



Song of Seduction

By
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Dedication

For my husband, who encourages me and inspires me beyond my dreams.

Congratulations to Cricket Sawyer: Poetry contest winner.

Turn to the final page for poems from two more poetry contest finalists!

SEDUCTION

By Cricket Sawyer

Pregnant with desire
Pulled from my dreams of you
The Sirens call my name
They lust for me
To drain my blood and power
I must obey,
They say.

It's you I want
Your hands against my breast
Your shaft a heated glow
That reaches to my center
I must obey my heart,
You say

The tug is more than I can bear
Their voices, sensual, wanting
Dew drips from my mons
I feel their teeth begin
To drain my life and power
I must obey
They say

You call my name
My very core answers
Lust, want, need, desire
My center is on fire
I must obey,
You say

Your lips devour mine
Hold on, you whisper
Your breath the heated message
That rips at my resistance
I succumb to your invitation
I must obey
My hunger says
Or is it lust
They say

Prologue

“My time’s almost up, Nicklos. You know this.” The old man’s piercing blue eyes bore into him, simultaneously sad and determined. “Savannah must be protected at all costs. If you are willing to do this for her, I’ll not object, but you know what you ask.”

Nicklos closed his eyes at the old man’s words. Yes, he knew. For Gregory to assent to the binding ceremony would mean complete trust on Gregory’s part, but it would also mean that Savannah would forget him for a time. He’d be bound to her, but she would not remember him.

The young man’s dark eyes mirrored the melancholy and perseverance of his companion’s. “Don’t try to persuade me otherwise, Gregory. You know my determination.”

The old mage paced the floor before coming to a stop in front of Nicklos. “My daughter is but eighteen. She is young, impressionable. You are an incubus. How do I know I can trust you?”

“Savannah has not yet come into her powers, but she still has her mother’s protections coursing through her. After the ceremony, I can do nothing she doesn’t want me to do.” Nicklos turned to face the older gentleman. “I can’t convince you to trust me. You must ask yourself who you trust more. Me? Or the monsters out to get her?”

“I love my daughter, Nicklos.” The old man smoothed his short, white beard; a gesture Nicklos knew meant he was frustrated.

“I love her, too, Gregory.” A distant bell announced the arrival of midnight. “It is time.” Nicklos’ voice sounded husky, strained. He took his place and dropped purposefully to his knees.

The mage sprinkled the herbs and began the chant to complete the binding ceremony. “You know you can’t make yourself known to her until her twenty-fifth birthday,” the mage whispered when he finished the first chant. “She can’t know you exist. All memories of you will be erased from her consciousness until then. She believes herself to be human. Your bond would reveal the truth to her.”

“I can watch her from a distance and visit her in her dreams. For now, that is enough. If danger approaches before her twenty-fifth birthday, I’ll know. I swear only to reveal myself if her life is in danger before then.” Nicklos didn’t open his eyes as he spoke. The strong fumes from the herbal mixture made him nauseous. Nicklos winced at the knowledge she wouldn’t even remember her dreams of him.

The old man began the next chant and Nicklos said the words, which would bind him to Savannah. “I swear myself to the service of Princess Savannah, Amiathea of the ancient city, to do her bidding, fulfill her desires, and protect her until she voluntarily releases me from this service. I surrender my powers to her and will only use them to protect and serve her.”

* * * * *

Nicklos awoke sometime later, just in time to see Gregory slipping through the chamber doors.

“Gregory, wait,” Nicklos called, summoning the will to leave the settee. He was in an incredibly weakened state and realized this would be the norm for him from now on. *All of my powers belong to her.* He straightened himself and thought, *That is as it should be.*

“You should be resting,” the mage said without turning to face him. Gregory’s shoulders slumped slightly. Grief over his wife and worry for his daughter succeeded in aging the ancient mage in a way time had been unable to do.

“I’m fine, Gregory. It’s you I’m worried about.” The cool air whipped around them announcing the arrival of night. Nicklos gazed at the splendor of colors caused by the setting sun. Oh, but he was grateful neither he nor Savannah were condemned to the night as their brethren were. Of all vampires, only the incubi, succubae, and the aimathea were allowed to walk in the sun.

“Savannah loves the sunset, the sunrise. She lives to be outside on a warm spring day.” The old mage shivered as he spoke. “You and I are ancients, Nicklos. We’ve seen too many sunsets to count. If one of *them* bites her, Nicklos, she will become like them.

Confined to the night. That, for Savannah, would be worse than death. But you, if you bite her, Nicklos...”

“I can’t, Gregory,” Nicklos interrupted. “Not unless it is her will.”

The mage nodded. Of course, he knew that. But he, like Nicklos, wanted only to protect Savannah.

“I will do everything in my power.” Nicklos hoped his voice was reassuring.

The mage nodded again. No traces of the sun remained now and night’s cloak shielded them from prying eyes. “I suppose it is time,” the mage said without warning. Gregory tipped his wand and his long purple cloak became a business suit, his white beard turned to brown stubble, and his hair lost its gray. “I must now return to my daughter and her stepmother.”

“You still miss Sarah don’t you, Gregory?” Nicklos’ voice was barely audible.

The mage nodded his response. “Savannah’s mother was my greatest loss, but even her loss wouldn’t compare to what it’d be like to lose our daughter.”

“Did you ever find out who...?”

Gregory shook his head. “I wouldn’t still be in hiding if I did.”

“You still think they’ll be after you?” Nicklos watched the mage carefully. His face appeared decades younger in a manner of minutes, but his eyes still held hints of his age and both the wisdom and the worry that accompany time.

“They want me out of the picture before her twenty-fifth birthday, Nicklos. I need your promise...”

“I’ll do whatever it takes to protect her. I swear it, Gregory.”

“That’s all I ask.” Even as he said the words, Gregory faded from sight. Nicklos smiled. He was probably halfway through his front door before he finished the sentence.

“Stay safe, Savannah. Until we meet again.” And Nicklos, too, shimmered into invisibility and took flight.

Chapter One

Seven Years Later

Savannah's auburn hair spilled around her naked body as she sat up groggily looking around. The only light that entered the tiny cabin was that of the full moon reflected on the ocean outside. The movement of the cruise ship seemed to be trying to lull her back to sleep. Yet, something told her she was not alone. She swung her legs quickly over to the side of her bed, before springing to her feet. Quiet as a cat her feet padded across the floor to the opened window. She closed it and the currents quieted to their original state. She picked up her drenched gown from beside the bed and threw it over her head.

I must've taken it off in the middle of the night, she reasoned and crawled back into bed.

Savannah didn't remember lying down, nor did she remember going back to sleep. She felt paralyzed as if she couldn't move, yet nothing restrained her. Her eyes opened. The white curtains billowed on the night's breeze.

Odd, she thought as her eyelids drifted down again. *I thought I closed the window*.

Her eyes fluttered open again. She glimpsed her own pale body, naked in the moon's silvery beams, before her eyes shut out the sight.

Savannah heard a woman's giggle. Why couldn't she wake up?

Long golden hair spilled around her own naked body. The woman seemed to be floating above her. Savannah felt a heat, not warmth really, for the woman seemed icy, but a heat was between the two women.

The woman hovered closer to Savannah, then was on top of her. Heat engulfed Savannah as the woman took her breast in her icy hands. Savannah couldn't help but gasp as the woman's hands kneaded her breast tenderly.

A flick of the woman's tongue across her nipple and Savannah hissed in pleasure, arching her back. Her hands and arms still wouldn't move. They were splayed on the bed.

Another giggle. Savannah opened her eyes to catch a brief glimpse of a brunette woman hovering above her. She felt the weight of the blonde shift to her right and the brunette settled on her left.

Savannah groaned and ached as the blonde continued to knead and lick her breasts. If she didn't know better, she would swear the woman was about to make her come without even touching her soft curls.

Then the brunette ran icy kisses down her body from below the soft mound of her left nipple to the top of her hip. Savannah felt her body quake in anticipation and silent surrender even though she knew she should feel ashamed at the very least for taking pleasure from women. Yet, it was one of the most erotic moments of her not so innocent life.

The women were both naked. The blonde ran her soft, smooth leg up and down her right hip, allowing Savannah to feel the blonde's moist curls against her side. Her soft mounds brushed erotically against Savannah's stomach and breasts at intervals, nearly causing her to climax. The brunette's soft legs were wrapped around Savannah's left leg, her nipples brushing Savannah's hip, and when the woman ran a fingertip against Savannah's clit, Savannah shuttered.

Two pairs of hands. Two pairs of lips. And Savannah was helpless to do anything but to surrender to the sensual flames both women caused to rise up in her.

"Let me bite you, Savannah," the blonde whispered in her ear. "Let me make you one of us."

No. Savannah thought, but the word wouldn't get past her throat. She gasped, then moaned, as the brunette's tongue swirled around her clit.

"Let me bite you, Savannah, and we'll let you climax. I swear it will be an orgasm the likes of which you've never experienced."

Savannah felt herself shudder, as if she were about to burst, but the brunette giggled and pulled away.

“Do you want me to stop?” the brunette asked. Her voice, like that of her companion, seemed to be coming from far away.

No,” Savannah managed. A single tear escaped her closed eyes.

“Let me bite you, Savannah. Surrender to me completely,” the blonde said again.

“Back off, Cierra.” The deep masculine voice seemed to rumble all around her. “This one’s mine.”

“Nicklos,” Cierra retorted, “find your own playmate. This one’s ours.”

“I’m not going to ask you again, Cierra,” Nicklos said. “Do you really want to cross me?”

“Hektor will hear about this.” The brunette withdrew her fingers from their task of slowly torturing Savannah.

“Leave, Marianna, now,” Nicklos said.

The women were gone. Savannah opened her eyes and saw a handsome man hovering above her. One glimpse showed dark brown wavy hair and eyes as black as night. His lips were full and his expression thoughtful. He seemed to be drinking in her scent.

“Savannah.” He lowered himself to her and took one exposed breast in his mouth. “You do not have to let them bite you. Their voices are like a Siren’s song. You can’t turn them down. That’s how they lured you into taking off your clothes for them, into surrendering yourself to them.”

“Then your voice must have the same quality.” She arched her back to meet the strokes of his fingers against her moist, tender folds. She shuddered then, on the verge of climaxing.

“Yes,” he confessed. “It does. But I will not ask you to give me what I want. You must ask me. What is it you want?”

“I want to come,” she whispered hoarsely, shuddering against his hand.

“How?” His melodic voice captivated her.

“I want you inside me.” Her voice, though barely more than a whisper, was demanding.

“Say it, Savannah. What do you want me to do? Let me hear you say the words.”

“Fuck me, Nicklos...”

Chapter Two

It must've been the insulin, Savannah told herself in an attempt to explain away last night's dream. She stood and noticed her knees shook. *I must've been sicker than I thought*. She was grasping at straws, she knew, but she felt the real need to find a logical explanation for her dream.

She took a step and realized she was sore in all the right places for the dream to have been real. *It's been way too long since you've had a real man*, she thought and laughed out loud.

In reality, she'd been with her boyfriend until four nights ago. *But*, she told herself, smiling, *he doesn't count as a real man*.

She sighed as she remembered the circumstances she currently found herself in. Her stepmother, father, and fiancé had planned this cruise six months ago. Her father died three months ago.

Now, she found herself aboard a cruise ship with her stepmother, her stepmother's new boyfriend Tim, and her ex-fiancé Aaron.

Their second night on the cruise, she'd caught Aaron with another woman. Tears burned in her eyes, threatening to fall as the memory of Aaron with the blonde bombshell returned. In one moment, all of her delusions of love and happily ever after came crashing down around her. Savannah wiped furiously at her swollen eyes. She refused to shed another tear for him.

And now she was alone dreaming of strange men. And women? She flushed all over as she remembered the details of her dream. She stepped into the shower and let the water fall on her for a long time. She wasn't ready to face her stepmother and Tim. She definitely wasn't ready to face Aaron. She still couldn't believe that her stepmother wanted her to reconcile with Aaron after what he'd done.

A few minutes later, she emerged from the bathroom with a white robe wrapped around her. She was determined not to spend another day of the cruise cooped up in her cabin. Today, she'd be bold and carefree. Today, she'd be sexy.

With a body like mine, why do I only own a one-piece swim-suit? But she already knew the answer. *Aaron.*

She and Aaron had worked for the same law firm for over a year. Aaron was moving his way up the corporate ladder fast. He had very ambitious political plans and didn't want a scandal to hold him back. So, he cautioned her against wearing anything too risqué. He'd practically squashed the sexuality right out of her.

Then he gets out here away from the prying eyes of the city and look what he does. Savannah slammed her fist on the dresser. To think all this time, he'd convinced her he wanted a sweet conservative woman when what he really wanted was a lady on his arm and a whore in the bed.

A knock at the door interrupted her silent rant. She tightened her bathrobe and opened the door slightly, expecting her stepmother or Aaron. A waiter handed her a box wrapped in red silk wrapping paper. She tipped him and accepted the gift.

The card on top read, "Happy Birthday, Savannah. Please wear this today." She didn't recognize the handwriting. It definitely wasn't Aaron's. Could he have had someone else write the card for him?

Her fingers trembled as she unwrapped the package. To her utter surprise, she found an extremely skimpy, red bikini.

Aaron definitely didn't send me this. She shook her head. *But who?*

She lifted the suit from the package. At the realization that the bottoms were thong cut, she threw them back in the box.

"I am *not* wearing that," she said to no one.

What would everyone think? What would her stepmother think? Aaron?

She already knew what Aaron would think. She knew the look of surprise and bewilderment which would cross his face. It was the same look he often got when something was beyond his control.

"Maybe I *should* wear it." She picked up the bikini before she lost her nerve.

* * * * *

Savannah emerged from her cabin some time later wearing the two-piece beneath a short, white silk robe. Her auburn hair was pulled into a loose twist with rogue ringlets bouncing down her back. She wore sunglasses, carried tanning lotion, and had a towel draped over her right arm. Her spiked high heels clicked against the wooden planks as she walked. She looked straight ahead and hoped to avoid her stepmother and Aaron on the way to the deck where she'd be able to loose herself in the sun.

She reached the deck and had located a secluded spot in the sun when Aaron's voice startled her.

"I'd hoped you'd come out of your room today," Aaron said.

Savannah turned to see Aaron accompanied by the woman he'd been with the night she broke off her wedding.

"I'm not in the mood, Aaron. Leave me alone." She turned her back on him and was about to walk away.

"Happy Birthday, by the way," Aaron said. "I hate for anyone to be alone on their birthday. Why don't you join *us* for dinner tonight?"

"I, uh. I have other plans, Aaron. Sorry," she lied.

"Oooh, baby," a woman from behind them said shamelessly.

Any distraction was welcomed, so Savannah turned her gaze to the direction of the woman's voice. Every woman on the deck ogled the man who now approached her.

Aaron, however, continued to stare at Savannah. "Please, Savannah. You don't have any plans. You haven't been out of your cabin since I dumped you. You're pathetic. Just say you don't want to join us. But don't lie to me."

"Savannah," the man in black said from over Aaron's shoulder. "Sorry I'm late."

"Nicklos?" Savannah was simultaneously thoroughly confused and enjoying the look of shock on Aaron's face as Nicklos sauntered past him.

Nicklos turned her chin up and kissed her parted lips lightly. "Your lips are still swollen from my kisses, darling. Did I get too rough with you last night?"

Images of the night before flashed in her mind's eye causing heat to flood through her body. She slumped against his hard form into his ready arms. "Not at all, Nicklos." The breathlessness in her voice was taken for desire by all who were listening, including Aaron.

“Perhaps you’d like to introduce me to your companions?” Nicklos prompted. A devilish grin played on his lips.

“Aaron, this is Nicklos. Nicklos, Aaron.”

“Her fiancé,” Aaron added.

My fiancé? How dare he! Savannah opened her mouth to speak, but before she could give Aaron a piece of her mind, Nicklos chuckled with noted derision.

“Oh?” Nicklos arched an eyebrow. “Well, then I must apologize for keeping her from you the last few days. Once I sampled her, I couldn’t get enough.”

Aaron’s jaw dropped and for once in his life, he was speechless.

Nicklos pulled at the bow of Savannah’s robe. His fingertips warmed her as they slid across her flat abdomen to her hips, then up to her breasts before sliding the robe off her shoulders. Nicklos stepped back allowing his gaze to penetrate her skin. Savannah felt Aaron’s stare as well, but forced it from her mind. Nicklos walked behind her, allowing his fingertips to brush the small of her back just above her thong bikini strap.

“I was right.” Nicklos’ voice was full of unconcealed desire. “It’s a perfect fit.”

Savannah allowed Nicklos to turn her toward him. She could feel Aaron’s stare on her back and knew he was staring where the red strap disappeared between her cheeks.

Nicklos pulled her into his arms and covered her lips with his in a heated, passionate kiss. His hands explored her back and squeezed her bottom.

She moaned against his lips. *Talk about scandalous.*

“Forgive me, darling,” Nicklos told Savannah, “But I don’t think I’m quite ready to share you yet.” Nicklos motioned toward Aaron. “Let’s go back to your stateroom, away from these prying eyes.”

Chapter Three

Savannah allowed Nicklos to lead her slowly through the stunned crowd toward her own cabin. Heated desire rose in Savannah as they approached her door. She fumbled with the keys before dropping them. She bent to pick them up. When she straightened, Nicklos' hands were on her bare hips. He allowed his erection to press against the small of her back.

Her breasts rose and fell slowly as she took long, deep breaths to steady herself. She trembled with desire. Her pulse throbbed in her temple, drowning out every other sound, until...

"Savannah. What on earth do you think you're doing?" The woman stalking up to her had freshly bleached hair, freshly painted nails and way too much make-up for her age. The low-cut halter-top and daisy duke shorts looked ridiculous on her due to the woman's age and weight.

"Not now, mother." Savannah managed to get the key in the lock despite the fact that her hands shook uncontrollably.

"Don't speak to me in that tone of voice." The indignation in the older woman's voice was unmistakable. "Your fiancé called my room to tell me..."

"He's not my fiancée anymore, Nina." Savannah's icy voice cut through the air like a razor sharp icicle.

"I didn't believe him, of course," she continued as if Savannah hadn't even spoken. "But, now I see it with my own two eyes."

"Cut the melodrama, Nina. I'm a grown woman." So much for hoping for a 'Happy twenty-fifth birthday' from her stepmother.

"How can you deny it? Standing outside your room, half-naked, with a perfect stranger. Does your fiancé mean that little to you?" By this time, her stepmother nearly screamed in hysterics.

Savannah put a steadying hand on Nicklos' forearm and shook her head. He had been about to come to her defense, but Savannah thought it was high time she started taking care of herself. Nicklos must've noted the determination in her eyes because he

gave her a reassuring smile. “Must I remind you, mother, it was Aaron who cheated on me?” Savannah’s voice was louder than she’d intended it to be.

“You only broke off the engagement two days ago.” Her stepmother paced the width of the hallway in agitation.

“And my father was only dead two weeks when you took another lover,” Savannah said savagely.

“How dare you? I loved your father.”

Savannah would’ve been convinced if she’d heard tears in the woman’s voice. Yet, the tone held little more than contempt. *What* had happened to her stepmother?

“And I guess I loved Aaron, but he betrayed *me*, mother. Not the other way around. How dare you? Everyone’s seen him with his new paramour. How can you take his side!” Savannah was nearing tears. She felt Nicklos’ warm touch on her skin. His warmth calmed her.

“I can’t believe you let him go so fast.” Her stepmother’s eyes filled with hate.

“And I can’t believe you let go of my father so fast. I thought you’d grieve more for a person you loved and were married to for sixteen years.” Savannah finally spoke aloud the thoughts she harbored in relation to her father and stepmother. She shrugged and tossed her chin up. “Frailty, thy name is woman.”

“What?” The other woman eyed her suspiciously

“It’s Shakespeare, mother. *Hamlet*. It’s a great play. You should read it sometime.” With that, Savannah ushered her guest through the door and closed it behind her.

* * * * *

“I don’t know her anymore.” Savannah swiped angrily at the tears streaming down her face. The last thing she wanted to do was let Nicklos see her cry, yet here she was, doing just that. “When father was alive, she was totally different. Then two weeks after his death she met Tim and she’s a different person.”

“Tim? Tell me about Tim, Savannah,” Nicklos prompted.

“Why? What’s going on here, Nicklos? Why do I feel like I know you?” She crossed the distance between them and traced his cheek with her fingertip.

“Savannah.” His voice was soothing. She forgot her stepmother momentarily and mused at his accent.

“It’s a blend of different places, different languages, different times,” he answered her unasked question.

“How’d you...?” Her forehead wrinkled in confusion.

Nicklos laughed. “I’ll explain soon enough. For now...” He pulled her into his masculine arms. Nicklos ran the pad of his thumb across her wet cheeks, drying her tears. He gently kissed first one cheek, then the other, and then her forehead. Finally, his lips covered hers.

She let herself melt into him. Her mind swam, images faded. She could no longer see Aaron’s mocking eyes or her stepmother’s angry ones. When she closed her eyes, she saw only Nicklos. He could make her forget her pain.

“Is that what you want?” Nicklos rubbed her lip with his thumb. “Do you really want to forget your pain?”

“I ... I don’t know.” Savannah was breathless. She didn’t know what she wanted. Yes, she did. She wanted Nicklos. To relive last night.

“I thought it was a dream,” she confessed.

“No dream could rock you like that, my love.” His devilish smile should’ve scared her. Instead, it left her body weak and wanting.

“And, what about...?”

“The women?” Nicklos’ eyebrows raised in a playful gesture.

“Oh, God. They *were* real.” Savannah sank onto her bed and held her head in her hands. Then she turned an accusing eye to Nicklos. “Were they yours?”

“No. They belong to Hektor. Did you enjoy it?”

Heat rose from her core and into her cheeks. Her body shivered, throbbed, and convulsed at the mere memory. How could she deny she’d enjoyed it? She buried her face in her hands again.

“It’s okay, Savannah. You were intoxicated.” He sank to his knees in front of her and gently tugged her hands away from her face.

“So, it was the insulin?” Disbelief was evident in her voice. She knew insulin wouldn’t cause intoxication, but since she didn’t drink and had taken no other drugs, she was grasping at the only logical straw left her.

“No. It is as I told you. Their voices enchant you. You must learn to resist their song of seduction.” His bass voice rumbled through her. She felt her pussy grow moist. Desire burned her.

“And what of your song of seduction? Do you deny your voice entrances people as well?” She visibly shook. It took all of her willpower not to straddle him and ride him until she was aching, raw, and sated.

“No. I don’t deny it.” His dark eyes bore into her and she was forced to look away. “My voice can be extremely seductive when I want it to be.”

“You *are* doing it on purpose.” Her voice was barely more than a whisper.

“Guilty.”

“Why?” The word came out in a broken, panted syllable.

“To teach you to resist the temptation.” He ran the back of his finger up her bare arm, sending chills through her body.

“No. I can’t resist. My body is on fire.” In a few swift movements, she stood before him naked.

“Savannah, you must try to resist.” He was still on his knees. He gripped her waist in his strong hands and teased her breasts with his tongue. He took her supple nipple between his teeth and suckled her. Meanwhile, his hands explored her pale, naked body. His fingers found her moist curls and he shuddered against her.

“What do you want, Savannah?” The bulge in his trousers grew and she knew it was because of the look of desire in her eyes.

“I want you out of those clothes and I want you inside me.” She fumbled with the buttons on his shirt before he jerked it over his head. Within seconds he’d stepped out of his pants and stood before her. Her eyes widened at the size of him and she shook. From fear. From desire.

“You’re sure?” In answer to his question, she turned away from him and crawled onto the bed and positioned herself on her knees, spreading her legs. She ran a long, manicured nail between her lips. She shuddered at the unexpected sensitivity of her clit.

At her stifled moan, Nicklos' eyes rolled back in his head. He grabbed Savannah's hips and pulled her back to the edge of the bed. He parted her legs with his thighs and thrust himself deep inside her heat. She cried out and met his hard thrusts over and over.

He grabbed her shoulders and shifted her legs so she took as much of him as possible. She contracted around his shaft and he thrust deeper inside of her. Savannah rocked against him and moaned as she came.

Chapter Four

“Nicklos?” Savannah’s voice sounded sleepy and far away even to her own ears. “Those women, what were they?”

Without lifting her head from his muscled pecs, she turned her head up to look at him, allowing her green eyes to bore into him. She held her breath, anticipating his answer. “They’re Lamiae.”

She raised her eyebrows and her confusion at his explanation showed.

“Female vampires.” Savannah stifled the urge to laugh out loud. “That’s ludicrous.”

“Do you deny what you saw last night? They hovered above you. Cierra begged for permission to bite you.”

“And are you a lamia?” Savannah raised her head from where it rested to stare into his dark eyes. Her father taught her vampire lore when she was a child and she remembered the Lamiae were female. She grinned at the thought of calling him female, only slightly embarrassed about showing her ignorance.

“No. I’m an incubus.” His voice rumbled through her and she was again overcome with desire. Savannah was confused by her overwhelming connection with this man she didn’t even know. She knew she should be scared of these emotions, but she felt as if she’d known Nicklos forever. Her mind tried to grasp memories hidden at the edge of her consciousness in an attempt to make sense of her passion.

“Incubus? The ones who seduce people in their dreams and feed off their sexual energy?”

His responding smile was pure seduction. “You know your vampire races.”

“I know vampire myths. That’s all they are. Just myths?” She had meant it to sound more positive.

“No. We’re very real, my sweet. You should sleep now. You told Aaron we have plans this evening. I wouldn’t want you to be too tired.” He pulled her back into his arms and rubbed his hands soothingly through her dark auburn hair.

“Hmmp. I bet you’re not tired at all.” She yawned and closed her eyes.

* * * * *

Savannah awoke slowly expecting to find herself in Nicklos' warm arms. Before she opened her eyes, however, she realized that was not the case. A cool breeze floated in through the window and enveloped her naked body, reminding her of the feeling of sitting outside on a spring morning waiting an impending rain shower. How could that be possible? Her back was against the bed, yet she could still feel the breeze. She opened her eyes to find herself a lot closer to the ceiling of her room than she should've been. She gasped, too afraid to move.

"Nicklos?" Her shaky voice testified that she was trembling. "What are you doing to me?"

"Nothing, Savannah. You're doing it." Apparently he knew she was about to panic, possibly causing herself to fall because he suddenly appeared beside her. "It's okay, Savannah. You're directly above your bed. Let yourself relax and imagine yourself slowly lowering until you reach the bed."

"I can't. Help me, Nicklos." She was more than panicked. She was trembling so hard she felt her teeth knock together as she talked.

"Yes, you can, Savannah." His voice was soothing, calming. Seductive. She wanted to bend herself to his every will. "Close your eyes. Concentrate on feeling yourself lower slowly to the bed."

She felt the soft satin sheets brush her back and the mattress yield to her slight weight. She exhaled sharply and it was only then she realized she had been holding her breath.

What just happened? She knew, instinctively if she asked Nicklos he would tell her the truth. Yet her voice failed her.

Still trembling, she stood and without covering her body, walked slowly to the bathroom. Her legs felt foreign and shook like those of a newborn fawn. She quickly wet a hand towel with cool water from the faucet and buried her face in it. When she looked in the mirror, she screamed.

"What's wrong?" Nicklos' asked from behind her.

She could see his worried expression in the mirror. Right where her own image should be.

“I ... I have no reflection. And *you* do.”

Nicklos’ expression didn’t change. “You must will your reflection to appear.” She watched with horror as his form faded from the mirror; then, just as slowly, reappeared.

She concentrated on seeing her own reflection in the mirror, and her face slowly came in to focus. Yet, she could still see Nicklos, through her own reflection.

“You are weak now,” he told Savannah. He began filling the tub with hot water, then pulled her into his arms to support her weight.

“What’s happening to me, Nicklos?” He stroked her back to soothe her, but didn’t answer her question.

After a short time he said, “I will tell you all. Not now, though. Right now, we must do something to help you regain your strength.”

“I need to check my glucose level. I think my blood sugar may be low.” She could feel a pull in her stomach which always seemed to say, *Eat something soon, or you’ll faint.*

“Food is not what you need, my dear.” He lifted her effortlessly and placed her in the hot bath. “Relax for a moment. Do not try to stand. I’ll be right back.”

Steam rose around her and she breathed it in. She sank further into the tub, allowing the water to engulf her up to her neck.

After a few minutes, Nicklos returned. Savannah vaguely registered that he had a bandage on his arm.

Nicklos handed her a glass of red wine. “Drink this. All of it.”

His voice was sweet seduction. Her eyes drifted shut.

“Savannah, you must keep drinking. It will make you feel better.”

She could deny him nothing. She drank the liquid slowly. She opened her eyes, and he started.

The wineglass shattered on the floor. Savannah slumped against the side of the tub.

“Shit.” Nicklos lifted Savannah from the tub, wrapped her in a towel and carried her to her bed. He hastily ripped the bandage from his wrist. He cursed when he noticed the wound had already healed. Without hesitation, he sank his fangs into his own flesh.

“Savannah.” He lifted her head and pressed his wrist to her lips. She opened her eyelids lazily. Her eyes had turned grey and were slightly glazed. “Drink,” he ordered.

Instinctively, her lips closed around his wrist. He could feel a gentle tugging on his skin as she slowly sucked much needed sustenance into her body. It was a lulling, tantalizing sensation that relaxed him and simultaneously made him hard for her.

He had no choice. To regain the energy lost in the giving of his blood he’d need to feed from her sexual energy. Nicklos had no choice but to visit her in her dreams.

* * * * *

Nicklos’ seduction of Savannah was slow. He wanted to build up as much tension as possible so her release would be satisfying for her and fulfilling for him.

Finally, unable to take his teasing anymore, Savannah pushed him onto his back and straddled him. He felt her shudder as she took him in her body. The moan that escaped her lips almost shook his resolve to wait until she was completely satisfied before he allowed himself to come.

She rode him hard and fast, taking his cock deep into her tight sheath. Nicklos grabbed her waist, guiding her movements in an attempt to match her wild thrusts. He watched her breasts bounce to their relentless rhythm and marveled at how her pussy seemed to tighten around his throbbing cock as she slid from base to head. Nicklos felt sure he was about to climax too soon. He thrust deep inside her and pulled her to him, stopping her frantic thrusts.

Savannah shook her head, seized his hands, and pinned them next to his head. “Don’t stop, Nicklos.” She rode him slowly for a heartbeat, but quickly found their previous rhythm.

Nicklos moaned as his cock contracted and throbbed. He felt as if he’d explode any minute, but then she stopped her movements. She looked over her shoulder and

didn't move for several seconds. When she faced him again, her eyes were a much brighter green than usual. She was in a trance.

"Savannah? Fight it, Savannah."

But she wasn't listening to him. Still sitting on top of him, she slumped back against a form only she could feel and was listening to a voice only she heard. Someone else had entered her dream.

Savannah began to ride him again. Nicklos watched helplessly as tiny finger-sized indentations appeared all over her breasts, as hands invisible to Nicklos pressed, stroked, and fondled her breasts. Her eyes rolled back, her head tilted, and her moans ripped through him. Another vampire had entered her dream. Nicklos had heard of such things happening when two vampires targeted the same person, but had never experienced anything like this before. Who was the other vampire?

"Who is it, Savannah?" Nicklos asked, attempting to pull her attention back to him. He hoped it would be enough to break the trance.

"Aaron." She moaned the word and continued to ride Nicklos.

He was tempted to pull himself out of the dream, but couldn't bear to leave her there defenseless. The other vampire was in *her* dream, not his. As much as Nicklos wanted to hit him, he knew it would be no use.

"It's not Aaron, Savannah. Fight him." The vampire had done his homework, and took the form of someone Savannah knew. The fact that she was so ready to take Aaron after all he'd done to her pained Nicklos. Did this mean she still loved Aaron?

"Fight him for me, Savannah. Remember what we once shared." Why didn't she remember their life together? Gregory had sworn she'd remember everything on her twenty-fifth birthday. Today. "Fight him," Nicklos pleaded.

But her head fell back to rest on the phantom's shoulder. She raised one hand behind her head. Nicklos could tell that she was probably rubbing her hands through the other guy's hair. Her right hand was going through the motions of stroking her clit, yet she was not touching herself. Nicklos realized she must be guiding the phantom's hand.

That son of a bitch is stroking her pussy while she is fucking me, Nicklos thought in outrage.

“Don’t do this, Savannah.” Nicklos grabbed her face and forced her to look at him.

“Aaron wants a mirror above the bed,” she said mechanically. “He wants you to watch him fuck me.” A mirror appeared on the ceiling, and before the realization of what she’d said could set in, the phantom pushed her forward. Her long auburn hair spilled around Nicklos’s face. A hand he couldn’t see lifted her hair and positioned it over one shoulder, presumably to give Nicklos a better view of the mirror.

Savannah’s lips were an inch from his. “Yes,” she said as if she were repeating someone’s words. “I want both of you inside of me.”

“No, Savannah,” Nicklos whispered and blinked back tears. “Please fight him. I can’t do it for you or I would. Fight him, Savannah.”

This was the first time Nicklos ever regretted the binding ceremony that made him bow to her wishes. He’d voluntarily taken the oath seven years ago, swearing he’d obey her commands, fulfill her desires, and protect her with his life. For seven years, he’d watched silently and done just that, mostly through her dreams. It’d been a pleasure and an honor, but now ...

In the mirror, he saw two hands forcefully grab her cheeks and spread them.

“Release me from my oath, Savannah,” he pleaded. “I can’t do this.”

“Fuck me, Nicklos.” He obeyed.

Nicklos could tell she was purposely grinding into the phantom to take him as deep in her ass as she took him in her pussy. She rode him forcefully, using his shoulders for leverage. The four small indentations in her right shoulder testified her other lover used her shoulder for leverage as well.

Nicklos was simultaneously turned on and disgusted. His cock throbbed whenever she came down on him hard and her bare breasts brushed against his chest. He tried not to focus on the invisible hands all over her body.

She screamed and shuddered. After she climaxed, she fell to him, panting. He was about to put his arms around her and make her see who he was, but she was pulled to a sitting position. Her auburn hair was pushed to the left side by a hand Nicklos couldn’t see. Savannah closed her eyes and exposed her neck.

Nicklos was still inside of her and used that to his advantage. He pulled her hips and thrust inside her hard. “Savannah. No.” She opened her eyes but didn’t look at him. “Fight him, Savannah. Fight him for me.”

She started. “Nick?” She looked down at him. Her eyes were no longer glazed.

“Close your eyes and mentally push him away.” Fury replaced the seduction he normally used in his voice.

She closed her eyes and screamed. Something, presumably the other vampire, hit the opposite wall.

Savannah covered Nicklos’s body with her own. Her warm tears stung his chest. He reluctantly wrapped his arms around her waist. He lifted her hips and withdrew from her body. When he did so, her silent tears turned to sobs.

“Oh, God, Nicklos. What’ve I done?” The anguish in her voice temporarily abated his anger.

“Just wake up, Savannah. It was only a dream.” But it wasn’t. It was so much more than that.

Chapter Five

Nicklos disappeared, leaving Savannah alone and crying. She tried to force herself to wake up, but in her sorrow, it was difficult.

She lost all track of time, and when she woke up, she was in her bed. Alone.

“Get dressed, Savannah.” Nicklos had his back to her and his hand was on the door.

“Wait, Nicklos.” Her voice was a faint whisper. He visibly stiffened. “What’s happening to me? How could someone else enter my dreams like that? How could he take advantage of me?”

“Only a vampire or powerful mage could enter your dream. He was able to put you in a trance because you were weak, vulnerable. You were easily seduced because you still have feelings for Aaron and because *I* mean nothing to you.” He turned the doorknob.

“No. Don’t go, Nicklos. Let me explain.” The door was slightly ajar. She knew anyone walking outside her room was likely to get a free show, but she didn’t care.

She was across the floor in a heartbeat. She placed herself between him and the door, shutting it as she did so. “Please, Nicklos.”

He closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. “I will do as you command. Please, Princess, don’t make me stay.”

“I ... I won’t *command* you to stay. I’m asking you to give me a few minutes to explain what happened.” *I don’t want it to end like this.* But those words wouldn’t come.

“You’ve nothing to explain, Princess. You’ve only known me for a couple of hours.” His voice sounded gravelly, seductive, even though she knew he was trying to be everything but seductive.

“No. I’ve known you for years.” Flashes of memories she didn’t even know she had came flooding back to her. “I feel as if you’ve always been here. Don’t go now.”

He sighed. “Listen, Savannah. You’ve got to stop relinquishing control of yourself. That man put you in a trance and you were ready to give yourself to him. Not

just physically, but completely. If he bites you, he drains your powers. Afterward, he controls your destiny, and sometimes your actions.”

Savannah gasped.

He lifted her chin with his forefinger. “He cannot bite you unless you give him permission. There are spells that protect you, but they’re broken if you give your permission.”

“What if you bite me? Will the others be able to...?”

“Savannah. Don’t. If a male vampire bites you, you become his bride. I cannot bite you.” He refused to look at her.

Savannah’s heart sank. “No. You’re right, of course. You and I couldn’t possibly marry.” How foolish of her to think he could possibly want to marry her.

“Can I go now?” She’d tried to hide her melancholy from him, but apparently failed because he added, “Look, Savannah. I just need to get out of here right now. I’ll be back this afternoon. You promised Aaron we’d be together tonight. We can’t disappoint him. Maybe he’ll see what he’s lost.”

I don’t want Aaron. I want you. Her pride wouldn’t let her say it. He searched her eyes, nodded, and left.

* * * * *

Nicklos was on a mission, so the last thing he wanted at the moment was a distraction. Distraction, however, presented itself in the form of the blonde he’d seen with Aaron earlier that morning.

“You look like the kind of guy who gets what he wants.” The blonde ran a finger down his chest. “I’m Trina.”

“I’m flattered, Trina, but I’m not interested.” He tried to step around her. She side-stepped, placing herself right in front of him in the narrow hallway.

“You haven’t given me a chance to *make* you interested.” Her voice was husky, purposely seductive.

He placed his hands on her shoulders and ran his hand down to her biceps. She moaned, exaggeratedly, and pursed her lips. He lifted her from the ground by her arms,

turned, and placed her behind him without effort. “I’m not going to *give* you the chance, either. Good afternoon, Trina.”

She may have tried to follow, but his long strides didn’t give her much of a chance to keep up. He turned the corner and descended the stairs. He found the room he was looking for and knocked forcefully.

A tall, beautiful woman with blonde hair opened the door. “Hi, Nicky. Have you come to play?” She tried to wrap her arms around his neck, but he pushed her away.

“Back off, Cierra. I’m here to see Hektor.” He pulled her arms from around his neck and pushed past her.

“And what if Hektor doesn’t want to see you?” A tall brunette asked from a chaise lounge in the corner of the room.

“He has no choice, Semele. If he refuses to see me, I take a silver stake to his heart the next time we meet,” Nicklos retorted.

“Tsk. Tsk. So much drama. And over what? A dream?” The deep, cold voice came from the doorway to his left. Nicklos turned to face his adversary.

“You think this a joke, Hektor? Savannah is in my care. You harm her and I’ll stake you myself.” He stalked up to Hektor and towered over him. Hektor was either too dumb or too brave to show any fear.

“Easy, slave. You forget your place. You’re not royalty. As a slave, you can’t even take a mortal as a bride without your master’s permission. I *will* have Savannah. And you... you’ll just have to watch from the sidelines. Does your master know you are here? No? Well, then your powers are useless.” Hektor turned to walk away.

Nicklos grabbed Hektor, turned him, and shoved him against the wall. He closed his grip around Hektor’s throat. Hektor fought for air as Nicklos said, “Don’t make the mistake of thinking I *need* my powers to end your existence, Hektor. I could kill you with my bare hands. In fact, I think I’d *rather* do it that way.”

Hektor’s eyes widened with horror. Nicklos released his grip. “If she goes to you when she is at full power, so be it. But if you *ever* again take advantage of her when she is in a weakened state, I’ll hunt you to the end of the world and hurl you straight to hell.”

Chapter Six

Late in the afternoon, another package was delivered to Savannah. The card was identical to the one that came with the bikini earlier in the day. She opened the package slowly, wishing Nicklos had delivered it himself.

The dress inside was black satin with a low-cut, burgundy bodice. Sheer material criss-crossed over her bare back to trail loosely behind her bare arms and attach with a thin elastic band at the wrists like translucent black wings. Beneath the sheer material, the dress v-ed dangerously low into the skirt in the back.

Savannah pulled her long auburn hair up, leaving a few ringlets hanging down her shoulders. Her beauty would be unsurpassed on the ship tonight, but her appearance did not reflect her inner feelings. Why did she feel such grief for a man she barely knew? How could she set things right with him?

She applied her makeup slowly, fearing tears would fall and ruin her efforts.

When she left her cabin, the sun was beginning to set. She looked neither to the right or the left and ignored the stares of passersby as she made her way to the dinning hall. Savannah only briefly noted the live entertainment at the front of the room. She purposely tuned out the piano and singer and concentrated on the whispers she could hear all too well. Her hearing had sharpened, become more acute. Trying to ignore the gossipers, her eyes scanned the room for Nicklos, but landed instead on her stepmother and Tim.

Tim's hands roamed freely over Nina's body, his lips covered hers in a feverish kiss, but his eyes were locked on Savannah. After countless seconds, he unapologetically broke the kiss and sauntered toward Savannah. Nina, panting, followed him and stopped short behind him. Savannah disliked Tim the moment she met him. She'd never tried to hide her resentment of his relationship with Nina.

"I think it's time we end this feud, Savannah. For Nina's sake. Why don't you dance with me?"

Savannah felt an odd sense of déjà vu at the seductive quality of his voice. Tim turned to Nina and said, "You don't mind, do you darling?"

“Not at all.” But Nina’s eyes told a different story.

Savannah took Tim’s proffered hand and let him lead her to the floor amidst the other dancers. Heat rippled throughout her body and she began to feel intoxicated. “Surrender yourself to me, Savannah.” The room began to swirl. Savannah couldn’t breathe.

“Who are you?” she managed.

“Your destiny. Join me.”

“What have you done to me?”

Tim’s hand slid down her bare back to her skirt, and he allowed one finger to dip beneath the cloth. “I’ve done nothing. You were born thus. It just took twenty-five years to awaken your powers. Now, they will be mine.”

She voluntarily exposed her neck to him, but thought of Nicklos and pushed him away.

“He’s nothing.” Tim’s voice was provocative. “He can’t truly love you.”

“No. He does. I felt his love.” Savannah tried to clear her head of the cloud that had descended upon her mind. Somehow Tim was invading her mind, her body, her senses. Fighting temptation was so hard. It’d be so much easier to just... surrender.

“No. Not truly. He is your slave. Sworn to do whatever your heart desires. You want him to love you, but it’s not real.”

Tears stung Savannah’s eyes and threatened to fall. “That’s not true.” But she was already melting into Tim. If what he said was true, she had no reason left to fight his luring song.

Tim dipped his head to her exposed neck. Savannah closed her eyes, but felt herself being pulled out of his arms. She opened her eyes, expecting to see Nicklos. Instead, she saw Nina’s angry glare. The stinging slap across her face was enough to pull her out of her grogginess.

“You slut,” Nina advanced on Savannah, but Tim caught her raised hand in his more powerful one. He whispered something into her ear. Nina’s eyes became glassy. She nodded and left the room.

“Now. Where were we?” Tim attempted to pull her back into his arms.

“I was just leaving.” Savannah’s voice was strong, stern.

Tim reached out for her, but she pulled away. “No,” she said defiantly.

Tim involuntarily retreated a few feet. “Savannah. Wait.” His voice was alluring, but was no longer worked on her.

“You heard her, Hektor,” Nicklos said from behind Savannah. She stiffened, but didn’t turn. “She said ‘no.’ Amiathea are protected by Artemis. You can’t touch her against her will.”

“I’ll be back for you, Princess.” Tim vanished, but no one else in the room seemed to notice.

Savannah shuddered as Nicklos drew her to him. “You resisted.” His breath was hot on her neck. “I’m proud of you.”

“What are Amiathea? Who’s Artemis? Why did he call me princess?” She pulled away from Nicklos despite the heat burning her body.

“Come with me.” Nicklos took her hand and led her to the upper deck. The stars were shining bright and the moon was full. He led her to a secluded bench and motioned for her to sit. He knelt in front of her.

“Savannah,” he said finally. “The man you know as Tim is an ancient. A vampire named Hektor. He’s a half-blood but because he is descendant of the oldest family of vampires, he considers himself royalty. You...” Nicklos took a deep breath, then continued. “Savannah, *you* are royalty. A descendant of Artemis, the huntress, goddess of the moon.”

“Okay, Nick. You’re really starting to scare me. Artemis isn’t real.”

“Until last night, you didn’t think vampires were real, either,” Nicklos pointed out.

“Even if I did believe Artemis was real, wasn’t she supposedly a *virgin* goddess? How can I be her descendant?” Savannah tried hard not to laugh. Or cry.

“Not *supposedly*, sweetheart.” Nicklos’ voice was as calm and seductive as it always was in her dreams.

She wanted to give him everything. Her body. Her heart. Everything. He hadn’t asked her, and deep inside, she knew he never would, but she *wanted* him to bite her.

“Artemis was a virgin goddess when the Greeks worshipped her, but when she fought for Troy, she fell in love with a Trojan soldier. She hid her affair, her daughters,

from everyone. She destroyed her brother's prophets who discovered her secret, so no stories were ever told of the Amiathea." He paused to let all of it sink in. "Hektor called you Princess because that's what you are. A vampire princess. You hold powers the other vampires, like Hektor and his females, want to possess."

"I have no powers," she whispered, shaking her head.

"Yes. You do. Powers of flight, shape shifting, and other powers that few vampires possess, but there's one ability you and I have that other races of vampires don't possess. The ability to walk in the sun. Other vamps believe that if they drain you, they inherit your powers," Nicklos explained.

"And in order to get my powers, they must bite me." Savannah shuddered at the dark look in Nicklos' eyes when he nodded his confirmation.

Chapter Seven

“Nicklos, Tim said...”

“Hektor,” Nicklos corrected.

“Okay. Hektor said you are my slave. Is that true?” Savannah’s heart pounded in her chest and she felt nauseous, but had to know.

“Yes. I took an oath to protect you when you were eighteen.” Nicklos sighed as if he knew what this line of questioning was leading to.

Savannah stood and walked to the railing. Without facing him, she said, “Is it true you surrendered everything to me when you took that oath? Even your emotions?”

“Savannah, let me explain.”

Nicklos was already crossing toward her but was stopped short by Aaron’s voice. “Am I interrupting?” Aaron strode up to Savannah confidently and handed her a glass of red wine.

“Not at all.” Savannah needed a distraction. Up until an hour ago, she’d been determined to find Nicklos and set things right. To make him love her. Now, she knew she could do just that. Which presented a major problem. *It’s not really love if you have to force someone to feel it.*

Niceties were exchanged between the two gentlemen, but Savannah didn’t register what was said. She sipped her wine and allowed Aaron to lead her away from the man her heart wanted more than anyone else. She’d rather face her past with Aaron than ruin a future with Nicklos.

Nicklos watched Savannah leave with Aaron with a knot in his stomach. His feelings told him something wasn’t quite right. Or, was his uneasiness caused by the fact that Savannah was purposely walking out of his life?

Damnit, Savannah. We belong together. Why don’t you remember?

A vision of their shared dream flashed across his inner eye. Nicklos punched the railing. *I’ve been gone too long. She’s in love with someone else now. She’s been with Aaron for over a year and had planned to marry him. There’s nothing more I can do.*

Nicklos shimmered into invisibility and took flight.

* * * * *

“Wow. I got you. God, Savannah. You’ve only had one glass of wine. No one’d take you for a heavy drinker, that’s for sure.” Aaron lifted Savannah effortlessly and carried her to her stateroom. “There you go,” he soothed, laying her upon her bed.

“Aaron? What’s wrong with me?” Savannah’s speech was slurred. Her lips were numb, and her vision was blurred.

“Nothing, darling. Why’d you ask?” Aaron’s smile was nothing shy of vicious.

“Aaron? What’ve you done to me?” Savannah’s eyelids fell, but she forced them back open. She tried to sit up, but couldn’t make her body do what she wanted it to do.

“I’ve given you something to help you sleep. To help make you more ... susceptible to my friend’s advances,” Aaron said.

Savannah wanted to scream out. To call for help. But the words wouldn’t reach her lips.

A light breeze swept in through the window. Savannah heard a familiar giggle. She didn’t have to open her eyes to know who the owner of the voice was. Cierra.

“I didn’t believe you could capture her,” Cierra said with a slow, seductive Southern drawl. “I’m impressed.”

“Me too,” another female voice said. “But, how do we reward him?”

Savannah heard a struggle. Aaron’s screams. Savannah forced her eyes to open. Both women were on top of Aaron. Blood ran down his neck and chest. He had stopped struggling. His breaths were faint.

Her eyes fell closed again and when she finally forced them to reopen, Aaron was staring into nothingness and the women were gone.

Chapter Eight

“Let me bite you, Savannah.” Hektor’s voice was pure seduction. Savannah’s first instinct was to say yes. She felt his hands on her calves. He ran his hands up her legs, pushing her skirt up as he massaged her. Her body shivered.

“That’s it.” His voice was a husky whisper. “Surrender to me, Savannah.”

“No.” She breathed, but her words weren’t as forceful as she hoped.

“Why not, dear? No one is standing in our way now. Aaron’s dead. Nina’s dead. Nicklos is gone.” He lifted her hips and slid her panties down. Slowly, he slid his hands down her legs and removed them completely.

“Nina’s dead?” Her voice held a dreamlike quality.

“I gave her a compulsion to jump into the ocean. She complied. She will bother you no more. Surrender to me. No one else stands in our way.”

Savannah could tell that he was trying to send her a impulse as well. She couldn’t let him. She forced herself to focus on everything else he’d said. *Aaron’s dead*. Yes, she knew that. What else?

“Nicklos? Gone? No.” Savannah didn’t believe him. They were in the middle of the ocean. How could Nicklos be gone?

“He flew away right after you left. I watched him go.”

Hektor’s breath was hot against her neck. He kissed her neck, her ear, her cheek. She hadn’t the strength to fight him. “Flew?” she managed finally.

“Nicklos is a vampire, remember? He can fly.” His lips never left her skin.

Tears sprang to Savannah’s eyes. How could he leave her? And, if he did, why should she resist Hektor now?

She’d never felt so alone in her life. She’d mourned her dear mother and missed her horribly, but her father had been there to mourn with her. He’d never let her feel alone. After her father’s death, she’d felt empty, but Aaron had been there and Nina.

Nina had been different then. Before she met Tim, or rather Hektor. She’d really loved Gregory.

Savannah had also felt a strength she hadn't understood at the time. Now she realized what it must've been. Nicklos. He'd watched after her always. He'd given her strength when she needed it. He'd loved her. How could he be gone? How could he give up on her so readily?

"Surrender to me." She felt the compulsion again, warming her, relaxing her. Hektor's voice was a soft caress. Why shouldn't she surrender? Wouldn't giving herself to Hektor be better than living a lifetime alone?

She opened her eyes and caught another glimpse of Aaron, lying in a pool of his own blood. She remembered the women, holding him down and draining the life out of him. She didn't want to be like them. She didn't want to be like Hektor.

"No. Don't touch me." She gave a mental push and Hektor struck the wall across the room.

Hektor straightened and popped his neck. "Why do you try to fight me, Savannah? Why do you want to resist?"

"I don't want to be like you." She panted, wishing she could find the strength to stand up and defend herself.

Hektor seemed to glide across the floor towards her, as if he hovered rather than walked. "You're already like me, Savannah. You've already tasted blood, have you not?" He settled back down onto the bed beside her.

No. He was wrong. She'd never drunk blood before. Then a memory flashed in her mind. The wineglass Nicklos offered her. The cut on his arm.

Oh, dear Lord, he was right! She vaguely remembered taking Nicklos' blood into her body. Needing his blood to regain consciousness.

"No. I didn't know it was blood. I'm not like you."

"Whether or not you knew you were taking blood is a moot point, my dear. You need blood to survive. You are weak because you have not fed. I can see the thirst in your eyes. Take my blood into your body, Savannah. You'll feel much better," Hektor offered her his neck.

She ran her tongue across her lengthening teeth. She wanted to comply. To lose herself in the moment. She wasn't sure if it was his relentless insistence, her own thirst, or a combination of the two, but she felt an overwhelming desire to bite him. She felt his

blood pulse against her lips. She heard a corresponding heartbeat in her ears and didn't know if it was hers or his.

"No," she said weakly. "I'm not like you."

"Surrender to me, Savannah. You're too weak to do otherwise."

Savannah felt herself slip out of control. Her mind called out for Nicklos, but no sound escaped her lips.

"No." She gave a mental push. She couldn't force her eyes to open, but she heard him hit the wall. She heard his sinister laugh.

Instantly Hektor was right back on top of her.

"Savannah." Nicklos' voice was strong, but Savannah couldn't tell whether she was dreaming or not. Was he in the room or in her head? "Fight him."

She gave another mental push. Hektor's form flew from her momentarily. Immediately, however, Hektor's body once again covered hers, his foul breath at her throat. It was then that she noticed how cold his skin was. He'd tried to hide it, forcing his body to become warm, but like the Lamiae he was cold.

Not like Nicklos. Not like her. She and Nicklos were different.

"You're one of us, Savannah. Join us." Hektor's seductive whisper nauseated her.

"No." Savannah didn't know if the word ever escaped her lips. She was slipping into sleep. She wouldn't be able to fight him much longer.

"Back off, Hektor. The lady said 'no'."

Nicklos!

Hektor's weight was lifted from her. She heard a struggle. Who was winning? Her eyelids refused to open.

She heard Hektor's sinister laugh. Savannah's heart raced. She feared for Nicklos, but could not find the strength to get up. She desperately needed blood. She tried to force the overwhelming thirst from her mind.

"What are you going to do now, slave? You can't use your powers unless you're defending her. How are you going to defend yourself?"

A crash, as if someone had been thrown against the wall and the mirror had fallen to the floor ripped through the room.

No! Savannah cried out inwardly, but no sound escaped her. She winced at the memory of this morning's dream. She'd hurt Nicklos so badly. He'd asked her to release him of his oath. Was it that simple? Could she return his power to him so he could defend himself against Hektor?

"No," she heard herself say, though she didn't know how she found the energy. She opened her eyes. Nicklos' eye met her own. "Nicklos, I release you from your oath. I return your will to you. Defend yourself."

She closed her eyes because she couldn't take the pain in Nicklos' eyes. Again, she'd hurt him. She wasn't sure how, but she'd hurt him.

The struggle continued. Nicklos screamed in pain. What was happening? She willed her eyes to open, to no avail.

"Die, Nicklos," Hektor panted.

"You first, you son of a bitch!"

Savannah opened her eyes in time to see a silver dagger fly into Hektor's chest. The scream that escaped him wasn't human. Her eyes closed, and when she reopened them, Hektor was dust. All that remained of the once powerful vampire was his cape and shoes.

Chapter Nine

Savannah dreamed of Nicklos. She was younger. Seventeen or eighteen. Carefree. No Aaron. No Hektor. Just she and Nicklos, without any guilt. Without any regret.

“Savannah, wake up.” She knew it was Nicklos’ voice. Still, she didn’t want to wake up. She wanted to stay here.

“Savannah, please.” She hated hearing the anguish in his voice, hated knowing she was the cause. Reluctantly, she pulled herself from her dream.

“How long have I been asleep?” Her speech was slurred and she would’ve laughed if she hadn’t been so sad.

“Twelve hours. It’s after noon. Please wake up.” Seduction lingered on every syllable, but she could tell he wasn’t purposely trying to seduce her.

“Why are you still here, Nicklos? You’re free.” Savannah raised herself onto her elbows and looked into his sad, dark eyes.

“Do you want me to leave?” He seemed to be holding his breath, waiting for her response.

“I don’t want to force you to do anything you don’t want to do. I don’t want to make you feel anything that’s not genuine, Nicklos.” Tears welled in her eyes and threatened to fall. She closed her eyes and sank back onto the bed. She wasn’t about to let him see her cry. Not again.

“Savannah, don’t you know why I took the oath?”

Savannah only shook her head at his question. She didn’t dare open her eyes.

“God, Savannah. Don’t you remember when you were younger? Don’t you remember us?”

Laughter drifted through her mind as if from a dream. So unsubstantial, yet somehow so real. His laughter. Her laughter. The memory came into focus. His face sobered, but the smile remained. His kiss was soft, yet passionate. They were so in love. So happy. Oh, to be in his arms like that just once more. If only it were real!

She opened her eyes and a tear fell down her cheek and onto her pillow. “That’s just dreams. Just dreams. Right?”

His eyebrows arched, his forehead wrinkled, and he closed his eyes. “Savannah, it was real. I wish you could remember it. How it felt. That’s why I took the oath. I wanted the connection with you. A mental connection allows you to call me when you need me. I’ve always been here, baby. Always.”

“You volunteered to be my slave? But why?” She shook her head and closed her eyes over another falling tear. Another memory drifted across her closed eyelids. She was in his arms again, but this time there was no laughter.

Her mother had just died and he was comforting her. “*I won’t let them hurt you, too, Savannah. I swear it!*” the dream Nicklos whispered in her ear.

“To protect you. I didn’t know who was after you. There was no other way,” he touched her cheek, wiping away her tears.

“But you left. And my memories of you were erased. Why?” If the memories were real and the love they felt was real, Savannah couldn’t understand how he could give it up without a fight.

“It was a trade-off. I had a choice to make. I could either stay with you and worry about your safety, or I could undergo the binding ceremony. The spell would make you forget me until you came into your powers, but I’d know immediately if you needed me. And before you ask, no, I wouldn’t have been able to protect you. No more than your father was able to protect your mother.”

Nicklos’ voice dropped to a whisper when he mentioned her father and mother. The look in his eyes told her he wasn’t trying to hurt her, but needed her to know the truth. She needed to know the truth.

“You know who killed my mother?” Savannah gasped, choking back more tears threatening to fall.

“No. We never discovered her murderer, which was why we guarded you with our lives.” Savannah didn’t have to ask to whom *we* referred. She knew he was referring to himself and her father.

“And this ceremony gave you a connection to me? You could read my thoughts?” Savannah stood and crossed to the window. Nicklos had apparently brought her back to her own room.

“Not your thoughts, really. Not unless I was in the same room with you. But I could discern your feelings no matter where you were. If another vampire put a compulsion on you, I’d know immediately.”

“Which is why you came to me the other night when those women ...”

Nicklos placed his strong, steady hands on both of her shoulders. She relaxed instantly. “Yes, Savannah. You needed me to help you escape their lure.”

“Those women killed Aaron.” Savannah wasn’t sure, but she thought she felt Nicklos wince. Did he still believe she was in love with Aaron?

“Aaron had served his purpose as far as they were concerned.” When she turned questioning eyes on him, he sighed. “Listen, Savannah. I don’t know if you’re ready to hear this, but Aaron ...”

“Never loved me,” Savannah interrupted. “You’re going to tell me that he was sent by Tim, uh Hektor, to get close to me.” She should feel betrayed, angry, sad, something at her sudden realization concerning Aaron. She didn’t need Nicklos’ confirmation to know it was the truth.

Nicklos’ voice was barely a whisper, as if he was afraid of her reaction. “When I removed Aaron’s body from the stateroom ...”

Savannah’s head jerked up and she pierced an inquiring eye on him.

“If I left him there, everyone would panic, realizing a murderer was onboard. The ship will not dock for two more days. It would be two miserable days for innocent people who are in no immediate danger. Hektor’s dead and his ladies have already flown to a new master.”

Savannah nodded her understanding and Nicklos continued, “I noticed Aaron had a small tattoo in the bend of his left hand between the thumb and forefinger.”

She nodded again. Yes, she’d seen the tattoo, a tiny dragon that twisted so that its tail resembled a serpent. What did it mean?

“It’s Hektor’s mark. It was placed there to be easily concealed, but easily revealed if necessary. If another vampire were to question Aaron, he could extend his

left hand, as if attempting to shake the vampire's hand and show where his allegiances lay."

Savannah sat in silence many minutes. She felt Nicklos' eyes on her. He was giving her the space she needed, although Savannah was pretty sure he misinterpreted her reasons for needing space. She wasn't mourning Aaron, as she suspected Nicklos assumed she was. She mourned, instead, the loss of her parents, the loss of Nicklos, and most especially the loss of herself.

Her life had been a lie. Who she thought she was had been a lie. She understood the lie had been told to protect her, but that didn't change the fact that she no longer knew herself.

She thought of Nicklos, remembered the time they'd shared before her mother's death. She'd been pure then. She'd been happy then. Could his feelings for her the girl she used to be transfer to the woman she was now?

"Nicklos?" she said finally.

She had his immediate attention. She searched his eyes and found hope mingled with fear. Was he afraid of losing her?

"The connection's gone now, Savannah. I don't know what you're feeling or what you want me to do. You have to tell me. What is it you want, Savannah?"

"I want," she swallowed the lump in her throat and plunged on before she lost her nerve. "I want you to love me, Nicklos. But not because of some binding spell. I want it to be real. Can you love me like that?"

The concern seemed to melt from his eyes, replaced by a look she recognized as if from a dream. A look that said, *I love you* better than words ever could. She waited breathlessly, silently pleading with him to say he could love her.

He pulled her into his arms and whispered, "I always have."

Special Thanks to all who entered their wonderful poems for this contest!

The judges had a hard time with this decision, believe me. Finally, we determined that Ms. Sawyer's poem was the best fit for the theme and characters of this book.

We also wanted to acknowledge and congratulate the other two finalists in this contest. As I said, it was a tough choice, and I know readers will enjoy these two poems as well!

Hugs,

Trista Bane

Untitled

By Susy Q

Drain me of this passion. Quench this burning fire,
That burns deep inside me, of otherworldly desire.
I know you want my spirit, You want to claim my soul.
Love me madly deeply, Take my body whole.
Ravish me completely, I give myself to you.
Touch me, feel me, please me; this passion is all too new.
Let us make destiny, let us seal our fate.
Take me now forever and claim me as your mate.

* * * * *

Tell Me

By: Nicole

Tell me your secrets, your whims, your fancies.
Whisper to me the decadence of your soul.

Show me your desires.
Your blood sweet as wine.
I am intoxicated and enamored.
I am yours only yours.
Soft light, your soul glows and combines with the light of the heavens.
I watch our love dive and soar.
No one can touch us.
No one can touch you.
I am here, always here.
Where you go, I go.
Where you fall, I fall.
Where you soar, I soar too.
To the heavens we climb as we climax.
Together, you are mine.
I am yours. Take me, trust me, love me.
Your skin against my skin.
Your lips against my lips.
We drink from the cup of eternity.
In each other's arms we will stay.
Hold me. I long for your touch.
Kiss me and let me know forever.
Desire, seduction, promise, protection.
Take me, love me, breathe me in.
Whisper to me the sonnet of your heart.
Melt with me until we are one.
You, only you, complete my soul.
Trust me, love me, teach me.
Tell me your secrets, your whims, your fancies.