hibernated for almost half of those years. How can you possibly gain any experience? I was a little concerned you'd grow stronger than me over the years. It appears I needn't have bothered. When are you going to learn to appreciate your immortal gifts?"

"I'm touched by your concern. Excuse me while I weep tears of blood."

"Ha. You've been watching too much television. Next you'll tell me you're the walking dead. Some say sarcasm is the lowest form of wit, Drago. I disagree. What do you say?"

Drago grinned. "Nothing comes to mind."

"Anyway, I'd hate for anything to happen to you before you find true love..."

Drago felt his jaw tighten and forcibly made himself relax.

"Centuries of solitude. You must be feeling the urge for more than a simple fuck. Many of which I kindly supply."

"That you do. A simple fuck suffices, as you well know."

"Indeed, you saw to that for me."

"Just torture and kill me, before you send me insane."

"I'll never dispatch you. I like you."

Under different circumstances, they would have been friends without a doubt. This sometimes bothered Drago.

"As my honored guest, I'd like you to partake of this gift with me tonight." He clicked his fingers. "Woman!" A tall blonde-haired woman, wearing nothing but a pair of black four-inch stilettos, materialized from inside and knelt at her master's feet. "Stand. Turn and let my guest admire your beauty." She rose, her head bowed and her arms by her side. She looked to be no more than twenty-five. Her skin was warm and golden and her breasts were large and full, crowned with tight, coral-colored tips. Her mons was smooth and hair free, her body toned. She smelled inviting, her nervousness and excitement causing blood to rush through her shapely limbs. The combination began to intoxicate him.

"She bears a striking resemblance to your lost love doesn't she?"

Yes, she reminded him of Camille, the woman betrothed to him when he was mortal. Drago

remembered the pain of watching her marry another man and become the mother of his children. "Why didn't you kill her and seek your revenge then?"

"You didn't love her near enough, Drago. She wasn't your true love. The pain you suffered over losing her was minor."

He often wondered why Khalid chose not to slaughter her, now he knew. "And you presume to be an expert."

"Yes. It took me centuries to find my sweet *Jasmine*. You shattered my dream."

"Yes, *I did*." Drago didn't know what else to say. He knew if he could go back in time he'd have killed her again, defending himself was instinct. Sure, he felt bad, but couldn't change what had transpired. Period.

Khalid waved a hand at the woman. "My guest loves pussy, it's his favorite part of a woman's anatomy. He wants you to lie back on the table, spread you legs wide and masturbate, while looking at him." He paused and gazed at her for a moment. "What do you say?"

"Yes, master."

"He wants to hear you moan your pleasure."

"Yes, master."

"After that he can do whatever he wants with you."

"Yes, master." She moved to the outdoor table and lay back on it. Spreading her legs, she exposed her dripping vulva, a glorious treasure in attractive shades of pink. Her silky inner and outer labia were slick with moisture and her clitoris erect. Her middle finger sank deep inside her vaginal opening and

pumped back and forth while the fingers of her other hand stroked and petted her clit. Copious juices ran down her ass, the perfect lubricant for entry to her anus. She moaned deep in her throat and her tits bounced as she fucked herself harder, inserting another finger. He could hear the blood racing through her veins, singing to him, enveloping him with its delicious aroma. He sucked in a ragged breath, Khalid's words ringing in his ears. Her plump mouth hung open and choked moans emitted from her. Her glassy blue gaze remained on him as she reached orgasm and released a puddle of her excitement on the table.

*Fuck!* His balls tightened and his cock wept.

He moved to the table, bent over her and licked at her musky sex before he buried his face there. He greedily sucked and bit at her flesh, tearing moans from deep inside her. He drank her climax and then applied open-mouthed kisses to her mouth and throat, biting into her and taking a much-needed sip. "I want you to suck on my cock," he whispered against her ear and then pulled back.

She knelt before him. Unbuttoning his jeans, she pushed them down along with his boxers. He kicked them off.

Naked, Khalid came up behind Drago, his arms going about him as he unbuttoned the white shirt he was wearing. His warm breath fanned Drago's neck while her mouth suctioned on his scrotum, taking his jewels inside her hot velvet mouth. "Doesn't that feel good?" Khalid's teeth nipped at Drago's earlobe and his fingers pinched his nipples. She sucked and rolled

her tongue over his balls at the same time. "Don't you just love her form of pleasure?" Khalid twisted his nipples, making them burn. His cock grew harder and raw desire ripped through him.

"Mmm."

"Was that a yes?" Khalid's hand moved down to caress his rigid cock. "Hard like steel and yet soft like silk."

"Arrgh!" He was powerless to still the groans that left his mouth. Khalid's fingers curled around its thickness and stroked back and forth, his grip firm. Fire roared through his gut and he badly wanted to come.

"Not yet." Khalid suddenly released Drago's dick and moved to caress his hips and thighs.

His cock now free she released his sack and tongued the underside of his shaft, working her greedy little mouth up to his cock head. Her tongue worked over the weeping slit and whirled around the mushroom-like tip, teasing him mercilessly. She drew his entire length deep inside and sucked like a vacuum, her sinuous tongue darting over it.

Khalid's generous erection pressed against his ass crack and slid up and down, his hands pushing his cheeks together, fucking them. His teeth crazed Drago's neck and his shallow breathing washed over him. On the verge of coming, Drago pumped until he spilled deep inside her mouth.

"Come and pleasure me." She hurried to take Khalid's cock in her mouth, vigorously sucking while Drago looked on. Khalid fucked her mouth hard, his hands wrapped in her hair, guiding her head back



and forth. Drago was hard again. His elevated sex-drive one of the more pleasant gifts immortality bestowed.

Khalid's cock was long and thick. It amazed him she could take something that size without using her hands. An expert mouth, she had Khalid groaning his release within minutes. He drew back and came over her face, then rubbed his dick over her swollen lips, silently commanding her to lick it clean. She did with a flourish. After she was finished, Drago bent her over the table, gripped her hips and sheathed his cock deep inside her throbbing cunt, fucking her doggy style. He pumped rapidly, creating a slapping sound each time he sank into her. She moaned loudly and fondled her clit, obviously enjoying the intrusion of his cock. Her muscles tightened about him, squeezing and pulsing and he exploded inside her heat. He recovered and withdrew, pulled her up and thoroughly ravished her mouth. Hot and horny, she clung to him, planting kisses over his face.

"Move aside," Khalid ordered, his glowing eyes on Drago, who grinned over her shoulder.

She sat on the vacant chair beside the table, watching them both with desire-filled eyes. Khalid pressed against him and they kissed deeply, their tongues brushing and rolling, their thighs mingling and rubbing. He gripped Drago's hair, his mouth sliding over his jaw and to his ear. "I want to fuck your ass." His stiff cock pulsed against Drago's belly, attesting to his need.

"What if I say no."

"You won't." Khalid bit his neck lightly and licked

up the trail of blood. Khalid's dominant side appealed to Drago's submissive side and vice versa. Occasionally they couldn't help but indulge themselves. "We fuck well and you know it. Don't fight it, you never win."

He kissed Drago roughly, his hands gripping his ass tightly. Drago moaned. "See, you want it." He turned Drago, pushing him forward. Drago spread his legs and gripped the table. He angled his head and watched Khalid lubricate his thick cock. "I don't want to hurt you too much."

"Sadist." Drago laughed.

"Oh, you do inspire such behavior." Khalid came behind Drago and pressed his hot cock against his anus, pushing until the head popped in. "Ooooh, yes."

"Arrh." Drago's ass stretched wide and pleasure-pain burned and heated up his body at once.

Khalid's fingers dug into Drago's ass cheeks and then slammed his cock deep and waited. "Ah, fuck!" The words came out high and hoarse. His lips moved over Drago's jaw. "Relax that tight ass of yours, please."

Drago turned his mouth and their lips brushed. "Watch how you use that thing, it's fucking big."

"And you're mouth-wateringly tight." Drago gripped the table tighter and forced himself to relax. Khalid slowly and smoothly fucked his ass, pressing his organ against his prostate with every thrust, giving Drago the buzz he sought.

"You feel good wrapped around my cock, especially when I hit your g-spot," Khalid panted,

thrusting until his groin smacked against Drago's ass.

"Oooh, yeah! Oooh, I need to come," Drago groaned.

"On your knees and please him," Khalid ordered. His submissive gleefully obeyed. Her fingers and lips stroked Drago's cock and orgasm rocked his body soon after. Khalid's hot juices filled his anus and his ragged cries his ears. His teeth sank into Drago's throat and they both rode the shattering climax, sating their carnal needs.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE PROVERBIAL ESCAPEE

Sara maneuvered her newly acquired 70's vintage Renault, which she dubbed Bessie, toward the cream-colored stone chateau resting on the crest beyond. She sighed, glancing out the window at the water as she crossed the bridge. Her cell phone rang and broke through her reverie, causing her to jerk. She fumbled for the phone and pressed the answer key. "Good morning, Sara Stewart speaking."

"Hello, Sara." She cringed as the smooth English tone, tinged with gloating, washed over her.

"C-Craig." She silently cursed herself for stammering. "What a surprise to hear from you."

"Say it with conviction, darling." Laughter tinkled through the earpiece, rich and full of life. Her stomach clenched and her heart raced. "I'm your editor. Not only that, I'm Executive Editor at *Willowgrove Press*, you're supposed to keep me abreast of things... It took me ten days to track down your new cell phone number."

"Jane has my number."

"I bloody know that now."

"I noticed. The deadline for *'Mysterious Occurrences in Huntington Wood'* isn't for another six months."

"I know that, too."

"What do you want, Craig?" He sighed into her ear and she shuddered.

*Masochist, get well damn it! Any fool can see what a loser he is!*

"Darling, you can't run from me."

"Don't flatter yourself, Craig, I wasn't trying to run from you."

"Uh-huh?" He began making that clicking sound with his tongue, a habit she loathed the three years they were together. She clamped her mouth shut on the bout of angry words queuing to leave her mouth.

*Why did I get involved with this insensitive moron? I can't believe it took him to leave me! God, am I so desperate? If so, it's bloody tragic! Is Dr. Granger right?*

"Hell, it's been seven months, Sara."

*Conceited bastard!* She counted backward from ten.

"You're being grossly unfair. Don't make me out to be a heartless ogre." He paused. "Are you there?"

*Oh, bugger off, I don't need this shit!*

"Hello? Are you there?" Glee filtered through his tone. She could almost hear his sick laughter and imagined him shuddering from withholding it.

*Choke on it, you fucking emotional parasite!*

"Sara?"

She took another deep breath. "I decided to take a much-needed holiday and finish the book at the same time."

"In France?" He sounded incredulous.

"I'll be back in London to personally toss the manuscript on your desk. Satisfied now?"

"Well..." There was another pause and she knew well enough what that meant. "I wanted to invite you to *our* engagement celebrations next month." *Our*, meaning him and Jenny.

"What a surprise. Congratulations to you both."

"Well?"

"Well, I'm out of town for six months. Clearly, I can't make it. " The words sounded forced, but she didn't care.

"Jenny forgives you and dearly wants you to attend."

*Forgives me for being angry she shagged my fiancé! The tart wants to gloat in my face, how gracious of her!*

"When I couldn't reach you, I figured you skipped town upon hearing the news. I thought you were over me, darling. How long is it going to take?"

There were those nasty little barbs, crushing the air from her lungs and smothering the life from her. "Don't fret, I am totally over you." Sharp and abrupt, but who the fuck cared!

"I almost believe you, darling."

"Almost?" Her grip tightened on the steering wheel and her jaw clenched.

"Look, I'm sorry things didn't work out between us. A relationship isn't a one-way street you know."

"Very true, I c—"

"I did try, but you're just too hypersensitive for me to bear," he continued on, as though she hadn't uttered a word, which was typical, and so was flogging a dead horse.

"I'm over it. I've moved on."

"Did your therapist tell you to say this?"

*Far from it! So what if I'm an emotional pygmy and a love addict to boot, at least I'm not a heartless, psychopathic narcissist like you! Don't think it, Sara, say it! No! No! No! Control yourself. Don't allow him to get to you.*

"I don't see Dr. Granger anymore. I don't need to."

"At least not while you're out of London."

More laughter.

*Yeah, go on, you nasty prick, taunt me some more. Why should I care? Because you're human, silly.*

"Speak to me, Sara."

"Well," she cleared her throat, "my therapist believes you taunt me to empower yourself, because you feel emasculated in your current relationship, and therefore, need to validate your masculinity. She said you're dysfunctional and a misogynist. She also thinks you may be fighting some homosexual inclinations." She paused. "Are you there?" Silence met her words. She'd vowed she wouldn't lower herself to his level, but he managed to get the better of her again! Fortunately, he didn't know her shrink.

*Shit!*

"I know you're still feeling bitter, but you stoop too low, Sara." He was ticked-off and she wasn't interested in a screaming match right now.

"What did you say?" She pressed the buttons on her keypad. I-I can't hear you. Hello? My battery must be going dead. Hello?" She hit the off button and tossed the phone in the glove compartment.

*Damn it, you fell for his bullshit! Why did you have to*

*sink to such depths? You AREN'T going to reduce yourself to a bitter and twisted old cow, so shapeup right now, missy, because you're better than that! And another thing, you're going to cease mooning over that atrocious fiend and find yourself a shag, and not just any old shag, a gorgeous, muscle-bound, shag you all night, shag!*

Sara returned her attention to the road. She eyed *Château le Rousse*, its tall blue-gray mansard roofs and high conical towers loomed above many of the cypress, spruce and ginkgo trees on the property. The majestic creation looked down on the Dordogne River, approximately three and a half miles downhill. Rows of grapevines graced the hillside left and right and an enormous chateau stood in a meadow off in the distance to her right. The French countryside was quaint and peaceful, getting away from the hustle and bustle of London was just what she needed.

*I could live here without a care, at least until I finish the book and hand it in for edits...*

"I can't work with him now." She glanced at the glove compartment. "I'll call Jane later." She tilted her wrist and stole a glance at her watch. It was almost four p.m. She slammed her palm down on the steering wheel. "Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! Late again, the story of my life."

She'd loaded everything and booked out of her hotel room at ten that morning, planning to lease *Château le Rousse*, regardless of what negatives were presented to her by the friendly realtor lady she spoke to on the phone the previous day. However, arriving thirty minutes late wasn't going to endear her. "Fuck!"



## CHAPTER 3

### SALLY THE REALTOR

A towering stone wall and arched entranceway met Sara's gaze as the road leveled out. A pair of wrought-iron gates hung open and neatly trimmed hedges bordered the driveway. She spun the wheel, turned in, and crawled down the narrow roadway.

A red Citroen was parked in the circular driveway, facing out. Sunlight deflected off the double chevron insignia across its front and bounced through Sara's windshield. She squinted, blocking the light with her palm and steering with one hand, wishing she'd remembered to replace her sunglasses.

A plump, middle-aged redhead in a red blouse and a black thigh-hugging mini leaned over the hood. She appeared to be jotting down notes. As the tires crunched to a halt on the gravel drive, the woman closed her attaché case and looked her way. Varicose veins stood out on the backs of the woman's pasty-white thighs and calves, her legs no doubt straining in the four-inch heels she wore.

Sara detested stilettos. She considered them a

contraption loved by man, simply because they tortured women. She took great pains to avoid wearing them. In the boudoir, she made an exception, as it lent height to her five-foot three-inch frame, and she was definitely the experimental type. She also donned them when she dated a six-foot tall dinner date. She loved tall men, something about them made her feel very feminine and protected.

Sara shut the engine off, bent, retrieved her handbag from the passenger side floor and got out of the car, slamming the door a little too hard. She held out her hand to the approaching woman. "I apologize for my tardiness."

"You're forgiven, dearie."

"You must be Sally Jackson."

"That's me, dearie."

The distinctive smell of *Red Door* perfume almost knocked Sara off her feet. Sally obviously had a problem with her sense of smell and poured most of the bottle on herself. She reached out a pudgy white, freckle-smattered hand, her mouth drawing back enough to bare her buckteeth. Lines etched deeply around her expressive blue eyes when her smile broadened, signs of wild living imprinted all over her.

"Sara Stewart, the famous author, yes?"

"I don't know about famous, but I am Sara Stewart." She squeezed Sally's hand before releasing it.

"I imagined you to be taller."

"Everyone does, it seems."

"I've read you're very popular indeed, dearie. I've even begun to read *Mystery of The Vanishing Lady*, and

let me tell you that beginning scared the life right out of me. You're a fabulous author, take my word for it."

Sara never got used to flattery, but learned to accept it graciously. "Thank you. I'm pleased to have a new fan."

"You do indeed. I'm originally from Liverpool, home of the Beatles. I proudly tell everyone who'll listen to that fact. I would have loved a chance to bonk that John Lennon, gorgeous hunk of a man he was." She sighed loudly. "What a tight butt he had. And you, dearie?"

"Huh?"

"What part of England are you from?"

"Oh. I was born in Oxford, my mother still lives there as a matter of fact. I reside in London now, as it's more convenient."

"And now?"

"Now?" Sara shrugged. "I just need a break from it all. I rather enjoy visiting France, so here I am."

"There's a man involved, I smell it, and Sal is always right."

Sara didn't feel comfortable discussing her personal life with a complete stranger, especially when she appeared to be excessively open.

"I read your mind. I live in Bergerac, a mere six miles from here if one follows the main road."

"It's a quaint town."

"Yes it is, I'll show you around the area and introduce you to some of the local gents, while you're here. When you're at ease with my company, you can tell me about him then."

*Oh, great! A newfound friend, just what I needed!*

"I don't mean to offend, however, I truly need this opportunity to focus on my writing, Sally. I w—"

"Don't panic, I didn't plan to call you on a daily basis."

Sara released a relieved laugh.

"You'll need a friend while you're here and I'm electing myself. That's if you want to be my friend, of course."

"Well, of course I do."

*Oh, shit! Sally Jackson is moving a little too fast for my liking! I wish I were a tactless moron!*

Sally's eyes moved across the overloaded Renault. "Oh, dearie, please tell me that's a rental."

Sara couldn't contain her grin. "She was. I needed a car to transport me around for the next six months, and so I took up the owner's offer and bought her for seven hundred Euros."

"You what?" Sally's eyes widened. "Looks like a gigantic white turd, an ugly one at that."

"Bessie has been very reliable for the past two weeks."

Sally's copper brows rose. "Bessie?"

"Yes." Sara tapped the hood, feeling rather protective. "I've been all over Aquitaine looking at rentals and she hasn't missed a beat. Apart from that dent in the driver side fender, there's nothing wrong with her."

Sally shrugged. "Each to his own, luv. Did the pushbike come with it?"

"No, I bought that last week."

"I thought it came with the car, since it has a rear bicycle carrier attached."

"The rack came with Bessie."

"You do love your secondhand items, don't you?"

"I'm frugal, and admit I love a good bargain."

"In my forty-two years I can't remember buying a secondhand anything."

"Antiques?"

"Ugh!" Sally produced a rather unflattering face and shuddered. "Imagine all the harmful bacteria."

"I don't, and that's about as daring as I get."

Sally turned and pointed at the chateau. "Careful, you may get more than you bargained for with this one, pardon the pun."

*What's that supposed to mean?*

Sally looked at her fine gold watch. "We'd best get to it then."

"Again, my apologies for arriving late, time ran away from me."

"You're forgiven, so long as you lease this pile of rubble for the next two years, I don't care."

"Two years?"

"Yes, dearie." Sally cleared her throat. "At sixteen hundred euros a month, there's no doubt *Château le Rousse* is a bargain, all three stories of it, but there's more than one catch not mentioned on the flyers. Many look at brochures and want to commit themselves right away. This is the reason why I wanted you to come into the office yesterday, so that I could explain a few things...before you viewed the property."

"You haven't wasted your time, Sally. I plan to alternate between countries, spending six months here and the other six in England. I don't mind

leasing for two years. The residence is furnished, a home away from home, what more could one need?"

"Well, there's no option to renew the lease after the two-year period and only half the chateau and property is for your use."

"Oh."

"Oh, indeed. *Lord le Rousse* closed the west wing off. Apparently, he stored his personal effects there. He's on a world holiday, you know," Sally added, not that Sara cared. "The east wing has eight gigantic bedchambers and the main living area is enormous, more than enough room for one solitary writer without pets, yes?"

Sara's beloved Corgi, Jess, died five months ago, and she didn't have the heart to replace her yet. She nodded. "Yes, no pets."

"Well, that's good news. *Lord le Rousse* prefers not to have animals on the property." She sighed. "Anyway, your share of the chateau is equipped to accommodate sixteen people."

"Splendid."

"That's if you wish to have the occasional visitor." Sally gave her a doubtful look. "I read that you're a recluse. She looked at a sheet of paper in her folder. "You're twenty-six, far too young to shut yourself away from the world. If I were you...well I won't say what I'd do."

"This is my bread and butter. I'm not shutting myself away. I simply need time to complete the manuscript I'm working on, nothing more."

"There's a family crypt in the graveyard out back, should you wish to make conversation, or want a stiff

one." Sally laughed at her crass joke.

*God, give me strength, or kill me and be done with this torture!* Sara forced a smile, the effort causing her cheeks to ache.

"You're too pretty for the reclusive career you've chosen, dearie." Sally reached out and tugged on her hair. "You should grow these curls, hacking them off at the shoulders does little for you. Have you ever thought of lightening them? Black is a little too harsh."

"Well, I've never dyed my hair. I—"

"Those big chocolate eyes say come fuck me, when one looks into them, dearie. How can anyone look into them if you're always inside?"

*God, I'm being propositioned by a lesbian!*

"And that flawless olive skin, I'd kill for it."

"M-my mother is of Greek heritage."

"Well, you're just the prettiest pixie I've ever seen." One perfumed hand stroked Sara's cheek.

She stepped back. "I-I... I'm not a lesbian." Sally's laughter made her blush.

"Neither am I."

"Oh, I thought—"

"I was paying you a compliment, dearie."

"I apologize f—"

"I understand. It's perfectly alright. I'm a little too forward at times."

"Indeed." Sara sucked in perfumed air.

"I'll have to come over and give you one of my famous makeovers and take you out."

*A treat I can live without!*

"You're not very talkative, are you?"

"Sometimes I am." Sara waved a hand toward the property entrance. "And what of the grapes vines growing along the hillside? Is the vineyard also part of the property?"

"Certainly is. The winery is further on. It's administered by Lord le Rousse's manager, who has his own cottage behind it." At Sara's look, she added, "You'd have twelve acres to yourself, which is fenced off, and the only person who'll contact you is me, or one of the staff at the real estate if I'm out of town."

Sara clapped her hands together. "That's more than enough land."

"It's very provincial."

Sara glanced up at the three-story building, admiring the honey-colored stone walls and the blue-gray mansard roofs—dormers were set into the lower slopes, each window having an ached roof of its own. The spire-topped conical towers at each end drew her attention, reminding her of *Neuschwanstein* in Germany. "It's rather charming. I like the rustic style."

"Of course you do." Sally waved at the Renault and shook her head. "It appears anything old and ugly appeals to you."

*You obviously have no taste.*

"I appreciate all good quality things, regardless of their appearance."

Sally laughed. "I can see appearance doesn't bother you. What of men, do you rate them the same?"

Sara sighed. What harm could it possibly do? "Honestly, I can't choose a good man to save myself. Perhaps I should start rating their attributes. I guess



I'll get better with age. My therapist tells me I will. How about you?"

"Yes, I have a shrink, too." Sally laughed. "About the men now, hmm... I had a *good* man, or so he kept telling me for four years. I had enough of playing second fiddle and paying for his wild holidays away from home. Once attached, he told me he was married. However, he didn't want to leave his wife, I assumed it was because she supported him. He wanted his cake and to eat it, too. I remained in the relationship for another three years, trying to persuade him to leave her." She shrugged. "Seeing the relationship was a lost cause I stopped bonking him. He moved on right away, deep little man he was. I later discovered, through an ex lover, he'd been having affairs for years and his wife tolerated it, dedicating more time to her work, just to be out of his company. I also learned she divorced him a little over a year after I met him and that he moved in with his mother at that point." She sighed. "And you know what they say about men who live with their mothers, dearie."

"Oh, yes. Only their mothers can tolerate them or worse..."

"The truth is I wouldn't have cared, had he told me the truth." Another shrug. "His mother died, leaving him alone. She willed half of her possessions to charity and he had to get off his lazy ass and seek employment to help support himself."

"Hmm, sounds like he had a few mental issues to deal with as well."

"Oh, he certainly did. Well, he came crawling to

me not long after the death of his mother... I pitied him, for about five minutes. His version of the story was somewhat dramatized. He claimed to be his mother's savior and portrayed his ex-wife as barren and a cold fish in the bedroom. Some of his bedroom antics went beyond adventurous; they were downright perverted. And to top it off, he saw no problem with the lies he told, saying it was easier than having me view him as less of a man."

"Oh, I see."

"Anyway, he offered to marry me and give me the world, but it was too late. I was over his brand of charm and told him where to get off."

"Good for you." Sara struggled to appreciate how Sally could be attracted to such a loser. But then she'd only begun to understand her own shortcomings as far as relationships were concerned.

"Time is a wonderful elixir for clearing one's thoughts and restoring one's self-worth. I recognized him for what he was and wondered what I ever saw in him in the first place."

"Removing the rose-colored glasses is the first step to one's awakening. I understand your sentiments perfectly."

"As far as I know, he's all alone now. I assume he can't find anyone to suffer his shameful and self-centered behavior. He turned out to be the most selfish sod I'd ever met right to this day. I deserved my punishment for dallying with him in the first place I might add. I stay well away from married men now."

"Wise choice indeed. They simply want to use and

discard, otherwise they'd divorce before they broke God's commandments."

*Furthermore, those without sin can cast the first stone,* Sara's little voice sneered. She inwardly winced.

"...not a decent moral-fiber in an adulterer's entire body. In saying that, I must admit my choice in men is dreadful, too."

"Yes it is indeed." They both laughed.

"I check out my potential life mates very carefully now. A shag is a shag, and as long as he's single I'll bonk him, his potential is irrelevant to me. I sincerely hope you choose do so, too."

"Come on then, dearie." Sally turned and walked down the cobblestone path to the arched entranceway. She unlocked the twin timber doors pushing them wide. "Let me tell you more about the chateau's history as we go through."

## CHAPTER 4

### CHATEAU LE ROUSSE & THE NEIGHBOR

A tiled stone floor lined with finely woven rugs, exposed stone walls of cream and coffee and matching columns greeted Sara's eyes. "This is positively amazing." A wrought iron and stone staircase led to the floors above, sweeping left and right, leading off to the east and west wings. Iron and frosted glass chandeliers suspended by iron chains hung from the vaulted stone ceiling above them.

"Would you believe a donjon, made of wood and another of stone stood here before the chateau?"

Sara felt her eyes widen. "Really?"

*The stories this place will inspire!*

"The timber keep was built in the year 950. The Rousse family has owned this property since before then. The lords of Chateau le Rousse have documented everything in a special leather-bound book. I am not one for history, so I'm only parroting

what *Lord Daniel Rousse* told me."

The investigator in Sara had to know. "Please forgive the interruption, what book are you referring to?"

"I have a copy of the book." Sally opened her attaché case and showed Sara a red leather-bound book. "It was presented to me by the mysterious owner himself. And what a gorgeous hunk of a man he is. He's unmarried, too. I read that somewhere. Imagine what one could do with all that money, dearie." She whistled and fanned herself for emphasis. "Anyway, he wanted me to inform prospective tenants about the chateau's history. Very sentimental it would seem." She opened the book. "He paid me five percent more to choose the *right* tenant."

"I see." Sara couldn't give a hoot about the supposed hunky aristocrat. What she really wanted was to get unpacked, shower and relax. Unfortunately, it appeared that Sally was in no hurry to make this happen. "You really don't care who rents his chateau, do you."

Sally nodded and scanned the page. "You're a celebrity, I know you're not going to jeopardize your good name. Besides, the monstrosity's made of stone. What damage could you possibly do to it?"

"I see your point." Sara laughed.

"Hmm... The chateau was built in the year 1625, from the ruins of the previous stone *keep*... Its architecture is baroque with renaissance and medieval influences. The renovations occurred in 1735, 1910, 1980 and 2003." She turned a page,

clearing her throat. "All furnishings, with the exception of some in the kitchen and some on the ground floor living room, are antique—mostly medieval, renaissance and baroque."

"Yes, I see..."

"Everything is cataloged, to avoid legal complications later, no ornaments or paintings hanging about for one to lift, though."

*Only a fool would leave such things in a rental!* Sara resisted rolling her eyes.

"I presume they're in the west wing." Sara nodded. "Oh yes, and there's a bond of five thousand euros."

"Understandable."

"You're fine with that?"

"Uh-huh." Sara gazed up at the staircase.

"The bathrooms and toilets are a combination of the two, so you won't have to empty chamber pots and the like or carry water from the swimming pool." Sally laughed again.

*Your sense of humor is crass to say the least!*

"Come on, dearie."

The redhead proceeded to show Sara through the modern appointed kitchen, which overlooked abundant herb gardens. One could reach them through the rear door left of the kitchen sinks and dishwasher. Furnished with antiques and contemporary appliances, the living areas on the ground floor had ornate stone fireplaces, stone floors and French windows.

When they climbed the stairway to the floor above Sara was sorely tempted to go west instead of east, but the heavy oak doors leading there had a chain and

bulky padlock securing them. The contraption stilled her curiosity, at least for the time being.

The chateau had an old-world rustic charm she simply adored. All eight bedrooms and the upstairs sitting room were immense and gorgeous. Filled with wall-to-wall books, comfortable armchairs and a stone fireplace, the library would be rather cozy in the winter and was her room of choice for writing. The sturdy coffee table would make a great home for her precious laptop and her endless supply of coffee and water.

Sara gleefully signed the lease and wrote a check. The utilities read and placed in her name, she busied herself unpacking the car, with Sally's help. Sally it seemed was rather lonely and Sara didn't have the heart to turn her away. Night began to fall as they finished. Sally kindly ordered takeout, to be delivered, and Sara showered and freshened up.

Sara chose the bedroom in the tower for herself, liking the circular shape and rows of mullion windows, cushion strewn window seats and the white mosaic tiled en-suite. The bedroom afforded her an unforgettable view of the woods, and a place to be inspired. It also had the most exquisite canopy-covered four-poster bed she'd ever laid eyes on. The plum drapes fastened against its elaborate chocolate posts with woven and tasseled ropes. A white bedspread decorated with intricate silk embroidery covered the bed. She fingered a plum-colored rose, turned and sighed.

*Craig would love this place! He had taste, for a rotten bloody cur!* She reached over and pulled a folded letter

from the trinket box at her bedside, a memento from her lying, cheating ex.

*Dear Sara,*

*I know this letter may appear somewhat clichéd. I imagine you're thinking this is the coward's path, but I knew you'd never understand and that your hypersensitivities would spur you to rage and I cannot deal with your fierce temperament right now.*

*You know our relationship has been rocky for the past two and a half years, so it shouldn't come as a surprise to learn that I'm leaving you. The only aspect that worked was our editor and author relationship, which I never want to lose. I'm going to be brutally honest, as you deserve this after investing three years of your life in this fruitless relationship. I've been having an affair with Jenny Brown for the past six months. She's the sweet romance author I told you about... You and I had a wonderful time of it for the first six months, then reality dawned and we knew this wasn't true love. Sara's the one I've searched for my entire life, my rock, my true love. I'm sorry I hurt you on my path to finding her, but I know you'll recover and one day forgive me, realizing I'm not a cad after all.*

*Sincerely,  
Craig.*



*Self-centered, Craig. That would have sounded more appropriate!* She refolded the letter and tossed it back in the trinket box. She angrily swiped the tears from her eyes. *Forget your bloody pride, Sara!* Jenny was welcome to him as far as she was concerned.

She dried her hair, dressed in a pair of hipster shorts and a plain cotton tank top. The door behind her groaned open and she jumped. *I closed that properly. Must be a faulty lock mechanism. The doornails could do with a good oiling, too.*

She checked the doorknob and it worked fine. She made her way into the corridor and through the central sitting area. "Sara, are you ready?" Sally called from somewhere down below.

"Yes, I'm coming."

Instead of proceeding downstairs to the ground floor, she continued on to the oak doors barring her from the west wing. She studied the keyhole and the padlock and chain. "You have the keys." She smiled, loving a good mystery. "What's so important you have to chain the doors as well, Lord Daniel Rousse?"

"Food's already here!"

"Alright, alright, I'm coming, Sally! I'm coming." She sighed. "Curiosity is your worst enemy," she whispered. Her mother had told her that many times. It was usually followed up with the statement, '*You're grounded, missy!*'

She didn't hear the doorbell, but the front door opened and a crunching sound on the gravel outside alerted her of the fact someone had just arrived. She dropped the lock and moved to the windows ahead of her, which overlooked the drive, and pushed them

open. Bracing herself against the exposed stone wall, she leaned out and peered into the well-lit grounds, expecting to see a delivery vehicle. There was a steel-gray 307 convertible coupe parked in the drive, its lights still on. Her favorite Peugeot and she bet it had the lama leather trim, too. A tall, dark and extremely fuckable man was leaning back against its side conversing with a beaming Sally. He was dressed in a white button-up shirt, which stretched over his well-honed torso, and a pair of charcoal-gray dress pants. Pulled back in a queue, his black curls protested, escaping around his temples and ears. She could well imagine what it would look like in the heat of passion. She felt her nipples tighten.

*My God, he's dinner on legs! I believed I just soaked my underwear! He's sure to heal my pride. Enough ogling for you, you little tart.*

"Sara Stewart, meet Karl le Croix, he's your closest neighbor, that's if one disregards the vineyard manager down the hill."

He turned his head and looked up at her, flashing a heart-stopping smile. "Hi there, neighbor," he said with an indistinguishable accent and then waved. Sara forgot to breathe and just ogled the stud-muffin below. He looked like one of those European models she frequently leered at and fingered herself over in women's magazines.

"Cat got your tongue, dearie?" Sally laughed. It was more like a girlish giggle.

"Hi!" she called, in a high tone. Karl le Croix's grin broadened.

*Oh, fuck!*

"Where do you hail from, Sara Stewart?" His tone of voice told her he knew she was attracted to him, but then what woman wouldn't be?

"Ah, England."

"Hmm, nice place to visit, but not to reside, correct?"

"She's running away from some ghastly man." Sara could gladly have rung Sally's neck there and then. Fortunately, her new neighbor didn't encourage the conversation.

"I adore England, but a change is also refreshing."

"Yes, a change can be rather rewarding, too."

"Yes, I suppose it can be."

Something about his manner made her pussy throb and moisture puddle in her panties. He had to be a bad boy, just being in their presence got her off. Something about their dark or dangerous side brought out the sexy nymphet, which lurked deep inside her. All four partners she'd bedded in the past were screw-ups and should have had warning signs imprinted on their foreheads. Her shrink told her she subconsciously chose men who let her down and hurt her, thereby eliminating or decreasing the disappointment right from the beginning. She added that this dysfunction stemmed from the fact her father abandoned her and her mother when she was six years old and she never got over it. Although Craig was tall, blonde and handsome, he wasn't a levelheaded woman's dream. Jenny wasn't levelheaded either. She pushed away the depressing thoughts and focused on what her delicious neighbor was saying.

"Sara?" He appeared concerned.

"Sorry, I didn't hear you."

"Are you alright?"

"Uh-huh." She averted her eyes.

"You seemed distressed."

"I'm quite alright, thank you."

"I apologize for the intrusion, but I wa—"

"Karl's two Doberman Pinschers escaped and he came over to warn you." Sally waved a piece of paper at her. "His number, should you see them."

"They don't bite," he added, sounding irritated that Sally implied such a thing. "Should you see them, please contact me on the number I gave Ms. Jackson."

"Call me Sally."

"Sally," he amended. "Well, I'd best be going." Sally forced a hug on him before he opened the car door. He looked up at her once more. "A pleasure to make your acquaintance, Sara from England. I certainly hope to see you again soon."

"I hope you find your dogs, Mr. le Croix."

"So do I." He slid into the drivers seat and buckled up. "I bid you *adieu*." The car roared to life and slowly moved off down the drive.

"Well, the food's going cold."

"Oh, it already arrived?"

"Yes, before he did."

"Oh, I see."

Sally clapped her hands together. "Let's assuage our hunger, dearie."

*What I'm hungry for you can't provide.* Sara watched the red taillights disappear from sight. Now that you've admitted your problem, if you get the chance,

simply shag him and nothing more.

"There goes your new screw, dearie!" Sally called jovially.

A cool gust of air touched Sara's neck and she could have sworn it was someone's breath. *What on earth was that?*

She turned and scanned the room. *It's only your wild imagination once again.* She shook off the peculiar feeling that someone was watching her and proceeded downstairs to dine with Sally.

\* \* \* \*

Drago watched her descend the stairs, troubled by the realtor's choice in tenant, knowing this one was different from the others who'd resided at the chateau in the past. She was intelligent, wild and eccentric, not to mention petite and physically attractive to him. While these things had nothing to do with the matter, the fact she interrupted his hibernation, did. Khalid was right about that... A curious little butterfly with a rather active mind, a broken heart and a caring soul, wasn't the best combination for a woman to have around him. She was the type who conjured up fantasies and inspired deep everlasting love. His instinct was to protect her, something he could never do should he show himself... However, he wasn't powerful enough to shield her from the dangers lurking close by.

*Eight hundred years you've managed to remain untouched by love, don't weaken towards this little sprite.*

## CHAPTER 5

### TRESPASSING

One week later, Pierre, the locksmith, turned the key in the lock and opened the oak doors. Excitement bubbled up and almost overwhelmed Sara as she peered past him into the darkened corridor of the west wing. He relocked the doors and handed her two shiny new keys. "Put one away and you'll avoid having to call me again."

Sara smiled and nodded. "I will, and thank you."

"The lock and chain you requested should arrive at month's end. I'll contact you when they're delivered and post them as soon as I receive payment from you. Here's my card, should you need to contact me again."

"Thank you."

"And bear in mind that there's a locksmith here in Bergerac."

"I know, but didn't like his work and that's why I called you," she lied, without batting an eyelid.

"Oh. I've heard nothing but good things about his work, until now." He tilted his graying head and his

shrewd dark eyes assessed her closely.

*Fuck!* Sara felt the color creep up her face. She swallowed the lump in her throat.

"I'd better be off, I have almost two hours drive ahead of me and it's almost dark. I don't like to drive at night. I appreciate you calling on me."

She let out a relieved sigh. "Thank you again."

"You're welcome, mademoiselle." She followed Pierre downstairs and to the front door. "I hope it was worth your while." He stepped across the threshold and she closed the doors behind him, his words ringing in her ears.

*It's too late to become all guilt-ridden now.* She peeked through the window and watched him leave, feeling more than a little devious. Now all she had to do was avoid Sally until the new chain and padlock arrived. She'd worry about the owner's reaction two years from now. She knew she'd regret her actions later, but today the excitement outweighed her need to fret about it.

Although she longed to rush upstairs and explore the forbidden wing, she had other commitments to see to first. She completed another chapter of her book, and then dressed and hurried off for her afternoon bike ride, her mind going over what may lay behind those heavy oak doors.

As she passed the road leading down to Karl le Croix's magnificent chateau, she contemplated dropping in on him, but as usual her courage deserted her. She rode the four-mile circuit and arrived home in record time.

After a quick shower, she dressed in a plain white

t-shirt and a pair of cotton panties, her usual eveningwear. She ran a brush through her curls and hurried back to the entrance of the forbidden wing.

She ran her hand over the rich timber door panels. *You know this is morally wrong, Sara. Shoe on the other foot, you know you'd loathe it if someone broke into your apartment in London and ransacked it.* Her hand shook as she inserted the key and turned it. *Just because you're in France doesn't make it any more acceptable.*

The doors groaned as she pushed them wide. She found the light switch and flipped it on. Exposed stone walls and parquet floors met her gaze. The wing mirrored her own with its design. Sara was disappointed as she investigated the rooms, finding nothing extraordinary. Fact was, the rooms were characterless and bore no trace of human touch. It wasn't until she reached the bedchamber in the tower that she discovered the occupant's presence. Several oil paintings of women, ranging from modest to sensually erotic, in all shapes and sizes, hung between the rows of windows, blacked out with wood shutters. They faced the four-poster bed, which was enshrouded sapphire-blue silk. Not all bore a signature, but the technique was very similar, leading her to believe the same artist painted them. Articles of fashionable male clothing, footwear and toiletries filled the wardrobes and chests of drawers.

It appeared he liked medium shades of blue. His cologne of choice was Estee Lauder's Aramis, a fine masculine scent indeed. Shooing away the voice inside her head she opened the bottle, splashed a little on her wrist, and inhaled its spice, leather and woody



fragrance. "Mmm, that smells inviting." She placed the cologne down on the plain baroque-style dresser. Closing her eyes, she tried to imagine the man who wore it. A soft rush of air caressed her cheek and then her neck, causing her to shudder. She opened her eyes and peered around the room. She sensed someone was watching her again, but the proof was there before her eyes. She shook off the overpowering sensation that made hairs on her arms and back of her neck stand on end. "I don't believe in ghosts, I merely write about them in my fiction, so bugger off!"

Laughing at her inane words, she moved to the foot of the bed, knelt, and opened the large cedar chest. Her breath caught as she gazed down at the leather-bound books, their red covers scrawled with fine golden words. "My goodness, these must be the le Rousse family journals." She stroked the words inscribed on a cover. *Journal 8. Period: 1900 ~ 2000* it read, and the one beside it was current. She surmised only the important events were listed, as the volumes weren't large enough to fit a hundred year period in detail.

She lifted the latest volume from the trunk. *Don't you dare invade his privacy further* the little voice inside her head warned. She sat on the edge on the bed and opened the book with shaking hands. The lid of the chest slammed shut, she jerked dropping the journal on the floor. Another burst of air wafted over her cheek. She leapt from the bed and spun around. Nothing. *You may as well add paranoid to your list of malfunctions!*

She bent down and retrieved the journal, breathing

a sigh of relief to discover it suffered no damage. Her conscience got the better of her and she returned it to the trunk. She spotted a gold frame that slid down the back when she reached for it. She dug deep and gave a victorious cry when she retrieved it. It was as she'd guessed—a framed photo. Her breath caught as she stared at the man in the portrait. She thought the neighbor was stunning, but this man eclipsed him twice over. His skin was like flawless alabaster, rivaling his cotton shirt. A pair of striking emerald-green eyes, framed by long, thick lashes, stared back at her, their expression rather haunted. An aquiline nose, strong angular jaw and high cheekbones were all prominent features in his superbly sculpted face. A pair of fine arching brows matched his raven-colored hair, which settled smoothly over his broad shoulders, finished the tantalizing image.

*Sally was right; you certainly are one hunky stud-muffin.* She replaced the frame and gently closed the lid.

She discovered the library was the remaining room. Like hers, this one had wall-to-wall books. There was also an office attached, which was furnished with an oak writing desk and a leather swivel chair. A baroque period painting of the same man she viewed in the photograph hung on the wall behind the desk. However, it couldn't have been him, unless it was a reproduction, which she considered was perfectly logical, given the time-span between the two. It wasn't difficult for one to gain access to a periwig and an embroidered justacorps these days. Those impressive eyes seemed to follow her around

the room. A chill ran down her spine. *I swear someone's watching me!*

The journals flashed through her mind. *Maybe I could read one to appease my curiosity, but not the current one, that way I'm not invading Lord le Rousse's privacy.*

She returned to the bedroom and hunted through the trunk until she found the earliest created journal. Written from 1300 to 1400, it was bound in brown leather, the parchment within crude compared to the later ones. She hurried from the room and back to her side of the chateau, locking the doors behind her. She expelled a loud sigh. "I swear you're going nuts, Sara."

## CHAPTER 6

### THE WATCHER

Sara Stewart sat propped up against several pillows, tapping away at her laptop keyboard. She'd just completed a chapter and was beginning another, so far a dark and interesting story indeed. "No, no, no!" she muttered. She deleted a paragraph and began typing again.

He enjoyed watching her, and although she usually sensed him, he moved too fast for her eyes to detect. Their invisible bond was nothing short of amazing. She amazed him, period. He liked the way she tilted her head when she considered a scene, laughed at a thought, cried over sad movies, talked to her beaten-up car and computer and named objects as though they had a life of their own. She was kind, decent and honest, apart from snooping through his rooms, which he'd already forgiven her for. He liked that she worked to a schedule and that she fretted if she had to deviate from it.

She imagined him romantically, which usually occurred after she'd been reading his journals, he

liked that, too. Her eccentricities were many and endearing.

Her obsession for him grew stronger as time passed. He'd considered removing the journals, but that would only make her suspicious. As it was, she imagined them to be works of fiction, made to look like journals. It flattered him his words engrossed her and that she imagined him to be a great author. That got him off as much as watching her masturbate over him, or his supposed character, which she did often.

Her usual vision entailed him biting her while he fucked her hard. Sometimes she liked it rough and imagined him as the knight disciplining his disobedient maiden. However, his fantasy was to take her gently, at least at first. He hungered to be closer to her, but knew that could never happen. He'd lived without a permanent female companion for this long and he wasn't going to weaken now, for her sake.

Just as she learned about him through his journals, her life unraveled before him through her thoughts and actions. Her family life was dysfunctional to say the least. An only child of divorced parents, both remarried, she had relied on herself since her teenage years. Life, it appeared, was one disappointment after another. Little wonder she visited a shrink regularly whilst in London, had been engaged to a complete loser and befriended Sally the loose-tongued realtor.

Sally and Sara had dinner and drinks every Sunday night at the local bistro and played chess every Tuesday night. Sally fucked any male who looked at her sideways and Sara went home alone, usually to read his journals.

"Shit!" She deleted a line.

Drago's eyes slid over her muscular legs, his fingers itching to caress their golden length. Her cell phone rang and startled her. She saved the file, closed her laptop and set it aside. She picked up the phone and lay back on her bed, pressing it to her ear. "Hello, Sara Stewart speaking."

His eyes moved over her slightly parted legs to the exposed portion of her cotton panties. He drew a deep breath, inhaling her musky fragrance. He could almost taste her on his tongue. He imagined sliding it between her moist, satiny lips and stroking her until she screamed his name in climax.

Her plump mouth moved with a sensuality that had him visualizing it brushing across his skin, whispering words of adoration. He wanted to release those long denied desires and openly love her. His cock strained against his jeans and ached, a torture he had not grown accustomed to since she had taken up residence in his chateau. No other woman had moved him since.

"What!" she said harshly, jolting Drago out of his erotic reverie.

"You're almost impossible to reach these days, darling," the male voice was saying. Drago's preternatural hearing had its uses. "You haven't been avoiding me have you?"

"I've been busy writing the story you're panicking about."

"You don't need to be sarcastic. And that's not the reason I rang you."

"Tell me what you want, then."

"I simply wanted to talk. Friends talk, don't they?"

"Yes, but we're not friends, Craig."

"I hoped you'd gotten over all that nonsense by now."

"For the last time, I'm over you." Drago admired her patience.

"Our engagement has come and gone, why didn't you send us a congratulatory card, Sara?"

"I've been so busy I forgot to." She ran her free hand through her riotous curls and sighed.

"Now Jenny's feeling guilty, imagining you're brokenhearted and this is affecting her performance and behavior."

*Performance? She's not a brood mare, you know!* Drago read her thoughts and stifled a laugh.

"You don't want to feel responsible for her grief, do you?"

"I'm not."

"I thought you were more mature than that," the male voice mocked.

*Well, you're still the selfish self-centered jerk you've always been!*

"Are you there?"

"Yes. Yes I am. Look, Craig, I'm in a bit of a hurry t—"

"Still the dull workhorse, I see. If you find the time, can you at least send a card? I'd appreciate it, for Jenny's sake. You know how sensitive writers can get."

*In the doghouse, are you?*

"I don't see why I should." She sighed loudly.

"I didn't want to tell you this, as it may put you off

your writing..." He paused. "Jenny's pregnant."

Drago felt her acute pain. "C-congratulations to you both. Sorry, I have to go, someone is at the door."

"Please send the card, Jenny is in a fragile state." Drago could hear the perverse joy in the caller's tone, and wanted to rip his heart out. She ended the call, placed the phone on the bedside table and picked up the letter in the knick-knack box.

Drago wondered how many times she'd read the letter since arriving and cursed the man a thousand times over for breaking her heart. He wanted to go to her and console her, but knew such actions would do more harm than good. It was the first time in over eight hundred years that he'd felt a twinge of compassion for another, human or immortal. He habitually squashed such feelings, knowing they were a vulnerability he didn't need. Yet, her soul cried out to him from beyond the night, her silent tears spilling into his indistinguishable days, saturating him with her anguish. He yearned to see her smile, to protect her from such pain, but couldn't, for her sake...

She looked so small as she sat on the edge of the bed, her shoulders trembling, as great sobs tore from her throat. Her desolate thoughts tugged at the edges of his mind. The page slid from her fingers and sailed to the floor, her tears smearing the blue inked words. She cupped her mouth, trying to smother her sobs, disgusted at what she perceived as weakness.

*Please don't cry!* Instead of taking her in his arms as he'd longed to do, he left her to grieve in private, his heart heavy.



## CHAPTER 8

### THE RIDE

#### THREE MONTHS LATER

**I**t was dark and Sara had no light on her bicycle. She wished she hadn't left so late to go for her ride, but she was on a roll and had written six thousand words, which flowed smoothly and coherently, and since gaining weight was far easier than losing it, slacking off on her exercise program wasn't an option. She'd remind herself of how unhealthy she was when she was forty-two pounds overweight, every time she thought about indulging in a slack attack, full-cream dairy products, greasy takeout and sugary treats, this kept her lean and muscular and at her goal weight, however, it wasn't easy. Her gluteus, quadriceps, abductor, biceps, and every other forgotten muscle in her lower extremities, burned as she pedaled up the gradual incline. Sweat poured down her face, stinging her eyes.

A peculiar screeching sound pierced her ears and she searched for its creator, bird or bat brushed past

her at sonic speed. "Oh, shit!" She veered across the road and almost dropped the bicycle. The bat turned, hovered, and dived at her at second time. "Shit!" She swerved to avoid it, her heart rate doubling. She pedaled faster, the eeriness of it all freaking her out. A popping sound and a bumpy ride indicated that her tire was flat. "Shit, shit, shit! She wobbled to a stop and climbed off the bike. She looked around her and the creature had disappeared, much to her relief. Feeling brave now, she made a fist and raised it. "Cursed bat! If you come back I'll wring your furry bloody neck!"

Sara pushed her bicycle up the hill, every little noise making her jump.

*Stop reading those darn journals, missy! The owner of Château le Rousse isn't a lonely eight hundred vampire and no, he can't shape-shift into a bat! That's just absurd! She rubbed her neck. He could be following you right now! If he were real and wanted you dead, you'd be dead by now. What's he going to do? Hug you to death. Twit!*

She passed the drive that led down her handsome neighbor's oversized chateau, with its endless spires. She discarded the notion of walking the distance and asking his help, in case he wasn't home.

As she crested the rise, another bicycle came from the other direction, its light flickering over the gravel road. She didn't know whether to be elated or freaked out. "Hello, neighbor," Karl le Croix called.

Relief assailed her. "Hello again, Mr. Le Croix."

"Karl, please." She nodded. He dismounted his mountain bike and inspected hers. "Hmm, flat tire and no light, not good."

"I know I should have a light." She sighed. "I don't usually ride this late, but my writing kept me."

"I see."

"A horrible little bat scared me and I veered off the road, almost falling off. I managed to flatten my tire. Must have been a stone or something. Fortunately, I'm almost home now."

"It's dangerous for you to walk a lonely road at night. I'll come with you for protection."

"I'd really appreciate your company. Thank you so much."

"My pleasure, Sara."

"Do you ride everyday?"

He nodded. "In the evenings mostly. My work doesn't allow me another time right now."

"I see." On closer inspection, under the little light she had to view him with, Karl le Croix's physique was superb in his blue and white bike shorts and shirt, which hugged every inch of his body. He noticed her inspecting him and grinned. She blushed and thanked God it was too dark for him to notice.

"What do you do?"

"Pardon?"

"Your work."

"I'm an air traffic controller."

"That must be fascinating and very stressful at the same time."

"I enjoy it. It's far more challenging than running a vineyard."

"So you have one of those, too?"

He nodded. "Indeed. Almost every property here has a vineyard or tobacco plantation."

"It's rather lovely."

"Yes, the view is beautiful indeed." His eyes caressed her so intimately. Her nipples tightened and butterflies fluttered wildly in her stomach.

"Sally tells me you're acquainted with the owner of *Château le Rousse*."

"Yes, though, not well. He's somewhat of a recluse. I didn't know he went on a world holiday until Sally Jackson accosted me and mentioned it." He laughed. "He's a handsome man in his thirties."

*Thirty-two to be precise. Having read seven of the man's journals and already half way through the eighth, of course, you know that!*

"His skin fascinated me. It was albino white. I presumed he was anemic."

"Was he attached?"

"I have no idea. Miss Jackson informed me he was bisexual, that she saw him and a male lover kissing, but that's about all I know regarding his relationships."

A chill ran through Sara. *The journals can't be real. It's just too absurd!*

Sara looked him over. "How do you keep such a golden tan with your indoor occupation?"

He flashed a grin. *Nice teeth.*

"It's fake."

"You mean a fake tan?"

He shrugged. "I admit it, I'm vain." They both laughed.

"Sally tells me you're not married."

Sara cleared her throat. "Errr, correct."

"How fortunate for me."

"Oh?"

"I'm having a dinner party at my home Saturday night and am in need of a date, would you care to have dinner with me?"

"Well I... I don't think so. I—"

"You're understandably nervous about dating men, after what the last one did to you. I'll tread carefully, I promise." He flashed a panty-wetting grin. "It will be good for you."

"Sally?"

"Yes. You're twenty-six, have divorced parents, both of which have remarried. Your mother is Greek and your father is English, but very proud of his Scottish heritage. You dislike him immensely, because he abandoned you and your mother when you were six. You write mysteries and your editor is your ex-fiancé. In addition, you have remained dateless the three and a half months Sally has known you. How am I doing so far?"

*What a big mouth she has! I bet he knows how I like to get shagged, too."*

"To be fair, I'll tell you a little about me. I'm thirty-three, I'm an only child like you, but I love to share. It's like a novelty to me. I don't have a lady friend, the last one left because I was unfaithful. I like variety and fucking is my favorite sport. I like it wild and hard. I dislike monogamy because I enjoy my freedom. I'm spoiled and rich, having acquired my inheritance early."

"Oh. I'm so sorry."

"They died in a plane accident. It was swift."

"I see."

They passed under the archway and continued toward the chateau, its lights a welcoming beacon for Sara. The silence stretched on.

He sighed. "Say you'll dine with me. I've thought of you often since our first meeting. I'd enjoy the chance to become better acquainted with you."

*Say yes, Sara. Pining after a character in a book is unhealthy. This man is real and sexy, and reachable. That's a healthy start. Say yes.*

"Very well, I will come to your dinner party, Karl."

"As my date."

"Yes." She nodded.

A hungry glint entered his eyes as they traveled her body. "I'll have a car pick you up at six-thirty p.m."

Sara placed her bicycle in the stone carport. "I'll take you home." She unlocked Bessie and popped the trunk.

"No, thank you. I need my exercise."

She closed the trunk and walked him back to the driveway. "Thank you for walking me home."

"You're welcome." He bent and kissed her cheek, his cologne making her giddy. "Thank you for agreeing to be my date," he whispered against her ear. He stepped back and mounted his bicycle. "Oh, and dress in semiformal clothing."

"Okay."

"Something short and sexy." He looked her up and down. Show off those gorgeous legs and those beautiful breasts."

"Oh." She was blushing like an idiot.

"And a pair of high heels," he dared to add,

winked and pedaled off.”

She watched him ride away, excitement coursing through her veins.

*You have a date, Sara. Don't fuck it up!*

## CHAPTER 9

### CARNAL APPETITES

Sara turned before the mirror. She wore a plain yellow sundress with shoestring straps. It complemented her olive skin and clung suggestively to her lush curves. She wondered whether it was too suggestive. It was slip over the shoulder and pool at her feet number, too easy to remove as far as Drago was concerned.

Drago was feeling pangs of jealousy and couldn't help it. He didn't want to punch her neighbor in the nose. He wanted to tear his throat out! He was so very tired.

Her sparkling brown eyes glowed with excitement and her freshly trimmed black curls shone and bounced about, barely touching her trim shoulders. Dimples appeared in her cheeks when she smiled and her pert nose crinkled as she pulled a face at her reflection. Her plump lips painted the same shade of red as her nails and stilettos heels, beckoned his mouth when she did the Marilyn Monroe pout. He cursed. Here was a woman ready for sex. It pissed



him off to think that overbearing prick down the road was about to fuck her. She was his!

*You snooze you lose, pal.* He pushed aside the distressing thoughts and left the room, before he did something stupid like kiss her senseless, fuck her stupid and then tell her he loved her.

\* \* \* \*

The tall, graying butler showed Sara into the sitting room. Painted cream and filled with floral and timber furnishings, it was rather cozy. "I will let the master know you've arrived, mademoiselle."

"Thank you."

"Would you care for something to drink?"

"No, thank you."

He nodded his head and then left. She sat there for what seemed like eons and was becoming quite uncomfortable. She would have gotten up and left, had she brought her car.

"I am terribly sorry for the delay, Sara." She turned and her mouth dropped open. Dressed in a black button-up shirt and black dress pants, fitted with a leather belt, his curls flowed freely about his broad shoulders. He looked magnificent. She thanked God she chose to wear panties instead of a thong. Dribbling on her dress in public wasn't an option.

"You look beautiful," he said at last. His dark eyes blazing a path down her body, making her crotch even wetter. "My car broke down on the way back from Bergerac," he added.

With supreme effort, she forced her mouth to

work. "It's perfectly alright, Karl."

"I fretted you'd not be here when I arrived. Thank you for waiting."

"I had no car."

He took her hand and helped her to her feet. "You smell intoxicating, like an exotic garden." He kissed her hand.

"*J'adore* perfume," she blurted, staring into his mesmerizing eyes. "I was about to say the same thing to you."

"Hmm." He brushed her cheek with his knuckles. "I didn't know I smelled like a flower garden."

"Oh. I-I mean you smell good."

"*Eau Sauvage*," he whispered, running his thumb over her lower lip. "Women love musk, floral and spice combinations, it gets them *wet*." She felt her face color and he chuckled. "Don't worry, your secret's safe with me."

*Where's the nearest hole that I can crawl into!*

"Come, we'd better join the others." He led her to the dinning room. It was a brightly lit chamber. Chandeliers hung from the embellished ceiling panel, their luminosity bouncing off the bright white walls and timber floors. A beautiful renaissance style dining suite dominated the room, its twelve places laid. She didn't have long to wonder where the guests were as the side doors opened and a group of chattering people entered.

"There you are, Karl. I'd almost given up on you and retired to home," a pudgy middle-aged man boomed.

Karl repeated what he'd told Sara and busied

himself introducing her to his ten other guests. Sally was one of them, much to her relief. All were polite, but she sensed several women didn't like her, especially the tall blonde, who glared openly at her when Karl wasn't looking.

Once everyone was seated, the servants plied them with entrées. Not long after, dinner arrived. She found it a little too rare for her liking and ate only the salad. Karl barely touched his plate and she surmised he didn't like raw meat either. They drank wine from his vineyards. She chose the white. It didn't take long for her to feel its affects, since she didn't eat much aside from the salad.

The night was pleasant enough and Sally certainly lent humor to it. Her date, a bank manager, fawned on her all night. When time came to go home, Sara was pleased Karl offered to drive her himself, taking the large Mercedes that collected her earlier.

He walked her to the door. "I had a wonderful night."

"It doesn't have to be over yet." His gaze searched hers. She giggled nervously as she unlocked the door. She stepped inside and turned, expecting him to be on her tail, she was surprised to find him standing before the threshold.

*Should I invite him in for drinks? God, that's so lame, Sara. He sure looks like he's interested in more than that! He really is waiting for me to agree to sex.* A shiver raced through her at the notion.

"Would you like to come in for drinks?"

"I thought you'd never ask." That *oh so sexy* grin slipped onto his exotic features and he flashed his

gleaming white teeth. "I'd be honored." He crossed the threshold and she closed the door. His intoxicating scent excited her as he passed by. She moved into the sitting room and he followed.

"I haven't had it for awhile," fell out of her mouth before she had a chance to stop it.

*No more drinks for you, missy!*

He cocked a brow. "Haven't had *it*?" He was toying with her and she didn't like it.

"Yes, Karl, that's what I said." He looked annoyed that she wouldn't play his game. She hid the smile as it threatened to form on her mouth.

"Well, I can give *it* to you like you've never had *it* before," he said softly, quietly. His dark gaze slid over her face and breasts. "I know you're ready for a long, hard fuck. Isn't that how you like it? Hmm?"

*His words excited her. She turned away feigning indifference. Meanwhile, her throbbing pussy drenched her panties.*

"Well?"

"Your demeanor has put me off. I'm not in the mood now."

"Don't play coy." She turned to find him dropping the last vestiges of his clothing on the floor. Long spiral curls fell over his taut, muscular body, almost reaching his lean hips. His cock was huge and beautiful, his legs long and sexy, she couldn't take her eyes off him. He reached out and slipped the straps of her dress off her shoulders. It fell to the floor, revealing her curves to his greedy eyes. He tugged at her panties, his fingers dipping between her sopping wet lips, before he pushed them down.

Suddenly, she was in his viselike grip, his black eyes piercing her soul. She sucked in a ragged breath, trying to calm her racing heart. He leaned over her and inhaled deeply. "You smell of desire and fear, a combination I'm incapable of resisting." He clutched her hair in both hands, dipped his head and claimed her mouth savagely. His potent scent enveloped her and his rigid body ground against hers, crushing her against the wall. She opened her mouth and he growled victoriously, softening his kiss. His tongue slid inside her mouth and danced with hers while his large cock rubbed against her cunt. It flooded with heat and moisture and a helpless moan escaped her. He captured her wrists and pressed them against the stone wall, sliding his fingers up to lace through hers. His hot lips and wet tongue stroked her throat and proud breasts, biting and sucking them. He released her hands as he moved lower. His fingers found her vaginal opening, sinking swiftly and deeply. They pistoned in and out and rubbed her throbbing clitoris until she almost came.

He brought his fingers to her mouth. "Lick them clean."

She gazed directly into his eyes as she sucked her musky juices from them. The look in his eyes frightened and excited her. He pushed her back on the lounge and knelt between her open thighs. He sheathed his cock deep and she cried out at the invasion. Pleasure-pain sliced through her body and she clawed at his back. It felt like he was splitting her wide open. "That's it, luscious slut. Take it all inside that hot little cunt." He push her legs higher gripped

her tightly and slammed deeper. His size made her buck and tears streak her face. He drew back and filled her again. "You love it, don't you?" She nodded. "Tell me you love it."

"Yes, I love it. I love it." She met his thrusts, feeling every inch of his long, thick flesh as it filled her repeatedly.

"Oooh, yes." Her muscles tightened around his thick heat and she groaned, batting her swollen clit. She'd never felt so full in all her life!

"Yes, yes, yes! Tighten that cunt and squeeze my cock till my balls are dry," he croaked. He held her thighs and watched as he pounded into her hard, until he spurted his come deep inside her. He leaned over squeezing her breasts brutally. His sinuous tongue darted over them and he suckled until her nipples tightened into little berries and throbbed. He released her breasts and lifted her hair off her neck, nipping it and then her ear. "Get up."

"What?" Her insides ached and she desired a rest. His cock was hard again and she knew he wanted more. "I... I need a moment to recover."

*Drop-dead gorgeous and fucks like a wild thing, little wonder women like him!*

"On your feet" He rose and yanked on her hair.

"Ouch, that hurts!" She scrambled to her feet.

"It was meant to." He licked her neck as he rubbed his rigid cock along her wet slit. "Lean over the armchair and spread your legs."

She angled him a look. His dark, dangerous eyes silently challenged her to disobey.

She bent over the chair, clutching the armrests for

support. "Like this?"

"Raise your ass and push out, using your anal muscles."

He gripped her ass cheeks and spread them wide. She felt the press of his lubricated cock against her anus and pushed out, as instructed, aiding his access. She bit back a moan when the sting of his presence made itself known.

*God, he's big!*

He growled and pressed further, his hold tightening. His cockhead finally lodged itself inside her unused orifice, stretching it wide, the burn curling her toes and tearing moans deep from her throat. He waited until she relaxed and then thrust until his penis embedded deep inside, his groin grinding against her ass. His gasping breaths caressed her ear as he smoothly pistoned inside her flaming flesh. Her moans became a litany as he used her ass. The burn lessened and she pressed back against him, enjoying the way he choked for breath, knowing she caused that. An open palm slapped her butt cheek. She squeaked and tried to pull away. "Yes, that's it, tighten that taut little ass, slut." He slapped her on the other cheek, harder.

"Don't, it hurts!" She felt the flat of his hand again, her protests unheeded. Every slap caused a contraction, and his groan. The stinging dissipated and a delicious heat claimed her flesh. Her ass cheeks throbbed and moisture dripped between her thighs, her pussy on fire. She let go a strangled cry, thrust back against his slamming pelvis.

His hands came over hers and his mouth traveled

over her neck, his teeth nipping at her flesh. She cried out when they sank into her aching throat. Immobilized, she couldn't move. He pounded into her while his mouth sucked from her neck.

*God, he's a vampire!*

Fire and ice raced through her veins, making her moan with pleasure and pain, until it all blurred and body gripping pleasure washed over her quivering flesh. Blackness descended on her.

\* \* \* \*

After Khalid had left, Drago lifted Sara up off the chair and carried her to bed. He quickly cleaned her up and dressed her in her favorite nightwear, then tucked her in. He felt the dawn approaching and knew he had to hurry or burn to cinders. He bent and kissed her cheek. "Mmm, you smell good, Drago." Her hand moved to his face. "Hold me awhile. Please." Her words were barely audible, but he heard them. He pulled her into his arms and held her gently. "I love you, Drago. I love you."

Even when he was human, no woman had the ability to arouse as Sara did. She wasn't quick fuck material, she was a keeper. *I love you, too. God, how I love you.*

She could never know this, as much as he wanted her to. A sick feeling twisted his gut. This was his fault. He stayed away from her and Khalid still hurt her to get to him. He contemplated warning Khalid off, but then he would know how he felt, that was something he didn't want. Now Khalid had an invite,



he could come and go as he pleased; a dangerous situation indeed. He had to stay strong, for her sake. She could never know of his feelings, period. He eased away from her, hurried to the window and leapt out. Racing the dawn, he flew back to the crypt.

## CHAPTER 10

### LOVE'S TOUCH

**D**rago kept a close eye on Sara since the incident with Khalid the week before. She knew what Khalid was and now actively questioned Drago's existence, which bothered him greatly. She made excuses when Khalid called her for another date and he hadn't bothered her since, a relief indeed. She'd also been down to the crypt. Fortunately, she hadn't called someone to open the lid! He half expected her to, after the locksmith incident.

She sat in her favorite armchair and typed words into her laptop under the soft yellow lighting in the library. The white t-shirt she wore barely covered her leanly muscled body, creating a feast for his eyes. Her left foot kicked back and forth and she hummed absentmindedly. Her thoughts washed over him and he ascertained she wasn't in much of a writing mood.

She was an excellent mystery writer. Her well-woven words were a great source of entertainment for him. He knew her agent wouldn't be too pleased if she didn't meet her impending deadline. She was

only days away from completing it, so an off day wouldn't matter. However, the man was a swine and didn't deserve a percentage of her earnings as far as Drago was concerned.

She ceased typing and began to play with her inky curls, twirling some around her index finger and then releasing them and doing it all over again.

Drago didn't usually like short hair, but it suited her. He liked the way it framed her golden face, barely brushing the tops of her shoulders. He longed to be her fingers and envied them greatly.

*Oh, what I would give to touch your satiny flesh with my fingers, my lips and my body.* He suppressed a frustrated sigh.

She closed the laptop and placed it down on the coffee table beside the chair. Her thoughts washed over him. *Oh, Drago, why did you write those journals?* She sighed. *Why did I have to trespass by venturing into that room? Damn it! Why did I venture into that wing?* She stared at the eighth journal, which lay on the table beside her laptop. *I feel your words are real, and I suppose that makes me mad, since you simply can't be the same man. Nevertheless, Karl is Khalid, I'm certain of it, and he's real.* Her fingers caressed her neck, all traces of the wound long gone. *I want to know you in the flesh. I desire that, more than anything, vampire or not! I can ease your loneliness. We need each other.*

She was the kindling to his fire and this bothered him more than he cared to admit. He was never far from her mind. She drew him to her night after night. Khalid was right; she was special indeed.

She placed her right leg over the arm of the chair

and drew her lacy white panties aside, revealing a dark pelt and the glistening treasures of her vulva.

His insides clenched.

She opened her soft pink lips and began to stroke herself with her fingers and thumb. His cock grew hard and pressed painfully against his jeans.

She slipped her middle finger inside her sex. "Come shag me, I know you're watching. I need you, Drago." The way her sweet voice trembled his name did alarming things to his insides. She arched her back and pressed a ripe little mound into her other hand and then plucked at the nipple through her t-shirt. "I want you so desperately." He groaned inwardly. Her hand moved under her t-shirt and massaged a breast. "Mmm... I'm so horny for you, fuck me now." She inserted another finger and slowly rotated and pumped her hips. Her fingers became slick with her musky essence and it began to drip down her ass.

Unable to deny relief, Drago unzipped himself and stepped out of his jeans and boxers. He freed his throbbing erection and slowly worked his fingers back and forth along its silky length. Not taking his eyes off her, he imagined himself buried deep inside her moist heat, giving it to her the way she wanted it.

She opened her eyes and looked in his direction, and although he knew she couldn't see him, he realized she could *feel* him project his thoughts.

*Oh, God!* He couldn't stop it!

"I know you're here," she said. "I can feel you touch me."

If he doubted it, there was his answer! Every time

his fingers reached the root of his shaft, she groaned. No matter what his movements, hers matched. Then suddenly, he felt himself deeply embedded inside her velvety heat. Her hands moved over his back, cutting into his flesh.

"Oooh, you feel so good." Her legs wrapped around him and her mouth drew on his before her tongue entered and boldly fenced.

Drago hungrily feasted on her softness, forgetting to be gentle, having starved himself for too long. He glided in and out, savoring the feel of her scorching insides, pressing himself deep, grinding his groin against hers before every retraction. The desire to taste her proved too great and his lips moved from hers and found that pulsing vein at her throat. She turned her head offering herself to him, her fingers cupping the back of his neck.

"Drink from me, my love."

"Oooh, Sara!" He bit into her neck and she cried out. He sucked gently and her whimpers became moans of pleasure. Her exquisite nectar pumped into his awaiting mouth, flowing over his tongue and then down his throat. Her taste was like that of a heady wine, intoxicating him. She began to climax, her sex clenching and releasing. His cock grew and spilled deep inside her. He kept stroking until her tightness wrung him dry. He ceased drinking and licked at her wound until it ceased to flow.

Guilt flooded him as he kissed the tears from her cheeks. "I hurt you."

"In a good way." Her eyes sparkled brightly.

"Oh."

She stroked his hair and laughed joyously. "I knew you were real."

"You should never have snooped, Sara." He pecked her open mouth.

She caressed his face. "You look so much better in reality than in the photo and painting. With that said, you're a very good artist." She stroked his hair. "I know you well, Drago le Rousse. I know what you like." She reached down and began to stroke his penis.

"Having read my journals, of course you do," he said hoarsely. She slid down his body and knelt, took his erection in her mouth and sucked. She tasted herself on his cock and this caused him to grow harder. He watched her sweet mouth swallow his rigid penis. Her hand rotated and moved up and down with her mouth. He came hard and it dripped from the corner of her plump mouth. She smeared it off with her index finger and sucked it clean.

"I also know you've watched me from the start. I've felt you many times. I know I'm special to you, you just won't say." She smiled. "But I see it in your eyes. I felt it in your touch last week, when you put me to bed. You love me."

"Oh, you're a tempting wench, Sara."

"I have loved you over and over in my dreams. To touch you now, is my dream come true." She pulled his head down and rained kisses over his face. "I don't fall in love, I submerge myself until I drown in it... I'm drowning in you and it's heaven, Drago. Don't go away on me now, because I need you."

Words choked in his throat. He wanted to say he'd

be there forever, that he loved her beyond words and she was his light, but feared Khalid would return and take her from him. It was best to tell her nothing of his feelings, that way she'd be safe.

It dawned on him he could never have stopped himself from loving her. It was destined to happen. But he could protect her. She had to leave as soon as possible. Without another invitation, Khalid would find it hard to intrude on her at her home in London.

"You'll surrender. I'll make you." She fell back on the chair, stretched and yawned.

He smiled. "Come." He picked her up and carried her to bed. She pulled him down with her and snuggled into him.

"I need you to listen to me, Sara."

"Hmm."

"I want you to book a flight back to London tomorrow. I will pack your things and have them sent there. I'll also reimburse you for the monies spent. If you can't catch a flight tomorrow, I still want you to leave the Chateau before sunset. Rent a room near the airport until you leave. If you need money, I'll give it to you."

She sat up and stared at him. "I want to stay here with you."

"You can't, you've invited him here and he can come and go as he pleases now."

"Forget Khalid, make me immortal. I want to be with you and I know you feel the same. Please, Drago."

"I-I can't." Hurt filled her eyes.

He grasped her shoulders and shook her. "Promise

me you'll leave the chateau tomorrow."

"If I go, will you promise to visit me in London?"

He nodded. "Yes, you have my word."

"Then I'll go."

He buried his fingers in her hair, tilted her head, and kissed her passionately. She moaned in his mouth, her tongue mating with his. He rolled over and slid between her welcoming legs, pulling her hands above her head he laced his fingers through hers. He moved gently and she followed his rhythm. Soon their sweating heaving bodies smacked together and sighs became grunts and groans. His mouth found her throat as they climaxed and they rode wildly to the end. He held her until she fell asleep in his arms.

He wrote Sara a letter, kissed her goodbye and returned to his resting place just before dawn.



## CHAPTER 11

### DESTINY

Sara's car was gone and there was no sign of her bicycle anywhere. Drago still wasn't convinced. He hoped it was his overactive imagination playing tricks on him. Somehow, he knew that was wishful thinking. The moment he entered the chateau, Sally Jackson approached him. One look and he knew she was involved. At this point, he wondered why he hadn't honed his gifts. He could have avoided much.

*Shit!*

He strode up to her. "Where is Sara?"

She began to laugh, her repulsive body shaking in waves. "I have no idea where she is."

"You lying conniving *bitch*." He gripped her throat and squeezed her windpipe. She kicked and wheezed, her watery blue eyes glazing over. He loosened his grip. "I'm going to ask you again. Think, before you answer this time. *Where is Sara?*"

She coughed and rubbed her neck. "I...in the

upstairs sitting room." He shoved her out of his way and continued upstairs. "If you're lying, I'll hunt you down and kill you," he said over his shoulder.

He reached the landing and was about to enter the east wing when Khalid addressed him. "Good of you to join us, Drago. As you can see, she didn't quite make it to London."

"Drago!" she whimpered.

It felt like someone had stabbed him in the gut. He composed his features into a passive mask and then slowly turned. She knelt at Khalid's feet on bloodied knees. Her hands tied behind her back, the rope suspended from the ceiling, acting like a winch. Her face twisted in pain. "As you can see you've missed half the fun. Drago rushed toward them and Khalid yanked on the rope. She screamed and passed out.

"Take one more step and I'll tear her arms off, Drago!"

Drago stopped in his tracks. His stomach tied itself in knots. "Your quarrel is with me." He thumped his chest. "Don't do this. *Please*. I'll do whatever you want." He sank down on his knees. "I'm *begging* you, have mercy, Khalid."

"You're weak and pathetic, Drago. Look at you, loving her has reduced you to a malleable puppet."

"Please let her go!" Silent tears tracked down his face. "Please..."

"As you wish." Khalid released her wrists and she fell on the floor. Drago clenched and unclenched his fists, helpless to do anything.

"I'm collecting on my long overdue debt today, Drago." Sara stirred. Khalid knelt at her side and

gazed down at her. "A pity...she's such a beauty."

She moaned, struggling onto her side. "Dra—Drago..." Her plea ripped at his heart.

"When you know the touch of true love, I shall slaughter her right before your eyes, after she has truly suffered," Khalid uttered.

His stomach wrenched "Take me, Khalid. Please *don't* hurt her!"

"I don't want to eradicate you, Drago. I simply want to devastate you as you have done me. Once I have avenged Jasmine, we'll be even. This is for my Jasmine you understand."

"Noooooooooooo!" With strength he never knew he possessed, Drago lunged forward his hand sinking into Khalid's chest. "I'll not let you take her." Khalid blinked several times and released a mournful cry. Drago retracted his hand, Khalid's pumping and bleeding heart in its grip. "I didn't want this, but you gave me *no* choice." He dropped Khalid's heart as his body turned to dust on the floor and swept out the window on a whirling draft. Finally, it was over. He released a sad sigh.

*It had to be done! You're free...Free to feel... Free to love her the way you've often dreamed...*

"Oh, Drago... You saved me."

He sank to the floor and untied her arms, then hugged her battered form to him. "I'm so sorry I didn't come sooner." She moaned. He drew back and examined her grazed knees and bruised limbs. "I'm sorry..."

"I'm not badly hurt, only a few scratches." She put on a brave front until he tilted her chin and captured

her gaze. She wrapped her arms about him and buried her face in his neck. "Hold me, Drago. I need to feel your warmth. I need you dreadfully right now."

He stroked her trembling body. "I've got you and I don't think I'll ever be able to let you go." He kissed her forehead as he rocked her in her arms. "I'll have to kiss every hurt and make you better."

"Mmm..." She sighed into his ear. "I'd like that."

"I love you." He caressed her curls. "You're not some novelty, I truly love you. I've loved you from the moment I felt your presence."

"And I love you, Drago. Since the first page of your journal."

"Now that I've found you, I can't exist without you." His body shook as he buried his face in her hair. "I simply can't. I crave you so much it hurts."

"You don't have to live without me. I'm yours." She cupped his face and kissed his mouth. "Make me immortal."

"Oh, Sara, that's my dream, but you don't know what you're saying."

"Yes, I do. I read your journals, remember." He drew back and gazed into her expressive eyes once more. His heart swelled and the words he'd meant to utter died in his throat as he choked on the long denied emotions that spilled forth.

"Now, are you going to make me your bride or not?" Her tone had a no-nonsense ring to it.

"A demanding little wench, aren't you?"

She nodded. "Very, but only when I feel the matter is of great importance."

"Will you be my immortal bride, Sara Stewart?"

"I'd be delighted." She moved and grimaced, belatedly trying to hide the pain.

"You need some tender care."

"It's nothing."

"Time to alleviate your aches, my love." He rose with her in his arms.

"But —"

"Shhhh, no buts." Her big brown eyes moved over his face and down his chest. "Don't look at me like that, you risk ruining the treat I have in mind for you."

## CHAPTER 12

### UNINHIBITED

**H**e carried her to his bedchamber in the west wing, bathed with her and placed her on his four-poster bed to tend her wounds. She lay there on the sapphire-blue silk coverlet, staring at the canopy above her as he plied soothing ointment to cuts and abrasions. The effort to stay detached proved difficult when his long fingers played over her knees. A sigh slipped out. He ceased his ministrations and she looked at him through bent legs.

"Did I hurt you?" He looked concerned.

"No." She cleared her throat. "Far from it."

His eyes filled with understanding and then desire. "I don't want to hurt you, Sara."

She wasn't interested in being coddled. "I'm not a cripple. I'm just so horny t—"

"Humor me, my love."

"I don't want to. I want a shag."

"Is that so?" He moved up to her side.

"Yes." She caressed his pale, sculpted cheeks. Looking at his beautifully chiseled face and inhaling

his raw masculinity made her wet. She traced his sensual mouth with a fingertip and his tongue snaked out and darted over it, a wild gleam entering his emerald eyes.

"I don't want to be pampered anymore."

He pulled away, his breathing labored. "Think, before you continue this madness, for I cannot promise I'll be gentle." A pained expression crossed his face.

"I don't want you to be gentle. I want to be thoroughly fucked, Drago." She tugged on his silky black mane, drawing his mouth down to hers.

"Thoroughly fucked?" He licked at her mouth. "Mmm, I like the sound of that." His teeth caught her lower lip and his tongue played over it. He fumbled with her dressing gown until she lay naked and panting beneath him, his mouth still ravishing hers. His fingers enclosed her breasts, branding her with their heat. "Beautiful."

*I've died and gone to heaven!*

Heat flooded her and moisture flowed from her aching cunt. His mouth moved to claim a breast, his wet tongue curling around one rosy nipple and then the other. His fingers found her quivering flesh and opened her throbbing lips, seeking and finding the treasures within. His thumb and index finger slid across her clit and rubbed it gently, while the others sank into her pooling heat. She raised her hips and fucked his fingers, her vagina gripping at them greedily.

"That's it, relieve your stress, my love." His mesmerizing gaze held hers as his fingers sank into

her with measured thrusts. Pleasure built and she closed her eyes, moaning helplessly. Her body tensed, reaching for the ultimate gratification. "Look at me. I want to see you come. I want to see everything," he whispered hoarsely.

She willed her eyes open and watched him watch her come. She was vaguely aware her cries resonated throughout the chamber. The possessive gleam in his eyes served to heighten her pleasure as several fingers rammed deep. "Oh, I love you."

"And I you." He pulled his fingers from her quivering flesh, brought them to his mouth, and sucked her juices from them. "Luscious."

"Oooh, you know how to please a woman." That one word caused another flood of moisture to pool between her thighs.

He bent and captured her lips, blending her musky flavor between them. "Only a fool would neglect to pleasure you, my love." He moved down her body and cupped her breasts, burying his mouth there, his teeth sinking into a nipple. "Ah, I've wanted to do this for so long." Another sharp nip.

"Yes, I like that." She cupped his head and pressed the sensitive mound against his hungry mouth, relishing the pleasure-pain his bite induced. He relinquished her flesh and tormented his way down her body.

He spread her labia and leisurely savored her cunt. His velvety lips brushed over her wet flesh, his hot breath fanning her naked lips and his tongue rolling over it. "Eat me..." She raised her hips offering her cunt up for him to ravish. His teeth nipped at her



aching clitoris and his tongue glided back and forth. Two long fingers slid inside her, thrusting deeply and then moving in a circular motion. The pit of her belly tightened and she buried her fingers into his dark mane. "Ooooh, don't stop..." She bucked her hips against his gluttonous mouth. His fingers left her and cradled her undulating ass cheeks and his mouth suctioned on her throbbing cunt, drinking her flowing juices. She came again, harder than the times before, her body tingling all over.

She lay there catching her breath, his possessive fingers stroking her sweat-slicked skin. "I can't stop touching you." He kissed her throat. "I crave you like no other woman." He licked a throbbing vein, following it down her shoulder. "I ache. Pleasure me, Sara."

She untied his dressing gown and drew it over his broad shoulders, feeling the rippling muscles beneath her fingertips tense as she did. She sucked in a ragged breath as her eyes moved over his superbly sculpted form, every muscle subtly honed and defined beneath flawless white skin. She traced his forearms and chest with eager fingers and mouth. He fell back against the bed and spread his thighs. She moved over him. His rigid cock pressed against her belly, its heated length as hard as granite. She slid down, her eyes dropping to it. The shaft was rigid and purple, its mushroom-like head secreted crystal droplets from the small slit there. It wouldn't take long for him to come.

"Mmm..." She bent and licked the juices away, her fingers curling around the thick, velvety rod.

He jerked. "Arrgh, such a sweet mouth."

She pumped her hand and mouth back and forth and his thrusting hips matched her rhythm. "Oooh, fuck!" he croaked. "Oh, I'm coming. I'm coming. Oooh..." He ejaculated into her mouth and she swallowed, drawing back. He spilled onto his belly and over her hand. She licked him clean, enjoying his salty flavor. He was hard before she finished.

"Oh. I am one lucky woman."

"And it's all for you." Unable to resist she sucked his cock head and then deep-throated him. He watched her suck him off, his hands in her hair. Her pussy ached. She loved the way his hot, silken length slid smoothly down her throat, the way those emerald eyes watched every stroke, and the way he growled his pleasure. "Ooooh." His fingers tightened in her hair and he exploded inside her mouth. She swallowed it all this time.

He pulled her up his body and rolled over her. "After centuries of abstinence, life with me will be rather demanding for you. Are you certain you want to spend eternity with me?" He nuzzled her neck.

"Yes. But what if you should tire of me?"

"That fool didn't deserve you," he growled. "I will never tire of you. I love you. Now, are you ready?"

"Oh, I'm ready." She wriggled beneath him.

He held her gaze and prodded her opening. "Just a taste." He slipped his cock head inside and then withdrew it again, his breathing ragged. "No one will ever come between us, I promise you." He slammed deep inside her and stilled. "Together we are one." He nipped her throat. "You're tight. So hot." He raised his hips and slowly pumped in and out of her,

embedding himself all the way with each thrust, his emerald eyes locking with hers.

"Oooh, Drago." She inhaled his leather and spice scent mingled with raw sex. She met his thrusting hips, taking his silken rod as far as it would go, her cunt clenching and squeezing at its steely thickness. "I'm soooo ready." His eyes lightened a feral gleam within.

"Come with me..." He rode her hard. Their bodies slapped together, their limbs straining and their eyes locked through a tumultuous climax. He fell on top of her, taking his weight on his elbows. "Arrgh, that was a delightful start.

"You lusty beast." She stroked the corded muscles on his back.

He grinned. "Every inch of that luscious body will feel the lash of my relentless tongue, my bite and my possession. He bent, his teeth gently grazing a path down her throat. "Each awakening, you'll be assured of my love and my passion. I promise you forever, my sweet woman."

His teeth sank into her throat and he drank...

**THE END**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I was born in 1970, in a small town called Longreach, which is located in Outback Queensland, Australia. I write Historical, Contemporary and Paranormal Romance. (Blush) I'm a hopeless romantic, as you'll see when you read my books. Although, I do like a little bite and a whole lot of spice as well, there's no point in missing out on the good bits. Is there? (Lol) I'm certain you know what I mean. I'll admit to being a little eccentric. :-) What writer isn't? Mmm...?