

# Shadow Whispers

## Lexxie Couper

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## Prologue

The traffic moved like thick sludge along Oxford Street, the sticky heat of the late summer day causing cars and motorists alike to simmer. Tempers rose, horns blared and in his old car with its finely tuned engine, Adrien Cole watched his ex-girlfriend.

Watched her walk along the busy Sydney sidewalk. Watched her firm ass cheeks bunch and flex under the faded denim of her shorts.

His cock twitched, a painful rod of eager steel too long deprived of the velvet rasp of her tongue. A low groan rumbled in his chest but Adrien kept his hands on the wheel. In fifty metres, Tess would be home.

He had to get to her first.

The forgotten shack deep in the scrublands two hours north awaited them. Prepared for their arrival. The double bed dusted with blood-red rose petals, the scented candles strategically placed. The heavy chains oiled and bolted to the concrete slab.

His obsession boiled like a vat of sickly sweet molasses churning in the cauldron of his skull. It was time to make Tess understand who she belonged to. Who she would *always* belong to.

He shot a look at the empty seat beside him. Plastic cable-ties just waiting to lock around Tess's wrists and ankles. Cloth and chloroform in easy reach in case she put up a fight.

A slow grin pulled at his lips and his cock began to pulse with deprived greed. It was time to bring their "break" to an end. For good.

Eyes back on Tess, Adrien watched as she approached the intersection. Watched her turn the corner and disappear.

*Now!*

With a quick glance over his shoulder he planted his right foot, the powerful engine launching the unassuming car into motion.

After Tess.

A car blasted its horn as Adrien cut across the congested traffic; a woman squealed as he crossed the sidewalk. He didn't stop.

Sixty-two steps and Tess would be at her front door.

The undercarriage of the car ground over the gutter as, with a sharp turn, he left the sidewalk and turned into Tess's quiet street, leaving Oxford Street behind him.

There she was. Almost at her small apartment.

The street was empty, the sidewalk clear. The sun sat low on the horizon behind him. When Tess turned, its blinding rays would be in her eyes.

Adrien's cock sprang into ravenous life again.

*Too fucking long deprived...*

His foot flattened the accelerator.

With a savage growl, the car, so long straining at the leash, leapt forward after her, closing the distance in a heartbeat.

He screeched to a halt and jumped out of the car before Tess even turned.

"Hi, Blossom." The words were a whispered breath as they slipped from his lips.

Eyes the colour of dark chocolate locked on his. "Adrien?" Recognition shattered to terror, seconds before he smashed his fist against her finely sculptured jaw. A jaw he had kissed a thousand times.

A jaw he would kiss a million times more.

She dropped into his snatching arms, limp.

Pliable.

Adrien's smile grew wide as, with an action he'd practised for the last six weeks, he threw her into the backseat of his car. Slamming the door shut, he moved to the driver's side, calm, relaxed and totally at ease. If anyone looked out their window, all they'd see was a bloke in a baseball cap climbing into an early model sedan. Nothing more. Nothing to remember.

Dropping into his seat, Adrien snapped on his seatbelt, shooting Tess's inert form a quick look in the rearview mirror. "I've missed you, Blossom." He ran his tongue across his bottom lip, throat dry, balls aching. "You have no idea how much."

With a silent chuckle, eyes lingering on her long, bare legs, cock a straining shaft of hot steel in his jeans, Adrien pulled back out into the street.

Straight into the path of an oncoming RV.

The last thing he saw before the RV tore him in half was Tess's eyes -- wide and dazed, meeting his in the rearview mirror.

Then nothing.

## Chapter 1

He crossed the floor of her bedroom as he had every night for the last five: eyes burning with desire, cock a rigid pole pointing straight up from the dark thatch between his thighs. Moonlight filtered through the open window, playing over his almost pearlescent flesh and casting his face in shadows.

From her bed, body quivering with hungry anticipation, Tess Darcy watched him, pussy sodden with aching lust.

Muscles seemingly sculpted from smoke coiled and flexed as he approached her, fluid and steely all at once. The contradiction drove her wild and her cunt fluttered.

Her fists knotted in the tangled bed sheets, breath growing short and shallow with each step he took closer. A gust of hot wind blew through the window, kissing her already fevered flesh until she shivered with wanton pleasure. She pressed her thighs together, squeezed her pussy tight and bit back a moan.

How could she be this aroused? When even a summer night's breeze almost brought her to climax?

Eyes that glowed with consuming passion raked over her and Tess gasped.

That was how. Her lover.

Silently he reached the foot of her bed, gaze burning a slow path over her tingling limbs, caressing her breasts, belly, cunt. Cool fingers, long and impossibly strong, curled around her ankles and as his hypnotic eyes held hers captive, he thrust her legs apart.

Wet tension flooded Tess's cunt. *Oh, God, yes!*

With fluid ease and undeniable purpose, he placed one knee and then the other onto the mattress, the corded columns of his legs pushing hers further apart, exposing her throbbing sex to his inspection.

Waves of hot want crashed over her. She arched her back, lifting her ass from the bed to meet her silent lover's descending mouth. Immediately his tongue found her swollen clit, like the cool kiss of spring mist on her flushed sex. She bucked, wanting that tongue, that mouth, to devour her. "Jesus! That's sooo good!"

The fingers around her ankles relaxed -- just enough to let his cool hands slide up her calves to her knees, forcing her thighs even further apart. The tongue on her cunt stabbed between her hot nether lips, lapped at the fresh cream coating them. It flicked the small nub of flesh until Tess flung her head from side to side and rammed her hips harder to his face.

Tension mounted. Her cunt contracted.

The tongue rolled over her clit, plunged into her slit and back to her clit again.

"Oh, fuck me!"

Her cry was hoarse. Raw.

The cool hands at her knees slipped to her thighs, icy on her fevered skin. Pushed her wider. Wider. Granting his insatiable, masterful mouth complete and absolute access to her clit, cunt and ass.

Tess's fists pulled on the sheets, tore them from the mattress. Juices flooded her sex.

*Lick.*

"Oh..."

*Flick.*

"My..."

*Stab.*

"Fucking..."

*Suck.*

"God..."

*Bite.*

"Yes!"

Just as she knew she could take no more, that she was on the edge of the precipice ready to fall, her lover stopped. Lifted his head. Eyes like ice stared into hers, boring into her soul.

“Tease!” she gasped.

He didn’t reply. He never did. Instead he straightened, knees still firmly planted beside hers, and wrapped one large hand around his rigid cock, stroking its bulbous head with his thumb.

Tess sucked in a breath, the squirming tension in her pussy impatient. That massive, solid cock would soon be embedded in her, stretching her to the very limits. Meeting his burning stare, she caught her breath as he moved closer, cock lined up with her spread cunt.

She was ready.

Ready to be consumed.

To be --

The raucous laugh of a lone kookaburra shattered the night.

With a gasp, Tess sat bolt upright, heart hammering against her chest, nostrils flaring. She stared about the room, her eyes darting from one dark corner to the next. Nothing but unpacked boxes, stacks of books and deep moon-cast shadows.

Alone. She was alone.

A growl of frustration tore from her throat as she dragged her hands through her tousled hair. A dream. Just another goddamn dream! Outside, the insomniac kookaburra screeched with mirth again.

Biting back a curse, Tess dropped back onto her bed. “Fuck.” Her mutter fell heavy in the silence of the night, as did her angry sigh. Five nights! Five nights in a row of the most explosive sex of her life, only to awake every time to discover it was just a dream. She stared up at the still unfamiliar ceiling of her bedroom, craving release.

Five nights.



She shook her head, pulse leaping into frantic flight at the tickling strokes of her hair on her neck. "This is getting ridiculous!" Jumping from the bed, she crossed to the window, gripping the sill with hands that still trembled from sexual tension.

The distant flickering lights of Kangaroo Creek dotted the blackness, like some higher being had thrown down a handful of stars on a velvet blanket. Tess snorted. Stars on velvet. What a romantic way to describe the weird little country town. She'd only been in the Creek, as the locals so eloquently called it, for four months now but already she knew there was little romance to it. Outback Australia might seem like a wild adventure, full of exotic life and breathtaking scenery, but for a big city girl trying to find herself again, it was just plain lonely.

*But isn't that what you wanted? Isolation?*

A shiver rippled up Tess's spine, standing the hair at her nape on end. Yes, that was exactly what she wanted. After the hell she'd been through -- the nightmare of Adrien's obsession -- the thought of letting *anyone* close to her again made her stomach roll and her chest ache. But seriously, when she'd dropped a dart onto a map of Australia to find her new home she hadn't expected to end up in a town of less than a thousand, all of whom seemed to exist in some weird plane of reality. She may be from the Big Smoke, but that didn't make her ignorant! Did it?

*You can tear the nation's politicians to shreds with your words, you can spit out insults in five different languages, you can operate both a PDA and cell phone while negotiating peak-hour traffic on Pitt Street, but you can't handle four months living in the country without blaming the people?*

Letting out a sigh, Tess turned from the sight of Kangaroo Creek and dropped back onto her bed. So much for being a ball-busting, woman-of-the-world journalist. Less than half a year away from Sydney and she was going crazy.

A feather-light tickle traced across the line of her bare shoulder up to the angle of her jaw and she shivered, nipples pinching into rock-hard peaks of longing. Not just crazy, sex-starved as well if the last five nights were any indication.

Another delicate tickle played across her skin, drawing a lazy line up the long, hideous scar that ran from the base of her spine to just below her right armpit, a reminder, as if she needed one, of Adrien's legacy. She sighed and the fingers moved again, down the line of her stomach to her mons.

*Tessss...*

Tess frowned, peering into the dark bedroom behind her. "Jesus, woman," she muttered. "You're so frustrated you're hearing your name in the bloody night, now!"

But that didn't stop her body quivering with need. A need she'd denied since standing at Adrien's grave four months ago. Nothing could heal the scars her ex had left on her heart, her soul, not even his death.

After six months of repeated reconstructive surgery, days of painful physiotherapy and too many hours spent with a too intense psychiatrist, she'd been released from hospital an entirely different woman -- body *and* soul -- from the one found almost dead in Adrien's twisted, crumpled car. Standing at his grave, staring at his headstone had eased the pain. A little.

*Adrien Cole.  
With tears and love.  
Devoted eternally to life.  
1971 - 2006*

Bitter hate had welled through her, hate and anger so strong she'd almost thrown up there and then. She'd left his grave and had never been back, moving to Kangaroo Creek the week after.

Yet that hate had never left her, and somewhere along the line it changed, manifested itself into a simmering odium directed solely at herself, and her sexual needs.

Adrien's obsession with her had hung entirely on his driving need to possess her body. To fuck her anytime, *every* time he wanted. Since then, the thought of sex, of being on the edge of sexual ecstasy, sent cold shivers of fear through her. Except in her

dreams. In her dreams, she went to the edge. Went to the edge and fell over in the arms of her silent dream lover. Willingly. Wantonly.

Would she ever be capable of that raw, instinctual connection again?

She didn't think so.

A deep sigh escaped her and she closed her eyes, trying not to think about the slight throb beating along her scar. *One day*, she thought, feeling sleep creep over her again, languid and seductive. *One day I'll find it.*

Until then, there were always her dreams.

And, as though he'd been waiting, her silent, ethereal lover was there. Reaching for her. Eyes burning with a hunger that sent ripples of eager anticipation through her sleeping form.

*Tessssa...*

He hurried away from the window, heart pounding. Shit. She'd almost seen him.

Grass, deprived of water by the blistering Australian summer, crunched under his feet, a brittle sound that seemed to echo across Tess's backyard and into the surrounding bush. He closed his eyes for a second, biting back a curse. She could have discovered him and then all sorts of hell would break loose. He had to be more careful! What had he been *thinking*?

A hot ball of squirming tension rolled through his gut as the memory of Tess at her window filled his head. Long dark hair dishevelled, sublime body free of clothes. Chocolate-brown eyes ablaze with a light he longed to see directed at him.

*You were thinking with your dick.*

He shook his head, moving deeper into the night-shrouded bush. No, he wasn't thinking with his dick, though he desired her more than he should. For too many nights to bear he'd watched her toss and turn in bed, unable to do anything to release her of her dreams no matter how much he wanted. As the sun kissed the sky each morning, he knew without doubt he was falling deeper and deeper into trouble. But it *wasn't* his

cock driving him. It was his heart. That small, vital organ so revered by poets and songwriters alike.

He shot a quick glance over his shoulder, finding the hulking shadow of Tess's home without any difficulty, despite the darkness. The pull on his soul to go back there, to enter her house, her bedroom -- to enter *her* -- was strong. Stronger than strong. A commanding desire almost too compelling to deny. To feel his hands, his *flesh* on her velvet-soft skin, to feel her heat permeate his being was a sin he'd willingly forfeit his existence to commit. But he couldn't.

Picking up his pace, he moved fluidly over the underbrush, getting as far from Tess's home as he could. The bush devoured him, startled animals scattering in his path. A distant part of his mind marvelled at their intuitive reaction; they *knew* what he was. He could sense it. But it mattered little.

Because the rest of his mind sensed Tess more.

He couldn't take it anymore. Sinking to his knees, he tore open his trousers, wrapping trembling fingers around his rigid cock and pumping its length with brutal force.

Every creature had needs. Even those with damned souls.

He would pay for it later, would burn in Satan's heinous hold, but he couldn't stop. As long as Tess Darcy was in his mind, his need consumed him and he could deny it no more.

As hot cum burst from the end of his cock in white spurts, arcing through the dark night to land in the dirt at his knees, Jared Pierce closed his eyes and held his breath.

He'd been sent to protect her, not covet her. But covet her he did.

May the Almighty have mercy on his libidinous soul.

## Chapter 2

Kangaroo Creek's main strip, Hill Street, was one mile long and as flat as they came. At the east end sat Divine Intervention, a small Christian bookshop run by the very shy Miss Kerry Peters, that seemed far busier than any Christian bookshop should. At the other end, where Tess now stood, sat the Creek's one and only library, ruled over by the silent Ms. Robyn Jones. Tess had been assured by one of the locals that the librarian could in fact speak, but in the six or so times she'd entered the sombre building she'd seen no evidence of it.

To Tess's cynical journalist's mind, there was a perverse irony in the sun rising each day on the word of God and setting each night on the words of just about everyone else. It was as though Faith and Knowledge faced off each day in the small rural town. The fact that Divine Intervention had at least triple the number of souls crossing its threshold every day made Tess a little uneasy and, for some reason, sad.

"Morning, miss."

The gruff male voice shattered Tess's reverie and she started, snapping her attention to the man in flannel and dirty jeans before her. She gripped the strap on her camera tighter, glancing around. The sidewalk was empty, except for the man. "Can I help you?"

The man -- obviously a farmer in town for supplies -- raised his eyebrows as if something was truly amiss. Then a smile stretched his mouth, revealing the most awful set of mail-order dentures Tess had ever seen. "Aaah." He nodded, pale eyes bright with sudden understanding. "You'd be that city sheila living in the old Milat house. Up from the Big Smoke lookin' for a sea-change." He gave a dry, somehow snide chuckle. At his ankles a skinny kelpie sniffed its balls. "No sea here, miss. Only miles of dead dirt and dead sheep."

Tess blinked, a shiver wanting to run up her spine. She shoved it down, wondering instead how the farmer would react if she told him about the live rats running the streets of Sydney. Or took his picture.

"The bush ain't kind to city folk, miss," he went on. "Specially pretty little things lookin' for something that ain't there." He tipped her a wink, the action both misogynistic and creepy. "You should go back to Oxford Street. It's safer there."

That chilled shiver tried to shoot up Tess's back again. How did he know she'd lived off Oxford Street? What did he mean by safer? Grinding her teeth, she gave him a flat stare. "Actually, I'm just about to go and shoot some of those dead sheep you mentioned." Lifting the heavy camera in her hand, she jiggled it about pointedly. "Would you like to --"

*"Merwyn Sullivan!"*

A sharp female voice cracked the tension, cutting Tess's comeback short. "Stop harassing Ms. Darcy and get back to work. Your cows aren't going to slaughter themselves."

The farmer flinched and his dog took off down the street with a high yelp, almost knocking Tess over as it fled. Casting her a dark look, eyes resentful and surly, the farmer shoved past her. "Stupid fucking mutt!"

"Please excuse Merv, Ms. Darcy." That coolly sharp woman's voice sliced through the air and Tess turned around, finding a tall, striking redhead standing behind her on the steps of the library. Eyes the colour of freshly cut grass studied her, missing nothing. Tess cocked an eyebrow, holding back a grin. *So, the librarian has a voice after all.* "The bank is on the verge of taking his farm," Robyn Jones continued, poised as ever, "and he's developed a dislike for anyone from the city."

Tess gave the woman a slight nod. "It's perfectly okay, Ms. Jones."

The librarian raised one of her own finely arched eyebrows. "Please, call me Robyn. And it's not okay. Not after everything you've been through before moving here." She paused. "Not after what Adrien put you through."

Tess's blood turned to ice. How did she know that? No one in the Creek knew about Adrien. Virtually no one in Sydney did either. She had no family to speak of and she hadn't told any of her friends or colleagues he'd been stalking her.

Cool, green eyes regarded her, seemingly seeing everything. "There's something I'd like to show you, Ms. Darcy. Something Mr. Jenkins, the postmaster, delivered to my hand this morning. Will you join me in my office?"

A stinging jolt shot up the length of Tess's scar and she flinched, the powerful desire to shout "No!" sitting heavy on her chest. But the reaction made no sense, even if it was from her gut, which she trusted without question. What could the woman possibly show her that was worse than an obsessed ex-boyfriend planning her abduction and rape?

*What indeed?*

"Well?" Ms. Jones asked with a cocked eyebrow.

Holding Robyn's green gaze with her own, Tess mounted the stairs, heart pounding in a way it shouldn't.

Cool, dry air folded around her as she stepped into the old, stone building, shocking her sun-flushed skin. Her nipples pinched into rock-hard tips, sending shots of electricity through her body as they rubbed against the coarse cotton of her tank top.

"This way, Ms. Darcy."

Robyn moved deeper into the dim library, spine straight, stride long and sure. She did not turn to see if Tess followed her past the rows of floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, a fact Tess found both irksome and annoying. For a defiant moment she considered leaving, if for no other reason than to bring the haughty librarian down a peg. But then the sound of Adrien's name falling from Robyn's perfectly red lips echoed through her head and she began moving. She wanted to know how the librarian of a small town in rural Australia knew her dead ex-boyfriend's name. And her cold curiosity had nothing to do with once being a journalist.

The distinctive smell of books, dusty and somehow old, hung on the air, growing stronger with each step Tess took. It was a smell she usually enjoyed. Up until ten

months ago her life had revolved around reading and research; she'd spent more hours in Sydney's Public Library than she could remember. Today however, it made her stomach turn.

She frowned at the thought. *Why?*

A scraping noise, soft and almost inaudible by the overhead air-conditioner's rumble, sounded on Tess's left and she snapped around.

Nothing.

Scowling, she shook her head. What was wrong with her?

*Teeesssss...*

Ice ripped through her veins and she froze. Did she just hear --

"Ms. Darcy? Tess?" Robyn turned, casting her a cool look. "Is everything okay?"

Suppressing another scowl, Tess gave the librarian a slight smile. "Everything is fine, Ms. Jones. Tell me, is the library always so empty?"

Robyn bristled. "The good people of Kangaroo Creek find their entertainment in various places, Ms. Darcy. You of all people should know that." And with that very ambiguous statement, she turned, disappearing between two bookshelves.

Tess's eyebrows shot up. "What the *hell* does that mean?"

A sudden soft pressure played down her spine and across her hips -- over the bareness of her thighs. Unexpectedly, an image of her silent dream lover filled Tess's mind and her nipples tightened into painful peaks of hunger. Eyes closed, she sucked in a swift breath.

*Teeesssss.*

A cool breath kissed her neck. Insubstantial fingers slid to her pussy.

"Ms. Darcy?" Robyn's confident voice sliced through the library from somewhere behind a bookshelf.

Tess's eyes flung open. She looked about herself, all too aware of the pounding beat in her chest, the damp heat between her flushed thighs. What the *hell* was she doing?

"Ms. Darcy?"



"I'm coming!" Tess called back, cheeks hot. *Well, almost.*

The librarian's office was almost as gloomy as the library itself. Robyn stood behind a massive mahogany desk, shrouded in shadows, impatience rolling from her in disapproving waves as she watched Tess enter.

"I did not take you for a dawdler, Ms. Darcy. Surely life in Sydney is not so bereft of good manners?"

Tess arched an eyebrow. "Let's not discuss manners, Ms. Jones. You know why I'm here. What do you know about my ex?" For a moment Tess thought the woman was going to argue, but then she pulled open a drawer in her desk and withdrew a large yellow envelope, handing it to her without comment. "What's this?" The paper felt cold and rough under her fingers -- and somehow alive. She wanted to drop it. Almost as much as she wanted to tear it open.

"It's for you."

With a barely suppressed growl, Tess dropped her stare to the envelope, turning it over in her hand.

**Mrs. Tessa Cole**  
**c/- Kangaroo Creek**

The words were scrawled in thick black Magic Marker. As if the writer had been in a hurry. A stinging jolt of heat shot up the length of Tess's scar and her breath caught in her throat. *Tessa Cole*. Adrien's surname. Someone was playing a sick joke. A very sick joke. Anger curling through her, she glared hard at the waiting librarian. "*Who sent this?*"

Utterly composed green eyes met hers. "Obviously someone who knows more about your past than anyone in the Creek does."

Anger turning hot, Tess ripped open the envelope, catching the small, glossy photo that fell from its torn wound with a hand so close to trembling she felt sick. She lifted it. Turned it.

Stared at it.

*Oh, God. No.*

The photo had been taken atop the Sydney Harbour Bridge's South Pylon, the blue of the spring sky so clear it almost hurt to look at it, the blindingly white arcs of the Opera House in the distance behind. It had been only their third date. Both she and Adrien were smiling, but even now, Tess could see an uncomfortable light in her deep, brown eyes. And a burning possessiveness in Adrien's ice-blue ones. His arms were curled around her so tightly she could almost feel their tenacious pressure on her ribs now, his body pressed to hers so closely she felt the sear of his hips and jutting cock on her ass, even in the cold library's office.

A finger of ice traced the line of her scar.

Two days after ending their relationship, she'd torn this very photo in two. She'd never given Adrien a copy. So where had this one come from?

The finger slid back down to the base of her spine and she shivered.

Mouth dry, heart hammering, she returned her attention to Robyn. "Thank you for delivering this to me, Ms. Jones." Her voice couldn't have sounded more relaxed. In control. Blood roaring in her ears, she gave the woman a smile as she slid the photograph back into its envelope. "I would be quite upset if it were to be lost." She folded the envelope once and pushed it into the back pocket of her denim shorts, then hitched her camera further up her shoulder. "Now I hope you don't think me rude, but I want to catch the morning sun on Tin Hut Gully before the flies come out."

Without waiting for a reply she left, the envelope burning into her ass cheek with each step she took.

If Robyn Jones had a problem with her big city manners, she could just stick it.

\* \* \*

Except for three dry eucalypt logs and some tinder, the fireplace sat empty before her. Outside, the day was turning into a mean, Australian summer scorcher, the midday sun and gale-force westerly sucking moisture from the air and flesh alike, leaving everything dry, brittle and hot.

Tess held a cigarette lighter in one hand. Lighting a fire in this hot weather was lunacy, but so was the existence of the photo in her hand. A photo she *knew* she'd destroyed over a year ago.

She'd kept the bloody thing in her back pocket for the entire morning's shoot, too aware of it for her own peace of mind.

Now, three hours later, she was about to destroy it. Again. Once and for all.

Afterward, she would have a bath. Her scar ached and for some reason she felt dirty, a feeling having nothing to do with the dust flying around in the hot summer wind. She was used to filth; it came with the territory of being an investigative political journalist. But filth from her own life needed to be scoured away. Now.

With a flick of her thumb, the cigarette lighter flared into life. Face composed, pulse steady, Tess leant forward and touched it to the bottom edge of the creased photo.

The glossy paper smouldered for a second, as if denying the hungry desire of the flame. Black smoke curled from its blistering surface. The smiling faces trapped there began to bubble, twist. As she watched, they began to melt and then it was alight.

Heart pounding and throat tight, Tess dropped the burning paper into the fireplace. "Once and for all."

She closed her eyes, suddenly completely drained.

And that was when he came to her.

Her silent dream-lover.

*Am I asleep?* The words fell from her lips without a sound.

Smooth, velvet-cold hands brushed across her shoulders, up her neck into the heavy curtain of her hair. The piercing gaze that drove her so wild night after night raked over her face. A smile pulled at his mouth, a mouth that could do wicked things to her. *Had* done wicked things to her.

With gentle pressure, barely more than the beat of a butterfly's wing, he pushed her backward until she lay flat on the floor before the roaring fire.

*Roaring?*

A frown dipped Tess's eyebrows, even as she gazed with rapture up at her lover's descending lips. How could it be roaring? She'd only placed three logs in --

His mouth crushed hers as his hands grasped her breasts.

Even through the material of her tank, she felt their cool surface brand her flesh. Her nipples hardened immediately, aching for more, sending bolts of squirming electricity straight to her already squeezing cunt.

His tongue plunged into her mouth, licked at her teeth. He tasted like mist. He felt like steel. The massive organ between his thighs rubbed at her wet sex, sopping the crotch of her shorts with the pearlescent beads of pre-cum on its tip and her own greedy juices. She pushed her pussy into its long, rigid length, wanting to feel it pressing on her swollen nether lips.

The hands on her breasts moulded to their shape, fingers playing over her flesh, despite the material of her shirt and bra.

*What shirt? What bra?*

The blazing heat from the fire touched her bare limbs, and with a moan of pleasure, Tess realised she was naked. Naked and flat on the floor with her lover's hands on her breasts, worshipping her taut, aching nipples, and his throbbing, engorged cock sliding over the pulsing bud of her clit.

*When did that happen?*

Did it matter?

The mouth on hers was all that mattered, the hands on her breasts, the fingers on her nipples. She arched her back, hungering for greater contact. His body was cool and she was so very, very hot.

Sucking her tongue deeper into his wet mouth, her lover moved his knees between hers, pressing her flatter to the floor with a bulk that somehow felt lighter than smoke. His hands left her breasts and she whimpered in protest, sensing, rather than hearing his responding chuckle. As his mouth continued to drink from hers he pulled on her thighs, inching his palms down her legs until she locked them around his hips. The action thrust his cock harder against her cunt and a moan rolled in her throat as

scorching bolts of white lust shot straight to her clit. Fuck, he was good. A master craftsman, and she was his creation -- a being forged from cold despair to become an object of burning, wanton desire.

Hands scouring up his back, she tangled her fingers in his short hair and yanked up his head, dragging the tip of her tongue up the bowed column of his neck, luxuriating in the gelidity of his smooth skin. He tasted like the night.

His Adam's apple moved under her lips as an inaudible groan sounded in his throat. The response flooded her cunt with wet heat. She knew he wanted to pleasure her, but rarely did he let her know how much she pleased him. The times he'd come to her in her sleep he'd taken her to blissful release without once demanding anything of her -- *the perfect dream lover* -- but now his consuming desire had moved beyond the blaze in his eyes, the fervour of his actions. Now she knew she affected him too.

She weaved her lips up his neck, let her teeth nip at his earlobe as her fingers moved to the hard pebbles of his nipples. His cock twitched as she dragged her thumbs across each and she felt new beads of pre-cum squeeze from its hot head.

*The only warm part of his body...*

The thought flittered through her befuddled brain, unimportant.

Ignored.

God, she wanted this so much. Wanted to have him fill her, fuck her until the end of time. Wanted so much for it to be more than a dream.

As if he heard her, the silent man lifted his head, staring at her with eyes that burned. *It is more, Tess...*

The soundless words moved from his lips to her ears and Tess gasped. "You spe --"

He didn't let her finish. With a thrust that was both brutal and total, his cock plunged into her willing pussy, so deep she felt its bulbous head press the wall of her sex. "Oh, God!" She threw back her head, sinking her nails into his shoulders as he drove into her again. Yet even as she did, her hands seemed to grasp nothing.

*You're going mad!*

Balls, heavy and hot with desire, slapped against her ass as he penetrated her again, again, again. Yes, she was going mad. A clear case of sexual insanity.

The fire roared higher. Devouring oxygen.

Lush lips fell on her neck, like ice on her sweat-slicked shoulder. Teeth nipped at her fevered flesh as a cock that grew larger and larger with every thrust punched deeper into her pussy, invading not only her sex but her being as well. Filling her. Consuming her.

Possessing her.

The cold thought sliced through her pleasure-fogged head and her heart froze.

*No!*

An angry shout rocked the room -- her soul -- in a silent voice somehow familiar.

*Adrien?*

Eyes snapping open, Tess stared up at her lover. And saw the ceiling. "What the..."

Rising up onto her elbows, she looked around the empty lounge room, squinting at the bright midday sun flooding through the windows. Shameful disgust rolled through her. Christ! What the fuck was wrong with her? Not only was she dreaming during the day, her mind was so messed up her one source of release now sounded like her dead ex-boyfriend?

She dropped her head into her hands, feeling stupid. Stupid and empty. Opening her eyes, she stared blindly at the barely charred logs. She needed to get her act together. She couldn't go on like --

Something bright and colourful in the fireplace stopped the thought.

Something that shouldn't be.

Her heart a pounding hammer in her chest, Tess leaned forward, trembling hands lifting the "something" from the scattered ashes.

The photograph of her and Adrien -- more perfect and spotless than it ever had been. Mouth dry, blood cold, Tess stared at it. "What the fuck is going on?"

## Chapter 3

With something very close to fear licking through her veins, Tess thumped her fist on the closed library door. "Ms. Jones? I know you're in there, Ms. Jones!"

Silence.

Tess pounded the door again, hot pain shooting up into her shoulder with each fierce blow. "Ms. Jones?"

"She's not in."

Barely suppressing the urge to scream, Tess spun around.

Mervyn Sullivan stood at the bottom of the library's steps, mangy kelpie at his feet. That misogynistic grin was back on his face but his eyes seemed to burn with a fervour that made Tess's hair stand on end. "Finished photographin' those dead sheep, have ya?"

Eyes narrowing, Tess crossed her arms. "Yes, now I thought I'd photograph a dead farm. Know of one?"

Merv tilted forward and spat. "City folk." With a snarl he walked away, dog scurrying after him, leaving Tess alone again. She blew at her fringe. It was obvious Robyn wasn't coming out, even if Merv was wrong and she was still inside. Gnawing on her bottom lip for a second, she wondered what to do next. She sure as hell wasn't going home yet.

*You scared?*

A dark frown pulled at her eyebrows. Scared of what?

*A photo you know you destroyed that suddenly exists again?*

Her frown grew darker. "Don't be stupid."

*Or the fact your dream lover suddenly sounds like your ex-lover? Your dead ex-lover?*

The chill that raced up her spine made her shiver, and Tess bit back a curse. She was tired, lonely and still emotionally raw, that's all. Anyone would be after going through what she had. Puffing at her fringe again, she started walking east, ignoring the squirming tickle in her gut and the aching pulse in her scar. The library might be closed, but the post office sure as hell wouldn't be. If she couldn't talk to Robyn, she would talk to Mr. Jenkins instead. Someone, somewhere in this town knew something -- and that was far too many "some's" for Tess's liking.

The post office, however, *was* closed when Tess, skin slicked in a fine sheen of perspiration from the baking summer sun, stopped before it. Dragging fingers through her hair, she shook her head. "You've got to be kidding me!" What in the name of God was going on? She was a suspicious person by nature -- all journalists had to be -- but this was getting ridiculous. She was beginning to think there was a conspiracy. "Fuck!" Forcing down another squirming twinge of unease, completely flummoxed, she turned around.

And crashed straight into a brick wall. A brick wall with long arms and large, warm hands that curled around her biceps. A brick wall with a deep voice like smoke and whiskey. "That's some colourful language you have there."

Tess looked up into the brick wall's -- no, the *man's* -- face. "I'm sorry, I didn't see you there."

Eyes the blue-grey of Sydney Harbour on a stormy day studied her from beneath a shaggy mop of honey-blond hair. "Obviously." A lopsided grin pulled at lips both lush and strong. "Unless this is just your way of getting me to notice you?"

Tess's pulse leapt into startled life and she sucked in a sharp breath. Not because of the firm way the stranger gripped her arms -- the first skin-to-skin contact she'd experienced since leaving the hospital -- but because of the damp heat stabbing into her pussy due to the intense way he looked at her. As if he could see into her soul.

An image flashed into her mind. His tall, muscular body pressing hers against the post office wall, their hips aligned, his hands on her breasts, hers on his ass, his mouth on her neck, hers open with ecstasy.



She sucked in another breath. *What is with you, Darcy? You're turning into a nympho!*

Contempt and unease shot through her chest and she took a step backward, slipping from his warm grasp. "I hate to deflate your ego, but I've never seen you before this very second." She gave him a cool stare, even as her pussy fluttered. "So the chance of me wanting your attention is zero to none."

The grin on his lips stretched wider. "Ah, but now you *have* seen me," he said, a mischievous light in his eyes, "are you sure that's still the case?"

Tess's pussy pulsed again, bringing with it a warm sense of need in her sex she hadn't experienced with a man -- a *real* man -- before. She suppressed a growl. Whoever this guy was, her body responded to him, and that could only lead to a whole lot of complications.

Eyes icy, she cocked an eyebrow. "Very sure." She spun on her heel, walking back toward the library.

"Pity," the man said behind her, warm laughter in his voice. "I'll watch out for you though. Just in case."

"There is no case," Tess threw over her shoulder as she continued walking away. But no matter how hard she tried, nothing stopped the squirming waves of hot excitement that rolled through her cunt at the idea of his "in case," or the tight pressure that gripped her chest.

Where her lonely, aching heart sat.

\* \* \*

How was he going to talk his way out of *this*?

Speaking to her? *Touching* her?

How many *more* rules could he break before he was flung to Hell?

The flesh of Jared's palms still tingled from contact, infusing his fingers and arms with a desire more powerful than life to feel her again. Breathing was no longer an option, but if he had the capacity, he knew each breath he took would smell of her, delicate and clean like new jasmine on a spring morning.

Balling his hands into tight fists, Jared watched Tess move west along Hill Street, still feeling the hot agitation ribboning through her energy. From the first second he'd felt Tess's life force many months ago, he'd sensed her pain, like shards of ice that cut into her very being. Yet today it was different. Something had happened to her.

Something bad.

A flash of anger shot into his chest, but he shoved it away. He wasn't here to get angry. Getting angry had landed him in all sorts of trouble already. An eternity of purgatory awaited him thanks to getting angry. Bitter guilt churned in his gut and he shook his head. His wife was dead thanks to getting angry.

Like a charge of blinding colour, a whirlwind of images shot through his head. Millie and a naked man writhing in the throes of ecstasy in Jared's bed, Millie's face red with hate, screaming she no longer loved him, pounding her knotted fists against his chest. Her lifeless body on a cold, metal slab, his own fists gripping the steering wheel of his car, a hairpin curve, a blood-splattered shattered windscreen.

Twenty years ago, he'd died in a car accident, wracked with guilt. Time meant nothing in death, but Guilt knew Time very well. Guilt and Time were the best of friends. Twenty years of suspended existence, awaiting Judgement, meant twenty years of stinging guilt. If he hadn't shouted at Millie, if he hadn't told her to leave, would she still be alive today?

Would he?

With a growl he forced the hideous, unwanted memory away. All too soon he'd be punished for the sin. Reliving it now served no purpose. He had one opportunity for redemption and one only -- watching Tess Darcy, protecting her from the Depraved One. He needed to keep his head clear.

*No chance of that now, Jared. Not after feeling Tess's soft warmth under your hands.*

A soft sigh escaped him. He hadn't orchestrated their contact today, but that wouldn't save him if the Powers chose to exert punishment. Touching was completely out of the question.

Tess's delicate scent tickled at his soul and his cock flooded with forceful hunger, growing long, stiff and rigid with need. He shook his head in disgust. If he were called back right now his hard-on alone would see him in Purgatory so quick even Lucifer would be surprised to see him. Lust was not permitted in a Watcher's soul. Ever.

With a scowl, Jared turned away from the enticing vision of Tess striding along Hill Street. He needed release.

Eyes closed, he concentrated on his next destination...

...and appeared inside the cool main room of Divine Intervention.

"I need to see Mistress K," he said to the female attendant unpacking a cardboard box half-filled with books called *A Kleenex for Mary*.

The woman lifted her head from the task and cast him a steady look. "I'm sorry, sir. I think you have the wrong t--"

"It's okay, Kirralee," a tall, willowy woman in a long, white caftan and faded jeans said, stepping out through a concealed door behind the counter. Gold-chipped hazel eyes locked directly on Jared and an arrow of blistering heat speared straight into his already swollen balls. "I will see this one." Those eyes flicked over him and her shaggy chestnut hair seemed almost to glow. "Though how *anyone* sees him," she continued in an off-handed manner, "is a mystery."

With a tilt of her head and a tiny smile, she turned and disappeared back through the door, the sheer white caftan floating behind her like smoke.

Jared stood still for a moment. He shouldn't be here. He should be doing what he was sent to do. Watching Tess.

At the very thought of her name, his balls grew tighter, his cock a rigid length of twitching heat in his jeans. *No matter what you do at this second, Jared, you're still going to burn when your time in Kangaroo Creek is finished. And after touching Tess today, just watching her from now on is going to be damn near impossible!*

Bunching his fists, he stared hard at the black opening beckoning him. He had to clear his head. He needed to focus.

Without looking at the hovering Kirralee, he rounded the counter and followed the woman with the arresting hazel eyes down the stairs, into the darkness below.

He was going to burn, there was no escaping it. But he *needed* to feel pain right now to clear his head.

For Tess's sake.

And his own.

\* \* \*

Robyn looked up from the slim tome on her desk, green eyes revealing no hint of emotion as Tess swung through the office door. "I see you made a new friend this afternoon, Ms. Darcy."

Stopping dead before the large mahogany desk, Tess crossed her arms. Her body was still reeling from the sizzling contact with the stranger on Hill Street, but she forced it under control -- just. "Who sent the photograph?" she demanded, fixing Robyn with a cold stare.

"A very strange man," Robyn continued, as though Tess hadn't said a word. "He appeared in Kangaroo Creek almost a week before your arrival. No one knows where he lives or what he does."

Mouth dry, Tess crossed her arms. "Who sent the photograph?"

"He is rarely seen and speaks to no one. Some say he is a ghost."

Tess narrowed her eyes, angry impatience rising in her gut. "The person who posted my photograph is a *ghost*?"

Robyn's perfectly arched eyebrows shot up. "Heavens no, Ms. Darcy. I'm talking about the man you met on Hill Street today. Jared Pierce."

It was as if reality shattered. One second Tess was standing before the Creek's librarian, the next she leant against a brick wall, the hot sun baking her naked, sweat-slicked flesh as the blond man with the stormy eyes -- *Jared* -- thrust his savage tongue into her willing mouth and his impressive cock into her eager, dripping --

"Ms. Darcy?"

Tess shook her head slightly, staring at Robyn. Why was her pulse racing?

*Jared Pierce.*

Her pussy contracted at the name, making Tess frown. Damn it, she needed to get her life back in control. Answers. That's what she needed. She gave the librarian a level look. "Who sent me the photograph?"

"I don't know what you mean."

Robyn's face was expressionless. Almost. To Tess, she wore the practiced mask of a politician caught out in a lie. Planting her palms on the desk -- ignoring the dampness still pulsing between her thighs -- she leant forward and stared straight into the woman's sharp green eyes. "Yes. You do."

Chair scraping, Robyn shot to her feet, giving Tess an indignant glare. "Let me be very clear, Ms. Darcy. I do *not* know who sent you the photograph."

Tess squared her jaw. "You're lying."

Robyn snorted. "To what gain? You are nothing to me. Just a big city slicker lost in the world. A woman too scared of her past to live her future. Too blinded by fear to see reality."

Staring at the librarian, Tess went cold.

*Too scared of her past... Too blinded by fear...*

The words echoed in her head, blunt, cutting and -- God, help her -- true? A silent gasp slipped from her lips. Was that really it? Was she just too afraid to move forward? *Christ, Darcy, was the photo and Adrien's voice all in your fucked-up mind?*

A sick, dead weight fell in her stomach and she dropped into the chair behind her, the strange, erotic vision of seconds ago forgotten. Self-disgust and shame crashed over her and she pressed her palm to her forehead. "Christ Almighty."

For a moment Robyn didn't respond. Then, feet silent on the wooden floor, she was standing behind Tess, cool fingers resting lightly on Tess's shoulders. "I know you've been through a lot, Ms. Darcy."

Tess flinched at both the unexpected contact and words. She tossed the woman a quick look. "*How* do you know?"

There was no answer. Instead, Robyn began to gently work the tense muscles in Tess's shoulders. Waves of intoxicating relief rolled over her, consumed her. With each squeeze and dig of the librarian's artful fingers, Tess felt more and more relaxed. It was as though the woman had tapped into the source of Tess's anguish and torment. She closed her eyes, suddenly languid. She should be demanding answers, not receiving massages from duplicitous public servants. That's what she came here for. Answers. She should be...

Strong fingers moved closer to her neck, kneading the dip between shoulder joint and collarbone. Currents of blissful release leached into Tess's centre and she moaned, an image of Jared Pierce filling her head. "Please..."

The word fell from her lips, a soft supplication unlike any Tess had uttered before.

The fingers on her shoulders slipped lower, skimming the neckline of her tank top. A ripple travelled Tess's flushed skin and her nipples grew taut just as the soft curves of Robyn's breasts brushed the back of her head. "Oh."

Tess's gasp filled the silent room, followed by her low moan as Robyn's fingers feathered over her aching nipples.

"I want to make you feel better, Tess." Robyn's voice sounded a long way away. Deep. Empty. "I want to make you feel" -- fingers closed around Tess's breasts and squeezed -- "me."

Bolts of electricity shot through her body, her cunt. She sucked in a swift breath, back arching as her pussy flooded with unexpected moisture.

"Feel me, Tessa." The words caressed her skin, her senses, as the fingers on her nipples twisted each hard tip.

*Oh, God.*

Giddy, Tess leant back in her chair. She wanted to open her eyes. To stand and leave...

*no you don't...*

*...but couldn't.*

Her breasts were cupped again, squeezed to an almost painful pressure. She squirmed in her seat, her cunt...

*Hungry...*

...fluttering anew with the need to be filled.

With a cruel yank, she was hauled backward, her shoulder blades smashing against the chair. "I can fill you, Tessa," said a hollow male voice as cold, strong fingers curled around her neck. "I can fill you with *this*." Something long, hot and rigid as steel rammed against the base of her skull; a cock she knew well.

Very, very well.

\* \* \*

Body still burning from the unplanned brush with Tess Darcy, Jared descended the stairs leading to the dark basement of Divine Intervention. Every fibre in his being seemed charged with life, scorching life that turned his impossible existence into a kind of torture he'd gladly suffer for eternity if there were a chance of touching her again.

But that was forbidden. He knew it was just as well and he had to accept it.

A muted yellow light suddenly flared up at the bottom of the stairs, and Jared snapped still, staring at the woman waiting in its flickering glow.

*May the Almighty save me.*

Gone was the Earth Mother in jeans and flip-flops who had appeared behind the counter upstairs; in her place stood a creature of sinful pleasure in skin-tight black latex and thigh-high stiletto boots. "You've kept me waiting, slave," she said, her husky voice floating up to him. The braided cat-o-nine-tails in her hand flicked around her calves as she took a step forward, looking up at him with eyes that radiated power and control. "You must be punished for that."

Eyes fixed on Mistress K, Jared continued down the stairs, the blood in his aching hard-on hungry for a woman he must never have, his soul yearning for a release he needed more than life.

*May the Almighty forgive me.*

\* \* \*

The cool fingers on her neck slid up to her jaw, cupping the sides of her face as the hot cock rubbed against the base of her skull.

*How can that be?*

“All I’ve ever wanted to do was fill you,” Robyn murmured, the timbre of her voice playing over Tess’s flesh as her fingers moved to her temple, tangling in her hair.

She didn’t sound like a man anymore, just a woman consumed by passion.

*And the throbbing organ?*

Robyn rolled Tess’s head in her hands, and angular hipbones pressed at her skull. Not the male appendage swollen with lust Tess had imagined seconds earlier.

*You’re going mad, Darcy.*

Soft lips fell on her neck, warm and utterly feminine, yet at the same time completely familiar, as if she’d felt them traverse her flesh before. They nibbled a path up to her earlobe, drew it into a mouth wet and warm. Teeth closed down on it, sending shots of tension into Tess’s pussy and she wiggled in her seat, her clit filling with blood.

She’d never been touched like this by a woman before. She’d written an article about lesbians in positions of political power, but the research hadn’t included such hands-on info --

A sharp tug on her hair yanked her head backward, giving the marauding lips greater access to her neck. A moan reverberated in Tess’s throat and her nipples pinched tight, wanting to be touched, squeezed. Sucked and bitten.

*“With pleasure.”*

The librarian’s voice rasped in Tess’s ear, strangely androgynous.

Her shirt was suddenly torn apart, the chilly air-conditioning falling on her hot skin as brutal hands reefed aside her bra, catching her breasts as they tumbled free. She pushed harder into their squeezing grasp, her heart hammering and her breath shallow. Fuck, she’d never been so turned on.

*But who is touching you? Who is doing --*



“Does it matter, Tessa?” Lips pressed to her ear as one hand skimmed down to the waistline of her shorts. “Just enjoy it. Just let me do what I want to do and everything will be as it’s meant to be.”

The command was hypnotic. Tess tried to pull a deep breath, but there seemed to be no air in the room. Fingers of liquid ice slithered between her flesh and the denim of her shorts, through the silken thatch of her pubic hair until they found her clit, sheathed between the sodden folds of her sex.

“You are wet for me, Tessa,” the deep voice gloated. “You cannot deny it. *I* made your juices flow.” As if to prove the words true, the fingers plunged into her cunt.

Tess arched in the chair. “*Yes!*”

There was a low chuckle and the fingers in her cunt wiggled. “*Yeeesssss.*”

Exquisite tension rolled through her, arcs of sizzling bliss that left her moaning. She ground her sex harder against the plundering fingers, wanting more. Pulse hammering, she grabbed at the sides of her chair, needing to anchor herself to something. “*Christ!*” Her cry filled the small room.

The hand on her left breast squeezed and mauled, grabbing at the heavy swell of flesh with savage pressure. “*Mine. All mine.*” The fingers in her cunt wriggled harder, stroking and pressing. Delving deeper and deeper. She could feel their presence at her cervix even as there seemed to be rapturous pressure on her G-spot.

*Impossible.*

But true. They delved and buried. What felt like a wrist bone ground against her clit and raw pleasure erupted through her body. “*Oh, Christ Almighty! Yes!*”

Teeth sank into her neck so hard, black spots of pain blossomed in her head and she gasped in dark ecstasy. “*Mine, Tessa,*” a voice growled, dark and commanding. The hand on her breast closed harder, trapping her nipple between two knuckles. “*Always all mine.*”

She writhed in her seat, every fibre of her being vibrating with unadulterated rapture. Christ! She was going to explode! “*All yours.*”

Invading fingers filled her cunt, pinched her clit and -- *how?* -- pressed at the puckered opening of her ass. "Who? To whom do you belong?" the breathless voice panted in her ear. Undeniably male. "Say my name." Undeniably obsessed. "*Say it!*"

An image filled Tess's head, unexpected in its clarity, vivid in all its power. Every muscle in her body contracted at its reality and she threw back her head, oblivious to the engorged cock ramming against the back of her skull. Her nails tore to the quick as she gripped the chair, the name of the man in her head bursting from her lips to rend the air with each screamed syllable. "*Jared!*"

"*No!*"

Adrien's bellow filled the office. Enraged. Furious.

Seconds before Tess was flung across the room into the far wall.

## Chapter 4

Mistress K circled him, the spiked heels of her boots rapping out a trip-hammer beat on the stone basement floor.

Jared curled his fists tighter around the leather straps pinning his arms to the St. Andrew's Cross, watching the woman pass before him, waiting for the next lash from her whip. Every sweat-drenched second that passed was torture.

"Who are you thinking of, slave?" Mistress K's husky voice played over his flesh, cutting deeper than the spiked tips of her cat-o-nine-tails ever could. He looked at her through the tangled mess of his hair...

And saw Tess Darcy.

*Almighty, help me!*

*Crack!*

The whip bit into his torso and Jared arched in hot, exquisite pain. His cock -- already straining with rigid need -- twitched, thrusting straight up as if demanding attention.

"Who are you thinking of, slave?"

Jared ground his teeth, meeting her gold-chipped stare. The question had to be answered. "You, Mistress K."

Blistering pain flooded into Jared's body as the whip bit into his flesh again, almost as consuming as the elemental pleasure flooding into his balls. The stainless steel teardrop ring the mistress of Divine Intervention had placed around his cock, minutes after securing him to the cross, dug into his balls and perineum, intensifying the hungry pressure gnawing into his being.

If he were to drop his head, would he see his haunted reflection in its highly polished surface?

Metal rapped against stone as Mistress K moved to stand behind him, scoring a red line of angry flesh from stomach to spine with one long, manicured nail. "Who are you thinking of, slave?"

Jared's ass cheeks squeezed tight. "You, my mistress."

A soft chuckle sounded in his left ear a fraction of a second before his swollen balls were grabbed from behind in a dangerously snug grip. "Liar."

Pain blossomed into hot life between his thighs. Pain and dark, bitter pleasure.

Without permission, he closed his eyes. Tess Darcy filled the blackness immediately, naked and sublime, perched on the foot of her bed on all fours, gazing at him with heady desire in her deep-chocolate eyes.

His cock jerked, craving the sweet tightness of her cunt.

A low groan rumbled in Jared's chest and he ground his teeth. This wasn't working. By now the only thing in his head should be pain-laced lust for the Dominatrix. Tess should be a scoured-away ghost.

A humourless snort burst from his nose. Fuck, what an appropriate word. Ghost.

*She's not the ghost here, Jared.*

No. He was.

\* \* \*

Tess struggled to her feet, every bone in her body aching, the coppery tinge of blood coating her tongue. A sharp pain sliced at her left side with each breath she pulled, but she paid it no heed. Nothing existed except the woman standing on the other side of the office.

*Woman?*

Terrified disbelief ripped through her veins. She pushed herself upright, staring hard at Robyn. "Who *are* you?"

Robyn stared back, red hair crackling with electricity, bulging eyes ablaze with ice-blue rage.

*Ice-blue?*

"You know who I am, Tessa." The words passed through Robyn's lips, but they were not hers.

Tess's throat slammed shut and her heart froze. "Adrien?"

A slow, arrogant smile curled the librarian's mouth. Adrien's smile. "Did you really think death would keep us apart, Blossom?" His voice assaulted her -- deep, hollow and insidious. "I told you the day we met you were mine."

Robyn's body suddenly snapped into a violent arch, cutting the words short. And then she began to vibrate, faster, faster, until she was just a writhing blur somehow suspended from the ceiling -- defying gravity, defying reality. "*Get out!*" Robyn screeched, and it was the librarian's voice -- torn with furious fear -- that Tess heard. "*Get out!*"

But Tess couldn't move.

Unseen hands held her still. Unseen hands of ice that clawed at her breasts and curled over her mons. Terror sliced through her, cold and absolute. *God help me!* She stared at the writhing smudge of colour that was the librarian's body. *Help us!*

"*Get out now!*"

Robyn's cry filled the room, just as the room began to change.

The library office warped. Pulsed. The temperature plummeted, crystallising the sheen of perspiration on Tess's body into tiny beads of ice. Freezing.

She sucked in an icy hiss...

...and stood terrified in a dim, candlelit shack, surrounded by rusted corrugated steel walls that shrank toward her.

"*Mine!*"

Gone was the immaculate mahogany desk. In its stead stood a wide, metal frame bed, resplendent in blood-red silk sheets, copious pillows and four shiny metal shackles attached to a short length of heavy chain at each bedpost.

Tess shrank away, petrified. "Jesus Christ..."

And all the while the cold hands on her body continued to maul her flesh.

\* \* \*

Jared's cock grew harder.

"This should be for me, slave." Long nails sank into his bulging balls, and Mistress K gave them a sharp tug. "This hunger that boils your blood and fills your sac." She pushed on the teardrop ring's point, pressing it harder into Jared's perineum. He clenched his jaw, choking back a groan. "It should be my face in your head," she continued. "My musk in your nose... Yet it isn't." She pressed the cock ring again. Harder. "So whose is it?"

Sweat beaded on his flesh, ran down his torso and spine in chilly streams. The leather straps on his wrists and ankles creaked as his muscles tensed. He hadn't expected this -- this interrogation. He needed to feel pain right now, pain that sliced through his borrowed flesh to destroy the source of his desire. Yet, Mistress K knew more than she should. Knew how to punish him in ways he hadn't planned. Tess Darcy grew more and more absolute in his being with each exquisite bite of leather on his flesh, and the Dommeseemed to know.

He lifted his head and stared hard at the far wall, sweat stinging his eyes as he willed the image of Tess from his mind.

The hand on his balls moved, dragging five burning lines across his hipbone before leaving his flesh completely. A ragged gasp burst from Jared and his cock throbbed with aching need. His debasement may not be destroying his desire for Tess, but it sure as shit was making his body thrum with sexual power.

*Channel that power, Jared. The upcoming battle will soon begin. You need every weapon you can --*

Mistress K suddenly stepped in front of him, eyes locked on his. Long, slender fingers danced a wicked path up the line of his abs until they found his left nipple. She tugged on the tiny metal bar pierced there. "Who is in your head, slave?"

Hot pain flared across his pec, down into his gut and his cock twitched. He gritted his teeth, nostrils flaring. "You, my Mistress."

A slow smile pulled at Mistress K's almost black lips. "Liar."

Before Jared could react, she tugged on the nipple-bar again and white pain consumed him. His cock grew harder, longer -- a pulsing shaft of angry, defiant hunger.

Fingers wrapped around it and gave a brutal tug. "Tell me."

Wet heat licked through his veins as he stared into her face. "You, my Mistress."

His cock was pulled again, fingers strong and punishing. "Who?"

"You, my Mistress."

His body thrummed with need, every sinew and muscle burning with rapturous pain, his balls rising higher, swollen and aching for release. All it would take was one more wave of pain and he would erupt.

With Tess Darcy still in his head and soul.

Gold-chipped eyes bored into his as Mistress K ground her thumb against his swollen cockhead, sending a ripple of scorching pleasure through him. Smearing the beads of pre-cum leaking from his cock on his fevered flesh, Mistress K pressed her lips to his ear. "You will tell me, slave," she stated, husky voice smug and confident. "You will tell me who makes you crave so much." She dragged her thumbnail down the underside of his distended organ. "You will scream her name so loud Hill Street will shake," she commanded as exquisite, painful rapture consumed him.

*"The Almighty have mercy!"* Jared cried out, bucking against his restraints and Mistress K's punishing fist as cum gushed from his cock in arcing spurts.

"Who?" Mistress K demanded, pumping his organ, milking his desire with brutal strokes. "Her name, Watcher! Scream her name!"

*"Tess Darcy!"* Jared screamed, slamming his head back against the St. Andrew's Cross. *"Tess Darcy! For fuck's sake, Tess Darcy!"*

The Domme's fist squeezed tighter around his pulsing, spurting cock and she chuckled lowly. "Yes, Jared. I know."

\* \* \*

Savage fingers mauled Tess's breasts; unseen fingers that made the icy air feel like a furnace blast from Hell. A hollow laugh bounced around the engulfing shack, maniacal and triumphant. Something cold, wet and hard plunged between the lips of

her sex, seeking the centre of her being. *"Mine!"* Her clit was pinched -- hard -- and Tess yelped in terrified pain.

Seconds before red, red rage consumed her. *"No!"*

*"There is no 'no,' Tessa,"* an empty voice snarled, vibrating all the way into her churning stomach. *"There is only 'always'."*

Fury erupted in Tess's chest. Blood roaring in her ears, she glared at the writhing blur that was once Robyn Jones. *"Fuck you, Adrien Cole. You don't own me!"*

The hollow laugh started again. Louder. New hands joined those assaulting her, grabbing at her wrists and ankles, forcing her legs apart. *"Don't I?"* The force in her cunt drove deeper, as if to prove her wrong.

Venom scorched Tess's veins. Contemptuous venom. *"No, Adrien,"* she growled. *"You don't."*

Pincers of steel pinched her clit. Fangs of ice punctured her nipples. A tongue colder than death slid up the side of her face, from jaw to temple. *"Who does then, Blossom?"*

Like a sledgehammer of blinding colour, an image smashed into Tess's head -- a man with stormy eyes and a crooked grin. *Say his name, Tess Darcy,* a husky female voice seemed to whisper in Tess's ear. *Say it.*

*"Who owns you, Tessa?"* The fingers on her breasts curled into digging claws as Adrien's voice panted in her ear, the stench of rotten flesh invading her body with each word. *"If not me?"*

*Say it, Tessa. Say his name now!*

*"Jared Pierce!"* Tess roared, jerking against the cruel vaporous hands to lunge forward. *"Jared Pierce, you fucking bastard! Now go and fucking burn in Hell!"*

The air squealed. The shack shrieked.

Then, before Tess could blink, she was in the library's office -- fully dressed -- staring at a gasping Robyn standing opposite her.

Horrified green eyes stared back, their once sharp depths clouded with haunted pain and sickened clarity. *"Oh, God help you, child,"* the librarian whispered, shaking



her head. "I'm sorry." Tears streamed down her cheeks, cheeks once flushed with colour now whiter than white. "If I'd known I never would have let him in." Her voice cracked and she staggered backward, crashing into the photocopier behind her, head shaking more violently with each second. "I'm sorry, Tess. I should never --" A shudder wracked her frame and her eyes grew wider. "You'll never escape him. Not ever."

Tess stared, a chill seeping into her bones. "What do you mean?"

But Robyn cowered away, eyes terrorised, voice rising to a screech. "Not ever. Not even when you die! You belong to him. Always and always! Always and always and *always!*"

A sharp sob burst from Tess's throat. Heart pounding, she shot past the screeching librarian, out of the office, out of the library, into the baking heat of Hill Street.

And still she heard those hideous words: *Always and always and always...*

\* \* \*

Spent and drained, Jared collapsed against his restraints.

Christ. What had he done?

Mistress K leaned forward, her grip on his cock firm as she rolled her thumb over the creamy dribble of cum still leaking from its tip. "You are not solely responsible for your wife's death, Watcher."

Jared's eyes flung wide open and his spine snapped straight. "What did you call me? How do..."

"You are not the only condemned soul seeking redemption among the living, Jared Pierce," Mistress K said, gold-flecked eyes glowing with an enigmatic light. "But you are the only one to break *His* rules."

An image of Tess turned to face him in his head. Smiled at him. Held out her hands to him...

"Punishment will not purge her from your being, Watcher." The Domme's fingers slid from his cock, taking the teardrop ring with them. It clattered to the floor at their feet as she smoothed her palm up his torso, resting it over the heart in his chest

that shouldn't be beating. "Only death once more will do that. To maintain the Order of Creation."

Jared stared into her face, imprisoned more by her words than the leather straps still restraining him to the St. Andrew's Cross. "Death once more?" He swallowed at the tight lump suddenly in his throat. "Order of Creation? What does that mean? Who the fuck sent you? I'm already dead. How can I die twice?"

Mistress K's eyelids closed and she pulled in a deep, slow breath. "No more." Shaking her head, she stepped backward, fingers slipping from his flesh. "I've already said too much."

Fury, like molten lava, surged through Jared. He glared at the retreating Dominatrix, fists curled into rock-hard balls. "Too *much*?"

Mistress K's eyebrows dipped into a slight frown and she shook her head again. "Check your anger, Watcher. It's already condemned you to Hell. Don't let it destroy you now. When the battle begins, anger will be your enemy as much as the Depraved One you fight." With one long, last look, she turned on her spiked heel and walked toward the dungeon stairs, scooping up her cat-o-nine-tails as she did so.

"Wait!" Jared roared, jerking against his restraints. "I want you to tell me --"

"Go, Watcher." Her husky voice floated back to him as she stepped through a hidden stone door at the foot of the stairs. "I can do no more to help you."

"*Help* me?" Jared leapt from the cross and charged across the room, rage pounding in his ears. "How the fuck have you helped me?"

It was only when his fist smashed against the closed stone door, seconds after it slammed shut behind Mistress K, that he realised where he was; twenty feet away from the St. Andrew's Cross, free from its binding leather straps.

Straps the Dominatrix had not removed before leaving him.

Nostrils flaring, Jared snatched up his clothes. He'd never liked being played, even when he was alive. He liked it less now he was dead.

Shoving his legs into his jeans, he snarled silently at the concealed door. If he concentrated, he could "move" to Mistress K's exact location. Demand answers from

her. But if she too was a Watcher, she'd feel him coming. The last thing he needed was a spiritual pursuit through the dimensions. Christ! What would the Almighty do to him if that happened?

*You're missing an important part here, Jared. If she is in fact a Watcher, just who exactly is she watching? You?*

A dark scowl on his face, he jerked his T-shirt over his head. Before he faced eternal damnation, *someone* was giving him some answers.

Boots back on, he stomped up the stairs and through the door, bursting into the bookshop at the top. "You're wrong," he said, not looking at Kirralee as he stormed past her. "This is the right town."

Without slowing down, he walked through the glass entry door out into the street, a black grin curling his lips as Kirralee's shocked squeal shattered the hot air behind him.

Divine Intervention's door had been closed when he passed through, and he hadn't stopped to open it.

*Mine!*

The snarled taunt shot through Jared's head, so loud he almost collapsed to his knees.

*Who owns you, Tessa,* a dead voice growled in his head, resonating with triumphant malice, *if not me?*

Jared froze. The Depraved One. Speaking to Tess. "Fuck!"

A tsunami of terror smashed into him, cold and powerful. Tess's terror. "Fuck!"

Ice ripping through his veins, he closed his eyes, concentrating on Tess Darcy's life force. He had to get to her, fast, but he had no idea where --

*Always and always and always...*

Robyn Jones's voice this time. Screeching and maniacal.

Jared's eyes snapped open. "Bingo!"

Narrowing his focus down, he took a step...

...and appeared smack-damn directly in the path of Tess Darcy, sprinting away from the library.

The concrete sidewalk bit into his ass as he landed on it, Tess's elbows grinding into his ribs as she tumbled onto him.

But neither pain mattered.

He was touching her. Again.

## Chapter 5

Tess scrambled to her feet, staring at the man getting to his before her. Her heart felt like someone had pumped it full of liquid adrenaline, pounding so hard in her chest her breastbone ached. "Jared?"

Those grey-blue eyes she kept seeing in her head widened as his name slipped from her lips and an expression close to irritation flashed across his face. But he covered it quickly, giving her a lopsided grin. "See. Told you there'd be an 'in case'."

Robyn's voice still screeched in her head, Adrien's voice in her soul. Icy fear still gripped her like a vice, but at the sight of that grin on Jared's face, her pussy squirmed and her breath caught in her throat. *Christ, Darcy! Just get the fuck away. Now!*

Ignoring the maddening urge to throw herself against Jared's hard, lean body, to capture his mouth with hers and taste his heat on her tongue, Tess turned and took off across the empty Hill Street. *Where are the cars?* a distant part of her traumatised mind wondered. *The pedestrians?*

It didn't matter. She was getting away from the library, Robyn and Jared Pierce.

Except Jared didn't stay still. "Hey!" A warm hand wrapped around her biceps, bringing her to a jerking halt. "Tess? Tell me what's happened."

Spinning around, she yanked her arm free, glaring at him. "I don't know what game you and the librarian are playing, but it's not funny. Now leave me the fuck alone."

Jared's straight eyebrows pulled into a deep frown. "I'm not playing any game, Tess. I just want to --"

"How do you know my name, then?" Tess rammed her fists on her hips, fear rapidly being burnt away by anger. "Hmmm? Until today, I've never met you before,

but now I can't get you out of my goddamn h --" She stopped. *Chr-ist! What are you doing?*

Dragging in a deep breath, she shook her head, holding up a dismissive hand as she turned around again.

"I can help you get rid of Adrien."

The words stabbed straight into her heart and a ball of numb grief welled up in her throat, choking her. Squeezing her eyes shut against the sudden sting of tears, Tess pressed a cold, trembling hand to her mouth. "I don't need help," she ground into her palm, shaking her head again. "Just leave me alone." She began walking across the empty Hill Street again.

"I can't do that, Tess," Jared called after her. "And neither will Adrien."

Before Tess even spun around, she knew Jared was standing directly behind her. His heat seeped into her body, her pussy. Their eyes met, he reached for her...

...and then his lips captured hers.

Strong hands cupped the cheeks of her ass, squeezing them with a passion that bordered on worship as his tongue traced the edge of her bottom teeth, seeking permission to go further.

*Stop him! Stop him!*

But she didn't. How could she when waves of rolling heat that felt like golden light streamed through her veins? She opened her mouth to him and their tongues met, each fierce and demanding. The flutter in her pussy intensified, turning into a full-blown tremble of squirming need. Her knickers grew damp with her own juices as Jared sucked her tongue deeper into the hot, wet cavity of his mouth, rapacious and unapologetic. It should have frightened her -- the force of his desire. But it didn't. Instead, it fed her longing. The centre of her being -- the very essence of her sex -- cried out in ravenous thirst. She'd denied it for too long. A dream lover might placate it, but only true physical contact could nourish it.

She ground her hips against his, head spinning with licentious delight when her mons pressed against a solid cock that felt like a long, thick rod of hot metal.

Holy fuck, was *this* true physical contact?

The hands on her ass yanked her harder into him, and he tore his mouth from hers, staring down into her face with grey eyes that almost glowed with thunderous desire. "Almighty, forgive me," he growled, nostrils flaring as he pushed his cock against her soft mound.

A small smile pulled at Tess's passion-bruised lips. "For this?"

"No," Jared answered, smoothing his hands up her back to bring their heartbeats in alignment. He dropped his forehead to hers. "This."

Their lips touched. Light blurred. For a split second the air turned icy, and then Tess felt the ground beneath her feet change.

From asphalt to wood.

She staggered backward, pulling from Jared's embrace. She looked around herself, mouth agape at the small but neat lounge room she stood in. "What the..."

Jared closed the distance between them, sliding his palms up her arms to bury his fingers in the tumble of hair at her nape. "I have to protect you, Tess." Stormy-sea eyes bored into hers and his hips pressed hers again. "I *want* to protect you."

Squirming heat twisted in Tess's pussy as his rigid cock nudged her crotch through the coarse material of their clothes. Lust rolled through her. Lust and anger. "I can protect myself, thank you," she snapped, ignoring her body's perfidious response. "And just what the hell are you protecting me from? How the hell did I get here? Just what the *fuck* is going on in this town?" She tried to jerk her head away from Jared's grasp but his long, strong fingers tangled in her hair held her still.

"Tess," Jared said, moving his hands to cup her jaw. He gazed into her eyes. "Trust me."

She opened her mouth to argue, infuriated disbelief crackling through her veins. *Trust?* He asked her to trust him? A complete stranger? After everything she'd been through she'd never trust a living soul ag --

An image more vivid than any before smashed into her head: Jared, surrounded by an incandescent white light, cradling her in his strong arms against a furious black wraith radiating obsessive death.

Eyebrows drawn into a deep frown, she stared Jared squarely in the eyes. "Who are you?"

For an answer, he placed his lips to hers.

And she let him.

With almost reverent care, he touched the corner of her mouth with the tip of his tongue, as if who she was lay waiting for him in that tiny, sensitive dip.

She pulled in a short breath, nostrils filling with a scent utterly intoxicating: rain in the bush, spring growth and potent male musk. A soft groan of mystified bliss escaped her -- slipped through her parted lips to be caught by Jared's tasting mouth. His tongue traced the full curve of her lower lip, dipping in to touch her teeth, nipping down with his own. Each contact sent a scorching bolt of wet tension into Tess's cunt. Each teasing flick and bite making her heart hammer and her blood sing.

Tongue now at the other side of her mouth, Jared placed the softest kiss at its corner, his strong nose brushing her cheek as he nuzzled the slight dimple there. With infinite patience, he moved to her top lip, pulling at it with gentle nips. His fingers rested on her temples, their feather-light pressure an exquisite tickle that made her skin tingle and her pussy contract.

Tess sucked in a hitching breath, eyelids fluttering closed as she gave herself over to the sensual onslaught. *Onslaught? If this is an attack, I surrender...*

The heady thought made her heart thump. What was she doing? She was one of Sydney's most powerful journalists! A woman capable of destroying a politico's career with just a word. Yet here she stood -- in a strange house with a strange man -- surrendering to the sensations he created in her.

Jared's tongue flicked at hers and a pulsing swell of liquid heat flushed between her thighs. Tess sighed. *Willing and complete surrender.*

She opened her mouth, tangling her tongue around his.



His taste filled her, as fresh and distinctly unique as his scent. She reached up, fisting her hands in the silken honey strands of his hair, pulling him harder into the kiss. Their teeth clicked together and she heard a low moan rumble in Jared's chest, felt his cock twitch as she dove her tongue deeper past his lips.

Her cunt contracted in wet, gripping pulses and she returned his moan. Christ, she was horny. She'd denied her body physical contact, physical pleasure for so long, petrified of letting anyone past her defences again, that she didn't think she was capable of this kind of burning, intense response anymore. She'd let a dream-lover consume her and convinced herself it was enough.

But it wasn't enough. Somewhere along the line, reality had cracked and the truth shone through like a blinding light. She had no idea who he was, no idea what the fuck was going on, but she *did* know -- beyond question -- she wanted Jared Pierce's cock pumping into her. Wanted to impale herself on its impressive girth and ride him until her body shuddered in ecstasy and nothing filled her head except pure, base and thoughtless pleasure.

With a growl both savage and submissive, she snatched at the collar of his T-shirt and tore it open. His chest was smooth under her palms, like carved granite on a statue of a god. She flexed her fingers, letting her nails dig small crescents into his warm flesh for a split second before seeking his nipples.

Delicious delight rippled through her as she encountered a tiny bar in each. Her pussy growing more sodden with each heartbeat, she gave them both a little tug. Jared's body snapped into a sudden bow, his cock ramming against her mons and his head thrown back as a sharp hiss filled the air. "Almighty, *yes!*"

Tess tugged on the nipple bars again, harder this time, wet rapture gushing to her cunt as Jared bucked into her again. His cock was so hard, a solid pole bruising her tender flesh with each grinding jab. Before he could reclaim her mouth with his, she dropped her lips to his chest, closing them around one rock-hard little nub and catching the tiny metal bar pierced there between her teeth.

"Fuck, Tess!"

His cry punched the silence of the room, his hands burying into the heavy curtain of her hair to hold her head to his chest. She smiled around his nipple and bit again. His cock smashed harder into her mons, his hands balled fists in her hair. He gave the long tangled strands a savage tug and a jolt of pleasure shot through her, straight down into her gripping cunt.

"Fuck, Tess..." The repeated words were a drawn-out moan that made her pulse triple. The hands in her hair tugged again, holding her head to his chest in a physical direction she eagerly obeyed.

She flicked her tongue, the nipple bar dancing under its tip in tiny jerks echoed by the grinding motion of his hips. Unable to deny herself any longer, Tess dragged her hands from his exquisite chest down the muscled planes of his stomach, seeking the growing bulge trapped beneath the denim of his jeans. Even through the coarse material she could feel a hot bead of pre-cum squeeze from the swollen head of his cock -- a damp circle against her pressing palm that said more than words could.

*What words would you have him say? Nothing is making sense anyway!*

Lips hot and wet, she dragged her mouth from one nipple, across Jared's smooth, sculpted chest to the other, all the while letting her fingers caress his rigid cock through his jeans. Jared groaned, fisting her hair in a painful grip, and her pussy contracted. *Making sense isn't important, Darcy. Not when just a sound from his throat makes you almost come.*

The tiny nipple-bar clicked against her teeth as she sucked on the tight nub of flesh and another groan -- lower, baser -- rumbled up through Jared's chest. "Tess..." His cock jerked under her palm. "God Almighty, can this be happening?"

Blood roaring, heart pounding and cunt sodden, Tess lifted her head, gazing at him with lidded eyes. "Yes. It can." She curled her fingers into the waistband of his jeans and yanked his button fly open. Instantly his cock sprung free, long, thick and commanding. She wrapped her fingers around its length and gave it a not-so-gentle squeeze. "Now stop talking to God and fuck me."

Jared stared into her dark brown eyes, seeing himself in their melted-chocolate depths. Every nerve, sinew and fibre of his body seemed charged. Raw energy devoured him. He'd never felt this alive, even when he was. *And you never will again, Jared.*

Tess's hand worked his cock, stroking it with fingers that alternated between feather-light kisses and almost brutal tugs. His balls, swollen and heavy, rubbed against the coarse stitching of his jeans' crotch, eager for release and attention.

Almighty, he desired this woman. If he had his life again, knowing what he knew now -- his wife's deception, her death, his own end and an eternity in Hell to pay for both -- he wouldn't change a thing. Not if it meant losing this -- this one moment of forbidden, stolen passion.

He'd watched Tess for so long, had felt her pain, loneliness and self-hate in a way only a Watcher could. At this very second, with her hands on his body and her breath in his lungs, not one of those emotions churned within her soul. All she felt was pure, elemental pleasure.

And he would sacrifice a thousand lifetimes to keep that so.

Dragging his hands down her back, he grabbed her ass, the toned muscles flexing under his palms as she quivered. "Please, Jared." She closed her fingers firmer around his aching cock. "Please fuck me now. I don't want to wait any longer."

Her words -- a husky plea -- scorched his condemned soul, making his body scream for fulfilment and his balls scream for release. Sucking in a sharp breath, he yanked her hips to his, trapping her hands and his cock between their bodies. "No." He dropped his head and nipped at her bottom lip, tasting her sweetness before nuzzling a slow line along her jaw to the perfect shell of her ear. "This has to last forever, Tess."

A ragged sigh fell from her lips. "I'm an impatient woman, Jared," she whispered, rolling her hips until his balls felt like they were going to burst. "We don't have to take our time. I'm not planning on going anywhere soon."

Aching remorse tore through Jared's veins at her statement. *No, but I am.*

The thought spurred him into action. Hell waited for him, but for the moment, Tess was his existence. With a low growl, he grabbed the front V of her shirt and tore it apart. "God, Tess..." Hands trembling, he brushed his palms down the full outer curve of each breast. The desire to sink his fingers into their heavy weight, to knead their perfection with his hands as his mouth suckled each pink nipple, pummelled him. He shot Tess a quick look from behind his hair, blood roaring in his veins. "You are truly beautiful."

A slow smile played with Tess's lips. "Thank you, Jared." Her answer seemed almost dismissive, but her life force burned with rapture. It folded around him, a scorching energy that permeated his existence and made him burn.

Unable to deny himself a second longer, Jared dropped his head and took one lush, erect nipple in his mouth. The nub of flesh pinched tighter as his tongue laved it through the delicate lace of her bra, straining against the material and his teeth. Tess moaned, her breasts growing firm and full in his hands, her fingers massaging his cock in wicked harmony with his sucking mouth. The rhythmic pulse sent sizzling bolts of sensation around his body, into his balls, up his spine, across his chest. God Almighty, he was in trouble.

Teeth nipping at one lacy covered peak, Jared revealed the other with impatient fingers, pulling the bra's cup aside until nothing but warm, soft flesh filled his palm. Tess's responding gasp echoed in the silent room and her hands left his cock to bury in his hair. "Christ, Jared. I don't know who you are, but right at this very moment, I don't care." Her voice was throaty, thick with pleasure. Her nails dug into his scalp with each gnawing suck he took of her nipple, holding him to her breast. "I don't care one little bit."

Jared's cock twitched at the statement and he lifted his head, slowly straightening until he looked down into her upturned face. Dark eyes glowed with smouldering passion as she gazed at him, her heat scalding his jutting, rigid organ even through the material of her shorts. Impatient, demanding lust tore through him. Fuck lasting forever. He couldn't control himself any longer.

Without a word, he grabbed her ass and hauled her feet from the floor.

In two steps they were against the closest wall.

He rammed her back against it, driving his hips forward with the force until his cock screamed in denied greed and pain. Never before had he wanted to sink its length so powerfully into a woman's cunt. In another life he'd loved and desired his wife, but the raw hunger controlling him now, hunger for the woman in his arms -- in his *soul* -- made those emotions seem like a schoolyard crush.

Tess stood against the wall, lips parted, breath ragged, as he raked his hands down her torso and yanked her fly open. The musky scent of desire filled his nose. Tess's desire. He pulled it deeply into his lungs, savouring it, drawing strength from it. Her blazing life force had called to him what felt like eons ago, but her potent, undeniable desire now commanded him. Owned him.

Pushing her hips forward, Tess gazed into his eyes. "Make me forget it all, Jared."

With a growl, Jared took possession of her mouth, then thrust one hand down the front of her shorts, between her thighs.

Her damp silken curls parted before his seeking fingers, slicking his skin with the creamy juices of her pleasure. It was an exquisite sensation and he groaned, the low sound captured by Tess's mouth. He moved his fingers further over her mons, parting the sodden folds of her sex until he found the tiny nub of her clit.

Tearing her head from his, Tess stared into his face and shoved her pussy to his hand. "Yes, Jared."

He rolled the pad of his finger across her clit, back, forth, side to side. A whimper slipped from her throat and her eyes closed, head dropping back to the wall. Fresh cream covered his hand and he smeared it over her swollen nether-lips, sinking the tip of his middle finger into her tight cunt as he did so. Her hot, wet muscles contracted immediately and he groaned. Plunging deeper, he ground his knuckle against her clit as he sought the sweetest spot inside her pussy. Her muscles constricted again, eager for more.

With a slight flick of his wrist, he slipped in another finger, gazing down at her rhapsodic face as he stroked the wall of her sex. Tess writhed, ramming her cunt into his hand, a cry tearing from her throat as she pounded her fist against the wall. "Jesus wept, Jared!"

Every time her cunt constricted, his cock grew harder and longer, demanding attention. Grabbing her fist from the wall, he wrapped it around his shaft's rigid length, holding her hand still as a wave of ecstasy crashed over him. "I'm so close to coming, Tess," he growled. "You in my arms, my fingers in your sweet, tight sex..." He closed his eyes for a second and pulled a ragged breath, struggling for control. "Almighty, I can't hold on much longer and I wanted to give you so much more."

"Let me feel you, Jared." Tess's whispered words made him open his eyes. "Let me take you to the edge. I'll stop when you tell me to, I promise." He looked into her face, held her gaze, as her hand moved under his, slowly pumping his cock with a grip both soft and fierce.

Heat flared in his balls, his gut. With each down-stroke Tess closed her grip tighter, squeezing his cock with gentle pulses timed in perfect rhythm with the fingers he still plunged into her cunt. Each up-stroke her grip relaxed, almost teasing his burning shaft with dancing fingertips until she reached his bulbous, swollen cockhead. Jared sucked in a hitching breath, feeling his balls swell and rise up. Intense heat began to build at the base of his spine and he shook his head, closing his fingers around hers, holding her hand still. "Stop."

She did as asked, rolling her hips against the hand buried between her thighs as she watched him teeter on the brink. Her eyes smouldered, her chest heaved. Desire devoured her. He could feel it in her life force. In her body. Devouring her in the very way it did him. He could take her to blissful release with just his fingers, of that he had no doubt. Power surged through him, power beyond the living. Golden energy and incorporeal will -- a Watcher's weapon. If he were to let it, it would consume them both. Elevate them to a dimensional plane where nothing but pure sensation existed, a plane

never meant for those imbued with life, but for those awaiting judgement. An eldritch, incorporeal level. God, how seductive its pull was.

But in doing so, he would end Tess's life. Only departed souls were permitted to bask in the Divine Bliss. He was a Watcher for a reason. He'd been sent to protect Tess's life, not end it, no matter how rapturous their forbidden connection was. He'd already destroyed every rule a Watcher was given -- talking, touching, *desiring* his charge had ended any chance of redemption he may have had. And there were worse things than an eternity in Hell. Would he now destroy the one rule created to keep Heaven and Hell asunder?

*For Tess?*

A surge of inviolable power rolled through him. Yes. For Tess, he would. With a growl, he plunged his fingers deeper into her pussy. Stroking. Delving. Seeking. "Oh, God, Jared!" Her eyelids slammed shut as her grip on his cock closed down, shooting painful and exquisite tension through him. "Christ Almighty! It's coming, Jared! It's coming!" Her cry echoed through the room.

A room suddenly less substantial. Fading away. Fading. Fading...

*Watcher!* A husky voice shouted in Jared's head, fierce and formidable. *Control it! Now!*

Mistress K.

Cold reality smacked into Jared and he froze. Shit. He'd just been about to kill the woman he loved.

"Jared." Tess ground her hips into his cupping hand, opening her eyes and staring at him with naked need. "Please, don't stop."

He stared back at her, the heart he shouldn't have hammering in his chest. *Loved?*

His body screamed for release, his soul for fulfilment. Even the beads of sweat on his fevered flesh ached for that supreme moment of eruption, when his balls swelled with his seed and his cock jerked with spurting force. Holy fucking Christ. What was he doing?

“Jared?” Tess gasped, confusion and desperate want falling over her face. “Jared, what’s wrong? What...”

He stared at her. His blood roared. The room wavered.

“Jared?”

He’d watched her for so long. Had seen into her soul and knew her like no other. He loved her. For the kindness of her heart, her sense of moral justice, her belief in the goodness of mankind even after all the shit she’d been through. For the pain she’d endured while Adrien Cole lived, the torment since his death, and the confusion and loneliness her life had become. He loved her.

Unable to look into her eyes anymore, he did the only thing he could. He removed his hand from her still pulsing pussy, unthreaded his fingers from hers on his still throbbing cock. “Forgive me, Tess,” he whispered, wrapping his arms around her torso and placing his lips softly to hers. “I’m sorry.”

He closed his eyes and thought of her home overlooking Kangaroo Creek. And vanished.

Tess blinked.

Where the... *what* the...

One minute she was pressed against Jared Pierce’s warm, hard body, his masterful fingers sending her to Heaven, his glorious cock about to erupt in her hand, the next... She looked about herself, a chilly, sinking sensation settling heavy in her stomach.

The next she was standing at the front door of her small rented home. Clothes immaculate. Completely alone. Closing her eyes, she shook her head. What the fuck was going on? Was she going out of her mind?

*Does it feel like you’re going insane?*

No. It didn’t. Her body throbbed and ached for Jared’s touch, her pussy still a mess of constricting muscles.

Yet now here she stood.



She couldn't explain it.

With a snort of disgust, she dropped her head, staring at her feet as she dragged trembling fingers through her hair. God, how long had she been standing on her front step, her mind imploding? Robyn possessed by Adrien? Jared Pierce miraculously whisking her away from Hill Street? Kissing her? Making her feel like a real woman for the first time since --

The cackling laugh of a kookaburra shattered the heavy, silent air and Tess shrieked, glaring out at the baking summer afternoon.

That's it. She was officially mad. If she was walking around in broad daylight having wet dreams about some guy she just met in the street... If a librarian turned into her dead ex and transported her to some shack out in the middle of nowhere... If a goddamn *bird* could make her squeal she was losing it. She needed help. And she wasn't getting it here in Kangaroo Creek. Keys jingling, she unlocked the front door.

She'd had enough. She was going back to Sydney.

## Chapter 6

Jared arrived in the Astral, the existence between Life, Death, Judgement, Damnation and Salvation. The home of the Watchers.

Corporeal form did not exist in the Astral, only consciousness. Yet somehow, inexplicably, Jared still felt *his* body -- the body Tess had held, touched, kissed -- burn and tremble from their lovemaking.

*How is that possible?*

Before his death, before being granted the chance to redeem his sins and save his soul by the Powers and the Almighty Himself, he'd been a paramedic. He was no dummy but the answer to *that* question eluded him completely.

"The Rules have been broken, Watcher," a low and husky voice sounded, a mellifluous tone that played through Jared's state of being. "That is why you still feel her on flesh that is not there."

A cool breeze blew through the Astral, another impossibility, and suddenly Jared *was* there. Jared as he was in Kangaroo Creek. Flesh and blood, muscle and bone. Complete with the delicate scent of Tess lingering on his skin. He gasped, standing on nothing, breathing nothing, but there all the same.

"The Rules have been broken, Watcher," the voice repeated as Mistress K materialized before him, skin-tight black latex hugging her exquisitely formed body. "Actuality is wounded." The golden flecks in her eyes glowed as a shiny black flogger appeared in her hand. "Shall we punish the offender?"

Hot anger spiked through Jared's chest, an emotion never before experienced in the ethereal state. "What is going on?" he demanded, meeting Mistress K's iridescent gaze. "Who brought me here?"

"The Powers," Mistress K answered, the flogger evaporating with a flourish of her hand. "Under His command." Her lips puckered and she shook her head, still the Dominatrix, even in this unearthly realm. "You've been a bad boy, Jared Pierce."

Jared shook his head again, another spike of angry heat stabbing his chest. "I shouldn't be here. How am I to protect Tess Darcy if I'm here?"

"It's over for you, Jared," Mistress K said, latex cat suit disappearing. A pair of faded jeans, a white caftan and worn flip-flops took its place. Earth Mother once again. "You've been... recalled." A flicker of pain crossed her face. "I'm sorry."

The angry spike in Jared's chest twisted and he narrowed his eyes. "Recalled?"

Mistress K tilted her head to the side. "I've told you before to watch your anger, Jared. Your wife's deception led to her demise, not your fury, but *it* led to *your* death, and that is a punishable sin. Be wary of it now."

"You also went on with some shit about dying twice, *Mistress*, yet, as far as I can tell, I've only done it once. But here I am now, back in the Astral where only a Watcher can be." He patted his chest and ribs, giving her a pointed look. "A helluva lot more 'alive' than I've been before."

"Creation can't be destroyed because you fell in love, Watcher." Mistress K's husky voice grew firm. Hard. "You almost elevated Tess Darcy to the Spiritual Plane today. Her existence there would undo the Word of God. Would you have His work cease to exist for one mortal?" The gold-chips turned flinty and the black latex returned. "No. I'm very sorry, Jared Pierce, but I'm afraid Lucifer holds your soul now."

\* \* \*

The stretching shadows of late afternoon painted the floor of Tess's lounge room in long, dark fingers. Crossing the small room, she flicked on the low side lamp beside the sofa, doing everything in her power to ignore the quiver in her pussy. Even after the cold realisation she'd spent the day in some kind of surreal daydream, the memory -- the *fake* memory -- of Jared Pierce's touch still had her squirming with wanton heat.

Tess dragged her hands through her hair. "You have to get a grip, Darcy. Unravelling is not acceptable. That's just letting Adrien win."

And there's no way she was going to let that happen.

Her pussy clamped down again, still hungry for a cock that wasn't there -- that had *never* been there -- and she gave a short snort. Maybe unravelling wasn't so bad, not if it meant being seduced by Jared Pierce every day.

Shaking her head, Tess moved into the kitchen, letting her fingertips slide along the worn wooden bench, drawing comfort from its solid reality as she reached for the kettle. She would miss the house. Kangaroo Creek itself maybe not, but the house... For some reason it felt more like home than her apartment overlooking Sydney Harb --

Adrien's face grinned up at her from the bench, in vivid Kodak colour.

A harsh sob ruptured from Tess's mouth. That photo. That goddamn fucking photo was propped against the kettle. Pristine and irrefutable. "Oh, God, Darcy!" She smacked her palm to her forehead, slumping against the kitchen bench. "You *are* going mad!"

The last *true* memory she had was sitting on the floor before the fireplace, the photo in one hand and a Zippo lighter in the other. Why the hell had she not destroyed it then?

"Mad, Darcy. Mad." With a scowl, she snatched the photo from the bench and crumpled it in her fist. "Have your cuppa, pack your things and get your ass back to Sydney, pronto. And book yourself into a shrink ASAP." She blew at her fringe, turning back to the lounge room. She was going to burn the goddamn photo once and for --

Tess froze, the photo slipping from her fist.

The lounge room walls warped and twisted before her, dark and rusted one second, light and wallpapered the next, as if two realities fought for existence in the same space.

"Jesus, Tess, you've lost it." Icy air engulfed her, made her flesh ripple into goosebumps and she rubbed her hands furiously up and down her arms. "What the hell?"

*Tessa...*

She recoiled, stumbling back into the kitchen, eyes wide. Her ass bumped into the edge of the bench, sending shots of sharp pain up into her spine, but Tess didn't take any notice.

All around her, the walls continued to bend, bleed from one state to another. Rusted metal. Wallpapered plasterboard.

A cold gush of dead air struck her and suddenly, where once her old TV stood, now sat a grime-covered headstone, thick, old blood oozing from its cold pores to stain the carpet underneath -- a carpet wavering between freshly vacuumed plush pile and old rot reeking of decay and mould.

*Welcome home, Tessa...*

The deep, empty voice seeped into her head, a parasite seeking the rich nourishment of her sanity. Unseen fingers brushed over her cheek, across her lips, deathly cold and dry. Tess jerked backward, elbows cracking the cupboard edge.

*I've been waiting...*

The walls wavered again, growing black with old rust. The lounge grew fat, seemed to bloat and stretch until a bed stood in its place. Liquid-red sheets undulated across the mattress, alive with insidious need.

Tess flattened against the cupboard, palms pressed to its solid wooden surface, her heart frantic as she stared at perversion around her. *Not real. Not real. It's not real, Darcy.*

*Yes, Tessa...* Those cold, dusty fingers slid across her cheek again, across her bottom lip to snake into her mouth. *It is.*

Dirt filled her mouth. Dirt and rotting, putrid flesh. As the lifeless fingers stroked her tongue, her throat filled with the taste of decaying meat. She gagged, flinging her head to the side, trying like hell to escape those fingers.

*This is not real. "Not real!"*

A soulless chuckle sounded in her ears and powerful, solid hands closed around her breasts. "Yes. It is."

Tess snapped back her head, staring straight into ice-blue eyes. Adrien Cole stood before her dressed in the ink-black suit he'd been buried in. Right there. Flesh and blood.

A smug smile curled his lips. "Not quite, Tessa." Rancid breath fanned her face as thighs that felt like steel pressed against her, pinning her to the door. "But getting there with each passing second." He slid one hand from her breast up to her neck, circling the column with long, ice-like fingers. Tess felt her pulse pound against his palm as she stared into his blazing eyes. Stared *through* his blazing eyes. He was right. He wasn't there yet. She could see the shifting, distorting walls behind him.

*God, help me!*

"He's already tried, Tessa," Adrien murmured, dipping his head closer to her. "Tried and failed."

Another wave of fetid air assaulted her, and his pale flesh seemed to ripple, rot before her very eyes. Writhing white maggots spewed from his gaping mouth and fell with a splat onto the groping, mauling hand on her breast.

Terror spurred Tess. Terror and repulsed fury. "Get off me!" She lashed out, thrashing against Adrien's grip. Her flailing hands and feet seemed to sink into thick mud and a gaseous stink erupted in the air. But she didn't stop. "Get the *fuck* off me now, you dead fucking bastard!"

Adrien's grip on her neck tightened. "Now, now, Blossom." Bony, skeletal fingers buried into her skin and he pushed his face closer. "You never said that when I looked like this."

The air shimmered and suddenly there stood her dream lover.

He looked down into her face, eyes shining, sensual lips curving into a provocative smile that bespoke of passion, desire and twisted, unending obsession. "Hello, Tessa."

\* \* \*

Jared's jaw clenched. "Do not think to tell me what to do, K. You may be *my* Watcher, but you are just that -- a Watcher." His fists curled and he met her glowing

stare. "Do you dare break the Rules too? What would happen to Actuality then, I wonder? Restrain me if you can, but nothing will stop me doing what I was sent to do." He focused his will, concentrating on the seven hundred souls of Kangaroo Creek. Moving...

...nowhere.

"Judgement has been passed, Jared." Mistress K's voice was but a whispered sigh of regret. "For your sins, you are condemned to burn for all eternity in the very pits of Hell." Blistering bands of molten fire unfurled below Jared's feet, radiating torturous torment as they reached for him. Mistress K looked at him, face cast in flickering red light. "It's time to --"

*Jared!* A scream of infinite terror filled his head. *Jared!*

Jared's eyes flung wide open and his heart froze. "Tess!"

"Watcher!" Mistress K shouted, glaring at him. "You are recalled! *Recalled!* It's time for you to --"

Jared gave Mistress K a cold grin. "Go to Hell."

He closed his eyes.

And, with Tess's petrified scream filling his soul, went to the woman he loved.

\* \* \*

Tess struggled against the man who held her, although "held" was not the right word, and he was definitely *not* a man.

Lips compressed, head flinging from side to side, she fought with Adrien's pinning strength, bucking against the sheer weight of his body nailing her to the kitchen door. "Let me go!"

His face, still shrouded in the deviously handsome mask of her silent dream lover, hovered mere inches from hers, one hand curled around her neck as the other squeezed and pawed at her breast. "I'm never going to let you go, Tessa." Decomposed flesh filled her nose with each word, rancid and vile. "Don't you understand that now? We were meant to be together." The hand on her breast slipped down her ribcage, hooked under the hem of her shirt to flatten against her skin -- dead flesh on living.

"Your soul called mine." Lifeless fingers slithered up her torso. "I felt your body crave my touch even in Limbo. Our love gave me the strength to be here. I denied Death for you."

A scream rushed up Tess's throat, hoarse and raw, but she bit it back. "I never loved you, Adrien!" she spat, glaring into his face. "Ever."

Ice-blue eyes flashed and his perfect alabaster skin rippled, as if a thousand parasites writhed beneath its flawless surface. "Yes, you did!" His fingers sank deeper into her neck as he pushed his mouth to her cheek. "You *do*." A tongue, wet and coated in greasy slime, slid up the side of her face into her ear. "I just have to remind you."

Tess cringed, tried to pull away, but Adrien's grip on her neck grew stronger. Crueller. He yanked her body into his, jerking her feet from the floor.

He wormed his hand up over her jaw, fingers pushing at her lips as what felt like an enormous pulsating rod ground against her hip. "See what you do to me, Blossom?" he panted in her ear, clawing at her bra, seeking her flesh. "Feel how hard I am. Feel what I'm going to shove into your cunt and fuck you with for the rest of your --"

"Hey! Dickhead!" The shout was clear. Strong.

Adrien spun toward the voice with a snarl, flawless skin decaying in a heartbeat. "You!" he roared, crushing Tess to his chest in a brutal clinch. "*The Watcher!*"

Jared Pierce stood in the wavering lounge room, arms crossed, a cold grin on his face. "Oh, I'm done with watching, Fuck-Knuckle."

A sudden blaze of gold light flooded the room and Adrien squealed, flinging decomposing arms up to his face.

Tess dropped to the floor, staggering away from the squealing, thrashing wraith. Black, oily smoke rose from his dead flesh wherever the light touched him -- which was everywhere. A sickening stench filled the air, thick and over-ripe.

"Run, Tess! Get away!" Jared's shout rose above Adrien's keening wails, and Tess spun around, staring at the man she'd met on Hill Street that day, struck dumb.

He stood in the centre of the light -- no, he seemed to *be* the light. It poured out of him in blinding flares of vibrant energy, as if he were a mighty sun erupting.



“Jared?”

He flicked his gaze to her and Tess gasped at its iridescent intensity. They were boiling pools of brilliant blue -- so sharp it was painful to look at them. “Run, Tess,” he ordered, another wave of lustrous light surging from him. “Now! I can’t hold --”

A squealing hiss cut him short as, decaying flesh splitting under the light, Adrien turned into a murky black smudge and shot forward. Straight at Jared.

There was a loud pop as the black smudge smacked against Jared’s chest. The light around him flared to a hideous puce, casting everything in the room in an angry red glare. Jared reeled backward, arms flailing, face contorting in agony. Like a broiling oil slick the black smudge covered him, unformed shapes reaching for his throat. A hollow laugh bounced around the room, smug and arrogant, as stretching tentacles slapped over his face, seeking Jared’s mouth.

Tess bounded forward, sick fear in her gut. She had to do something. She had to get Adrien off --

“Run, Tess!” Jared’s roar ruptured the air. Golden light flared again, punching holes through the smothering black spectre. But it wasn’t enough. As Tess watched, the smudge that was Adrien spread out, wrapping around Jared’s lucent body. Devouring him.

Cold terror seized Tess. “Jared!”

Another laugh boomed around the room, louder. Stronger. “So much for the Almighty’s Watcher.” The shroud encompassing Jared rippled, a pulse of dead light staining the pure gold emanating from him and suddenly Adrien stood there. Completely solid. Hands buried up to the wrists in Jared’s throat. Maniacal eyes razed her flesh as Adrien threw her a look over his bunching shoulder. “Pathetic, isn’t he.”

“Tess.” The choked gasp fell from Jared’s lips and Tess whimpered at how deathly pale they were. The golden light, now a tainted cat-vomit yellow, wavered, leaving the room a grey, morbid hull. Trembling hands reached up and curled around Adrien’s flexed forearms, weakly attempting to yank them away. The sound of singeing flesh stung Tess’s ears and she watched, unable to move, as rancid smoke rose from the

point of contact. Jared bucked against Adrien's grotesque hold, growing paler and paler, less and less substantial with each waning struggle.

"Oh, God..." Her heart squeezed in pain, fear chilling her blood, but she took a stumbling step forward. She had to save him. Somehow.

Demented fire in his ice-blue eyes, Adrien gave her a wide, toothy smirk. "I told you already, Blossom. He's not going to save you. Nothing can stop me from having you." He swung his head back to the almost vaporous Jared, fists clearly visible beneath Jared's translucent skin. Jerking him up by the throat, he stared into Jared's face, a supremely smug chuckle rumbling in his chest. "And I am going to have her any and every way I want."

A very small, very angry grin pulled at one side of Jared's mouth. "Think again, fucker." And before Adrien or Tess could blink, Jared exploded into a ball of blazing, furious light.

Adrien's body flung backward -- a squealing projectile of putrid flesh. Tess screamed, dropping to the floor as he slashed through the air above her. Another wild wave of brilliant red light radiated through the room, like a fireball of concentrated rage. Adrien smashed against a kitchen cupboard, wave after wave of refulgent light pummeling him, nailing him to the wooden plane. Tess cringed, gaping up at the sight as she scurried backward on her ass. As each wall of light crashed into his body, he became less solid. The rotting flesh grew more pungent with each luminous blow, the thrashing form less substantial. Less real.

"Tell me who's pathetic now, huh?" Jared's voice rose above Adrien's wail, low and thick with contempt. A blistering wave of blood-red light flooded the room. For a split second it surged over Tess, a sickening sense of being pushed out of reality coming with it, as though her essence was being forced through an unthinkable grate. Her vision blurred, the room became...

*-- emptiness, oh, sweet fucking God, where the fuck --*

...dark, and then she was lying on her kitchen floor, tears streaming down her face and gasping for breath.

“Tess?”

She jerked away from the voice, terror stripping her lungs of air. Fuck, where had she been? Nothingness. An empty nothingness.

“Tess.” A warm hand gently closed over her shoulder, soft and strong. “It’s okay, Tess. Adrien’s gone. I’ve pushed him into the Void.” Another hand smoothed up her arm and she jolted up, staring into eyes the colour of a stormy ocean. Jared. “You’re safe.”

He crouched down, a small lopsided grin playing with his lips as he cupped the sides of her face with palms that felt more real than her own. “Told you I would protect you.”

She stared at him, incapable, for the first time in her life, of speech.

With infinite care, he brushed his thumbs across her cheeks, wiping at the hot tears wetting her face. “It’s over, Tess.” His grin stretched wider and he nodded his head, an air of calm completion settling over him. “It’s over.” For just a second Tess thought she saw a dark flash of regret flare up in his eyes, and then his lips were on hers and she couldn’t think anymore.

He lifted her from the floor, holding her body to his in an embrace so tender her knees threatened to give out. Lips moved over her face, tasting her tears, taking them away.

A shudder rocked through Tess, hot and cold at once, and a squirming beat of heat erupted between her thighs. She gasped and pulled away from Jared a little, gazing into his face. Her body might know exactly what it wanted, but her head still needed answers. *She* needed answers. “Who are you, Jared?” she whispered, searching his eyes for the truth. “What just happened?”

Jared threaded his hands into her hair, pressing his hips to hers as he drew her head closer. “I’m the man who gave his soul to protect you, Tess Darcy.” He placed a gentle kiss on her parted lips before meeting her eyes again. “And I would do so a thousand times again.”

“Aww,” a snide voice drawled. “Ain’t that cute!”

Tess's scar burst into agonizing heat just as Adrien Cole -- as rotted and putrid as ever -- materialized behind Jared and plunged his arms straight into his back. "Shame you gave it up for nothing, Watcher."

A shriek of absolute agony tore from Jared's throat and his head flung back, body snapping into a hideous arch.

*"Jared, NO!"* Tess screamed, grabbing at his shoulders.

With a malevolent smirk, Adrien yanked his arms free of Jared's torso, hooked fingers gripping an incandescent orb of pure white light, so beautiful Tess's heart froze.

And then, with a sly wink at Tess, he crushed his fist around it. Obliterating it completely.

Jared's gaze dropped to Tess, hollow, clouded and suddenly sunken. "I'm sorry, Tess," he whispered, voice sounding far, far away. "I'm..."

"Dead," Adrien snarled, seconds before Jared's body turned into an ashen statue and shattered into a million specks of dust. "Again."

## Chapter 7

Adrien closed the distance between them before Tess could move, stepping over the grey pile of ash scattered on the floor with one fluid stride. Cruel fingers dug into the soft flesh under her biceps and he yanked her against his chest. "As I've said before, Blossom..." Ice-fire roared in his eyes as he stared hard into her face, the ragged flaps of decaying flesh hanging from his cheeks making little *slap-slap* sounds as he spoke. "Mine. *Always* all mine."

Tess opened her mouth to scream.

And Adrien plunged his tongue past her lips.

The cloying taste of over-ripe meat assaulted her senses as his thick tongue wormed deeper into her mouth, lashing at her teeth and tongue. She bucked, her mind gibbering, but Adrien held her firm, bony fingertips stabbing into her flesh and muscle like daggers.

He ground his cock against her body, the organ pulsing between their hips like an angry snake, full of poison and death. A wail rose up in Tess's throat and Adrien swallowed it, greedy mouth sucking at hers with savage force. She lashed out, her fists striking at shoulders that seemed to be made from mouldy sponge. And yet the muscles there were harder than steel, stronger than they'd ever been when Adrien lived.

*Much stronger, Tessa...*

Adrien's voice sank into her head, a boast of his power over her. A promise of what was to come.

Teeth that felt coated in sludge bit into her bottom lip and hot, coppery blood pooled in her mouth, slipping down the back of her throat.

She bucked in Adrien's brutal hold again, desperate to break free. If she didn't, she knew her mind would snap. She had to get away.

Adrien's mouth tore from hers, and he gazed down at her, bright red blood smeared across his lips. "You're right, Tessa." Those glistening lips stretched into a wide smile, revealing moss-covered teeth, and he punched his still-growing cock against her crotch. "Let's get away. Let's go..." the temperature in the room plummeted, the air shimmered, and suddenly they were standing beside a bed in an old, iron shack, candles flickering everywhere, "...home."

Tess's blood ran cold as steely, unseen hands grabbed her thighs and arms, hauled her from the floor and threw her onto the bed.

Four heavy chains lashed out, curling around her legs and arms, pinning her spread-eagle to the red sheeted mattress. As one, four wide shackles locked around her wrists and ankles and then, with a speed so quick Tess barely had time to scream, the chains snapped tight.

"Always mine," Adrien drawled, appearing at the side of the bed, absolutely flawless skin aglow with perfect health. "The way it is meant to be." He extended a finger and ran it up the length of her torso, her shorts and shirt evaporating under its faint pressure, leaving her stretched out naked for his hungry, burning inspection. "The way you've wanted it to be all this time."

Tears welled up in her eyes, hot and shameful. She blinked them away, staring up at her dead ex. She knew what was to come next. The rigid, pulsating length of his cock told her *exactly*, even if she hadn't seen the obsessed look in his eyes. Knew what was to come. Knew she had no way to stop it. How do you stop a ghost doing whatever it wanted?

A tear slipped from her eye, scouring a line down her cheek like acid and she choked back a sob.

How do you survive when it does?

Adrien made his way to her head, finger tracing a line around her exposed left nipple as he stared down into her face. "Our souls have been connected from the moment we first met, Tessa." He flattened his hand to palm her breast, squeezing its heavy swell in slow pulses. "It's why you conjured me in your dreams. You craved me

in the very way I craved you before I died. As I do now. Completely. Nothing else exists but the need to feel your flesh on mine, my flesh on yours. Your sleeping mind knew that, even when you denied me." He dragged his fingertips up to the peak of her nipple and pinched, chuckling when Tess gasped in pain. "That craving, *your* craving, called me and I came." He flicked at her nipple, a gleam of immense satisfaction shining in his eyes as she gasped again. "And then *you* came. Again and again and again."

Shame flooded through Tess. Sick, repugnant shame.

Oh, Christ, he was right. He was evil incarnate, but he was right. Her body had never stopped needing sexual satisfaction, even when she'd fled from Sydney. It had craved release. *She* had craved release. She could accept her sexuality only in her dreams and in her dreams she'd created a lover. A lover whose passion for her had been so paramount, so consuming and powerful, she'd felt like he existed solely for her needs. Solely for her.

Adrien's teeth flashed as he smiled. "That's me." He dropped into a crouch beside the bed, leaning forward until his hot breath fanned her cheek. "Solely for you." His tongue traced the outer rim of her ear. "Solely for me."

The hand on her breast closed down painfully, solid fingers slipping into her flesh with sickening pressure. "Denying it won't stop me, Tessa." He suddenly straddled her, hand dragging down her quivering stomach, between his spread legs until his palm rested on the exposed mound of her mons, his middle finger parting the folds of her sex to grind against her hooded clit.

"I remember doing this to you when I was alive," he drawled. "In your bedroom. I remember thinking then I never wanted it to end." He plunged his finger into her cunt, a stretching, squirming icicle that seemed to delve all the way to her womb. "And here we are now. Where time doesn't exist and no living soul will ever find us." His hips slid back, his stiff cock sliding over her mound until its bulbous head replaced his hand at her pussy's lips. "Ever."

Tess's flesh crawled and she pressed herself harder into the mattress, trying like hell to get away from him, even with nowhere to go and no way to escape. Teeth bared,

she glared up into Adrien's leering face, hating him -- hating him with every fibre of her being. "You can fuck me until the end of eternity, Adrien, but you'll never 'have' me. You never did."

A hard, damp fingertip pushed into her mouth and she tasted her own musk mingled through the retching slime of decomposing flesh. Adrien dropped his head closer to hers, smiling broadly. "'Having' you is all there is, Blossom." He gave his hips a quick thrust and his cock pushed harder at her sex, parting her folds, taunting her in the very way he had when he was alive, like a feral tomcat playing with a frightened mouse. "Open your heart to me again. Let me be there and eternity will be..." he ground his cock harder into her cunt, mashing into the soft flesh of her nether lips, cruel, brutal and inescapable, "...blissful pleasure."

A perfidious shot of heat stabbed into Tess's pussy, tight and wet. The same heat Adrien had meted upon her body night after night when he came to her as the silent lover of her dreams.

"Yes, Tess," Adrien purred, worming his cock harder into her sex. "I heard your longing and I came."

*Heard your longing...*

The words slid through her mind and Tess's chest squeezed tight as a cold thought struck her. *She'd* caused this. If she'd faced the psychological guilt of Adrien's obsession earlier, if she'd let herself heal rather than flee to the forced isolation of Kangaroo Creek, her heart would have purged the hate she had for Adrien, for herself, days after her admittance to hospital. But she hadn't. She'd closed her emotions, denied her sex, and let her heart become an empty, wanting shell Adrien's distorted, perverted love had found all too easy to possess. And he'd fed from it. Continuously.

She'd caused it all.

*God help me.*

Looking up into his face, she saw naked obsession there. Any second now his teasing game of control would stop. And then her life was over.

She closed her eyes, waiting for his first inhuman penetration.



And saw Jared.

Jared's crooked grin, his stormy blue-grey eyes, his long, lean body threaded with the strength of the world and yet so soft to the touch under her lips.

Jared's soul. Held exposed for her to see, in Adrien's cruel grip.

Yet she hadn't needed to see it to know it was pure. She'd known from the moment his warm hands had curled around her arms -- what felt like a lifetime ago but was only this morning -- making her feel something apart from self-hate and pain. Had known the moment her head started filling with images of him every time his name came to mind. Images of wild passion that made her heart -- that empty, starved organ -- soar.

His soul was pure and he'd given it to save her.

An act of sacrifice.

And she loved him for it in a way her bruised heart had never known was possible.

"Say you belong to me, Tessa," Adrien commanded on a hiss, pushing his swollen cock deeper past her spread lips. "Tell me you're mine."

Opening her eyes, she stared into his face and saw a pitiful creature.

Driven by lust. Thwarted by love.

A frown pulled at her forehead and she shook her head, pitying him all the more.

"No, Adrien. I can't."

The fire in Adrien's eyes erupted into icy flames of rage and his mouth curled into a venomous snarl. "Then I guess I'll have to make you."

His cock punched into her sex like a fist punching through glass.

Tess slammed her head back into the mattress, eyes closed, fists bunched. Her body exploded in hideous pain but she did the only thing she could think of, the only thing to keep sane.

She drew every memory of Jared she had into her soul. Every breath, taste and touch. The way his lips curled into that lazy, lopsided grin whenever he saw her, the way his hands skimmed over her flesh with reverent worship. The way his mouth

drank from hers, drawing new life with his kiss when she thought there was no life left in her soul to have.

Adrien's fingers knotted in her hair as his cock plunged into her, and all Tess could think of was Jared Pierce.

*I love you, Jared.*

"No!" Adrien screamed into her face, eyes blazing with frenzied ire, flesh suddenly rupturing with fresh, weeping patches of decay. "No, you love me!" His cock hammered into her. "Me! Me!"

Looking up into his crazed face, Tess shook her head. "I'm sorry, Adrien. I'm truly sorry."

She closed her eyes again, drew Jared into her heart...

...and let go of all the hate and anger and contempt for Adrien poisoning her blood. Let it go, and let *him* go. Once and for all.

"Noooooo!" Adrien's scream shattered the air.

He reeled off her, skin falling from his body in rotten flaps as he staggered across the floor.

"No!" he shouted, glaring at her, chest heaving, fists bunched at his sides. "You cannot do that! You cannot --"

A roar filled the shack, as if the ground was being rent apart. Adrien's eyes flung wide open and he looked at his feet, shaking his head wildly. "No, you can't. She's mine forever!" he screamed at the floor. "Mine! You can't take me away from her! You can't!"

Another roar rocked through the shack and suddenly the air around Adrien turned black. Black and boiling and purposeful. It formed into five long fingers of death and wrapped around his rapidly decaying body, holding him firm.

"NO!" he screamed one more time, thrashing about in futile effort before -- dense black air seeping into his mouth and eyes and nostrils -- the floor disappeared under his feet and he was dragged downward.

From the room, the Void.

Existence.

Tess lay on the bed, breath shallow and quick. Her body ached from Adrien's gruesome assault and the cruel shackles still imprisoning her on the bed. The walls warped and bent around her, as if the shack was a living thing suffocating. She stared at them, numb with terror. Why did they still exist? Adrien was gone, why weren't they? Why wasn't she back in her lounge room?

A cold lump suddenly filled her throat and Tess's eyes widened. "Oh, shit." Wherever the hell she was, she was stuck, completely alone and chained to a bed.

Heart pounding against her breast, she yanked on the chains attached to her arms. They dug into her palms, cutting her flesh with each frantic, futile jerk.

Another stab of cold dread speared her heart and she swallowed, her mouth feeling as if it were coated in dust. Whatever fucked-up existence Adrien had brought her to, it was as real and solid as her own lounge room. The chains weren't going to break, no matter how hard she pulled on them.

*So, after all this, after everything that's just happened, you're going to die of starvation, spread-eagle on a bed that may or may not exist. Great. Just the way you wanted to go.*

The thought was dark and bitter, bringing hot tears to her eyes, and she squeezed them shut. She wasn't going to cry. She might be trapped in some perverted after-life hell, naked and unable to move, but she wasn't going to cry.

*So what are you going to do then?*

Grinding her teeth, Tess tightened her grip on the chains. "Get the fuck off this bed."

"Why?"

Tess's eyes snapped open, and she looked up into a stormy blue-grey gaze.

"I can think of lots of things to do in a bed when you're with the right person."

Tess stared, too afraid to blink in case she was seeing things. "Jared?"

For an answer, Jared Pierce -- looking exactly as he did the very morning she met him -- reached out his right hand and placed it on the solid shackle locked around her left wrist. There was a moment of soft warmth on her skin, like the sun peeking through

heavy clouds on a winter's day, and then the shackle disappeared. *All* the shackles disappeared. "C'mon, Tess," he said, grin turning into a wide smile. "Let's go."

He slipped his fingers through hers and a burst of dazzling white light flooded through the shack. No, not the shack. The shack was gone. Luminous white light surrounded them. *Just* luminous white light. Nothing seemed to be, except diffused, pure light.

And, of course, Jared.

Gazing into his face, Tess let him draw her close, still unable to believe him there. "I saw..." she began, but the words caught in her constricted throat. "I saw Adrien take your..."

Jared shook his head as he slid his palms up her back, the tip of one finger tracing her scar with infinite tenderness. His warm, hard body melded to hers and a shiver of sheer joy passed through her. He was there. Really there. Holding her. Touching her.

"It doesn't matter what you saw, Tess." He brushed his lips over hers, gentle and reverent. "All that matters is now." He kissed her again, lips more fervent, tongue flicking into her mouth to touch the edge of her teeth before he lifted his head and gave her another grin. "Just this one moment."

Tess threaded her fingers into the silken strands of his shaggy blond hair and held him close, feeling the heat of his desire grow harder and longer against her belly. She had no idea where they were, whether she was alive, whether *any* of what happened was real, but Jared was here. When he shouldn't be. With her. And *that* was all that mattered.

With a low groan she pulled his head down to hers, capturing his willing mouth with open lips. Their tongues met, each fierce and hungry, both too long deprived of the taste of the other.

Light-headed, Tess dragged her hands down Jared's back, thrilling at the smooth, sculpted curves of his muscles under her palms. A sense of weightlessness came over her, a euphoric giddiness growing stronger with every caress from Jared's

tongue, every nip of his teeth on her lips. She curled her fingers over his ass and pulled his hips harder to hers, anchoring herself to his body through a contact that was both burning and taunting. She could feel his rigid cock through his jeans, pressing against the sensitive curve of her mons, making her pussy damp. She wanted to feel him inside her. She *needed* to feel him inside her.

With an impatient growl, she pushed his hips away and moved her hands to his fly, flipping the buttons undone. Before her eager fingers could release his cock however, it sprang free, a long, thick shaft that filled her hands completely and burned her flesh with its pulsating heat.

Jared's flaring nostrils brushed her cheek as he sucked in a swift breath, his tongue plunging deeper into her mouth in appreciation. She slid her hand down the length of his cock, cupping his full, heavy balls in her palm before drawing closed fingers back up to his organ's swollen head. A bead of pre-cum seeped from the small slit. It was caught by Tess's thumb and smeared over the glans. Jared sucked in another sharp breath through his nose, stabbing his hips forward. His cock pumped into her hand, harder, longer, an urgent need surging through its taut skin.

Tess moaned, pulling her mouth free of Jared's as that need joined her own. "Please, Jared," she whispered, rolling her thumb across the bulbous head above her fingers. "Please."

"I want to sink into your warmth, Tess," he stated, his voice low and shaky, as if he fought with a tremendous force. "I want to feel consumed, taken and owned by you."

"Then do it," she commanded on a gasp. "Don't make me wait any longer."

Angry-ocean eyes roamed her face and his body grew still. "Tess, you need to know..." he shook his head, the white glow surrounding him shot with shadowy ribbons, "this is not forever."

Tess opened her mouth, but Jared pressed firm fingers to her lips, stopping her. "Neither of us are where we are meant to be. This is but a stolen moment."

A tight pressure closed around Tess's heart and she frowned, staring into his eyes. "What are you telling me, Jared?"

That crooked grin returned and he ran his palm down her torso to squeeze her ass. "That Heaven and Hell are about to get a lesson in *true* passion. One Time will *never* erase." He leant forward and crushed her lips with his, but not before Tess saw a sorrowful flicker fill his eyes.

What are you hiding, she wanted to ask, but his mouth moved over hers with such wanton need her head grew giddy again and her legs lost all strength.

Without a word, Jared scooped her up, one arm curling under her knees, the other under her arms to hold her close to his lean body. His warm flesh pressed to hers and Tess gasped, a shot of liquid delight flooding into her pussy as she realised he was now as naked as she.

"You're not the only impatient one here, Tess Darcy." His murmured words caressed her skin. "I don't want to waste any time with clothes."

A kaleidoscope of opalescent colours shimmered through the white as he took possession of her mouth once more. His tongue mated with hers, flicked at her lips and then he placed her down, resting her on nothing, her body supported on a bed of air that moulded to her like mist.

"I've loved you from the moment I saw you, Tess," he said, standing over her, the white light radiating from his being an almost blinding shroud. "I felt your pain and it made me ache. I sensed your strength and it made me strong." He pulled in a long, ragged breath, raw emotion shining in his eyes as they roamed her face. "My heart stopped beating twenty years ago, yet when I saw you it became a pounding force I couldn't ignore." He took a step, spread legs straddling her thighs, staring down at her with undeniable longing. "And still can't."

Knees dropping into the white nothingness that Tess lay on, he kissed her again, mouth ravenous and urgent as his balls rubbed over the flat plane of her belly.

The contact was electric. Bolts of twisting energy scorched a path straight to the dampness between Tess's thighs. She reached up, wanting to thread her fingers in his

hair, but his strong hands stopped her, catching her wrists and planting them beside her head, holding them still as he continued to ravish her lips.

She arched into him, the heat from his swollen balls seeping into her sex. Calling. Teasing. With a roll of her hips she drew her cunt in line with their heavy weight, grinding her mons against them in slow circles that caused Jared to groan low in his chest. His tongue lashed at hers and he pulled her wrists together, holding them with one hand as the other dragged down her arm to one uplifted breast. He cupped it, pinching its erect nipple between two knuckles until Tess writhed beneath him, pushing her pussy to his rigid cock and whimpering in supplication.

A growl rose in his throat and he tore his mouth from hers, scoring it along the line of her jaw, up to her ear. "I've died twice and I still yearn for you, Tess, desire you. I wasn't meant to, but I do. Nothing will ever change that." Teeth, sharp and even, nipped at her lobe, each stabbing pressure adding to the squirming tension in her pussy. "I could die a hundred deaths but that will *never* change, no matter what happens to Creation."

She moaned and lifted her hips, his words driving her wild, his hands wilder. "God, Jared." Her voice fell from her lips in a husky whisper. "Oh, God, I want you inside me so much. Please..."

His mouth moved over her ear, tongue flicking into its shell before he scorched a path down her neck to her collarbone. He rained her flushed skin with soft bites until she cried out, ramming her cunt to his cock, a wordless plea for fulfilment.

But still Jared continued to deny her. His mouth worked down to her free breast, capturing the taut nipple and suckling deeply. Hot barbs of sensation ricocheted through her, buried into the constricting centre of her sex. "Christ, that's so good," she murmured, rolling her head from side to side against her bed of ethereal light. "So good."

Jared's teeth closed around the aching nub, pulling at it in rhythm with his squeezing, fondling hand on her other breast. She arched beneath him, pushing her nipple harder to his mouth, wanting to feel his teeth and tongue raze that sensitive peak

more. Her cunt contracted, gripping for a cock still so torturously denied her. "I'm aching for you, Jared," she said, straining against the hand on her wrists. She wanted to touch him, feel his smooth, warm flesh under her palm.

Instead, Jared raised his head, blew a fine stream of cool air on her distended nipple and then met her eyes with his. "Do you trust me, Tess?"

The question was as serious as the fire in his gaze and Tess nodded, incapable of forming the word. Yes. She did.

A whisper of pressure brushed along the length of her body and suddenly Tess found her wrists held in the softest bands of shimmering light, an imprisonment so heavenly, hot liquid gushed into her gripping sex.

Both hands now free to worship her body, Jared continued to stare into her eyes. And worship her body, he did. He palmed her breasts until she whimpered and begged for him to stop, her cunt so tight and wet she could feel her pleasure dampening her thighs. Lips curled into a lazy smile, he paused long enough for Tess to drag in breath after ragged breath in an effort to regain control, but not long enough to let the building tension in her body subside.

Just as she began to feel the pressure between her thighs ebb away, Jared returned his fingers to her nipples, flicking and pinching in quick succession, bringing her to a peak of exquisite bliss again. "Oh, God, Jared!" she moaned, pussy flooding with cream, pulse a pounding beat. "Please... Please..." She wrapped her legs around his hips, pulling the jutting organ closer to the sodden centre of her desire. It ground against her clit, parted her folds to push at the tight entry.

She growled, writhing in Jared's hold in an attempt to impale herself, but he wouldn't let her. He took one nipple into his mouth and rolled the tip between his teeth, nipping and flicking at it with the end of his tongue before moving to the other breast. Tess moaned and pulled her legs closer to her body, desperate to have his cock stretch her, impatient greed boiling her blood when he straightened away from her body.

"No!" she protested, glaring up at him. How could he deny her -- himself -- any longer?



“Trust, Tess,” he whispered, eyes holding hers as his hands smoothed down her ribcage over the curve of her hips to her thighs. “Trust.” His fingers curled under her ass, squeezed her cheeks. “Trust...” His long fingers spread them wider and she felt a teasing pressure circle the tight, puckered hole of her anus.

*Oh, Jesus wept!*

Blue-grey eyes gazed down at her as he pushed at her hole a little harder, his teeth flashing when a choked cry burst from her mouth. “Trust,” he murmured, before dropping his head between her thighs and plunging his tongue into her pussy.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck!” Tess cried out, rolling waves of wet heat crashing through her. She bucked into his mouth, whimpering with barely contained pleasure when he drew the tiny tip of her clit between his teeth. Shots of raw pleasure stabbed into her cunt, electrical pulses that made her heart hammer and her juices flow. Jared lapped at her as her soft moans filled the light-diffused air.

His tongue laved her spread sex, tasting and delving with a mind-blowing pace that made Tess squirm. She lifted her hips, giving herself to him completely, wanting to be devoured by his mouth.

Just when she thought she couldn't take any more, that it was impossible for Jared to give her more, he raked his left hand back up her body to close around her passion-swollen right breast, and slid his mouth from her sodden cunt to her ass, letting the wet tip of his tongue join the fingers massaging there.

*“Holy fucking Christ!”* Tess cried out, jerking against Jared's head and the misty white bands on her wrists. *“Christ, yes, yes!”*

His tongue bathed her ass in frantic stabs, pushing her closer, closer to the precipice, until she felt the first wall of concentrated bliss crash through her being.

*“Jesus, Jared! I'm coming! I'm coming!”*

In a blur of white light, Jared rose up from between her thighs and aligned his rigid shaft to her wet, glistening pussy. “Then let me come with you,” he said, and plunged his finger into her ass and his cock into her cunt.

Tess's scream rent the air. A kaleidoscope of blinding colours erupted through the white light around them, radiating out to infinity like a shockwave.

Jared thrust into her, balls slapping her ass cheeks as his finger wriggled in her ass. His free hand palmed her breast, pinched her nipple, as his mouth found her neck and sucked.

Another wall crashed through Tess. Indescribable. Consuming. She clenched her fists, tumbling over the edge as one orgasm after another claimed her. "Yes, Jared! Oh, Christ, don't stop! Don't stop! God, please don't ever let him stop!"

Jared's divine rhythm accelerated. He raised his head and looked down at her with burning eyes, lips parted, chest heaving. "I love you, Tess," he ground out. "Never forget that." His thrusts grew wild, his breathing wilder. "No matter what happens after this, never forget I love you."

Fresh waves of molten lava welled up in Tess at his words. Building, building. She looked up into Jared's face, watched the white light around him flare into a brilliant, encompassing flash of dazzling colours. Watched him close his eyes as, with a shudder she felt deep in her being, he finally gave himself over to his own orgasm. Watched his nostrils flare as it scorched through his body and pumped into hers.

Healing her damaged soul, and her wounded heart once and for all.

"Trust," Tess whispered, gazing into Jared's euphoric face. "Trust and love unending." A bell sounded in the air, loud, pure and strong, just as she closed her eyes and surrendered willingly to the power of her orgasm.

And the power of her love for Jared Pierce.

Body drained, heart thumping, Jared opened his eyes, gazing down at Tess. Her own lids were still closed, but her lips were parted and he ached to taste them again. To burn their soft texture into his mind so deep not even Lucifer could remove it from his memory.

An eternity of Damnation awaited him. He'd denied Death to rescue Tess from Adrien's Hell, but now the Powers would call him, the Almighty would demand it, and he would have to --

"Are we home?"

Tess's soft voice filled Jared's head and he lifted his gaze from her mouth, resting his elbows on the floor to stare into her eyes. "No, Tess," he answered, smoothing his hands over her torso to hold her close. "This is not home."

A frown crinkled Tess's forehead as she ran her own hands over his back, casting a dubious look around herself. "It looks like home to me."

Jared turned his eyes from her face, looking about himself for the first time. A heavy pressure closed around his heart at what he saw and his breath caught.

Tess's neat and homely lounge room surrounded them. Late afternoon sun streamed through the far window, a golden ray that fell on them like a warm blanket of light. "What..."

"Are you sure this isn't home? It feels like home," Tess said, a smile playing on her lips. She turned back to him and her smile grew wider. "Did you know you're not a light bulb anymore?"

Jared gave her a puzzled frown. "I'm not a... What do you mean, I'm not a light bulb anymo --"

*Welcome to your life, Watcher.* A husky voice inside his head cut his words short and Jared froze, staring down at Tess with stunned, dawning hope. Could it be true?

*Of course it's true,* that husky voice continued aloud, a Dominatrix tone if ever there was one. *Now stop wasting time and kiss the woman you broke all the Rules for. It's not every day you get a second chance at living.*

A pulse -- a *real* pulse -- leapt into life in Jared's neck and he grinned down at Tess, heat flooding through his body. His solid, corporeal body. "Thank you," he whispered, curling his arms tight around Tess.

Tess's smile turned into a playful grin and she tugged him down to her. "You're welcome," she said. "Now do what the lady said and kiss me, will you?"

## Epilogue

“Stupid bloody kids,” Roy “Sol” Solovsky snarled, shoving his bunched fists into the pocket of his work-issued trousers as he glared at the mess at his feet. “If I get my hands on you...”

He let the rest go unspoken. Not because he was a polite man, but you never knew who was being buried today and he’d already been reprimanded too many times before by his wanker boss for being disrespectful of the mourning.

Storming back to his pickup, he snatched cleaning fluid and a shovel from the tray. Bloody kids always made his life miserable, knocking over headstones, ripping up flowerbeds. This though... He returned to the offensive rubble, shaking his head. What fucked-up freak would dig up a grave and deface a headstone? “Betcha the parents are to blame. Not enough whacks with the strap, I’d say.”

He stood and looked down at the mess waiting for him. Whoever they were, they were clever. The act of vandalism genuinely looked like someone had dug their way *out* of the grave. Splintered wood and torn velvet littered the immediate area, as though the corpse inside had ripped its way out of the locked casket. There were no bones. No corpse. Nothing.

Sol curled his lip, disgusted. The cops had been and gone and now *he* was left to clean up the mess. “Fucking kids need to be shot,” he muttered. He kicked at a clod of dirt and then squatted down and glared at the headstone. God knows what the fuckers had used to write on the marble. Looked like old, dry blood. Pulling a rag from his back pocket, he squirted a blast of diluted ammonia onto the marble surface and scrubbed the headstone clean. “If they were my kids...”

With one last wipe, he stood up, stepping backward to admire his handiwork.

*Adrien Cole.  
With tears and love.  
Devoted eternally to life.  
1971 - 2006*

"Poor bugger," he muttered. "Not long a stiff and already some shits are messin' with your grave."

He shoved the rag back into his pocket and began to work, chucking bits of wood and shreds of velvet into a large sack.

Yet his eyes kept flicking back to the headstone like insects to red, raw meat, and he began to work faster, an inexplicable chill shooting down his spine, making his balls shrivel up into their sac.

"What's got you so spooked, Sol?" he mumbled, turning back to the gaping, freshly ruptured grave.

A good twenty seconds passed before his eyes were drawn back to the headstone, but when they did, his blood ran cold.

The epitaph -- the *new* epitaph -- was back. Just as it was before. As if he'd never removed it in the first place.

*Adrien Cole  
With flesh and blood  
Devoted eternally to Tessa  
Tessa Tessa I'm coming Tessa I'm coming  
Death will never stop me*

And underneath the headstone lay a photo where one hadn't been before. A bright, colourful photo of a smiling couple overlooking Sydney Harbour, the arms of the man locked around the woman, a grin on his face that rivalled the Cheshire cat's. A manic look in his eyes.

Sol staggered backward, a scream building in his throat as he stared at that somehow vivid photo.

Something wasn't right here. Something wasn't right at all.

**The End**

## Lexxie Couper

Lexxie lives for wild times, wild worlds, wild characters and wild sex! With a flex of her knuckles and a frenzied attack of her keyboard she's off on a new adventure... thanks in part to her husband's *Playboy* collection, her Sci-fi DVD collection, her Stephen King library and her very twisted imagination. When she's in the "real world" Lexxie's life revolves around her family; a husband who thinks she's insane, a pony-sized mutt who thinks he's a lap-dog, and her greatest treasure -- her daughter, a little ray of Heaven that beamed straight into Lexxie's heart two years ago and will stay there forever.

Want to join Lexxie on one of her sizzling, out-of-this-world adventures? Contact her on [lexxie@lexxiecouper.com](mailto:lexxie@lexxiecouper.com) or catch the next flight at [www.lexxiecouper.com](http://www.lexxiecouper.com)