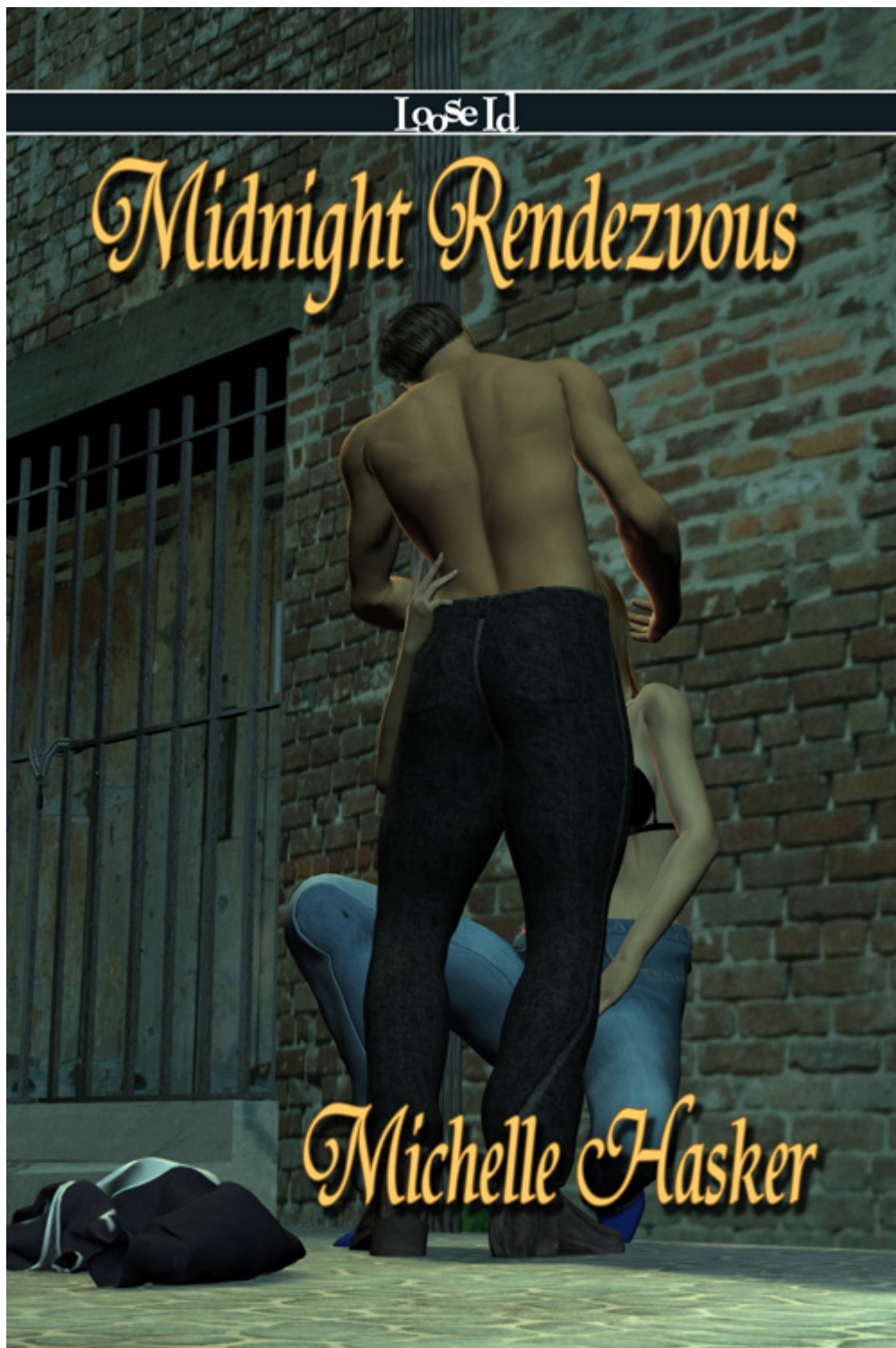


Loose Id

Midnight Rendezvous

Michelle Hasker



Praise for the writing of Michelle Hasker

Midnight Rendezvous

Ms. Hasker creates an evocative vampire world full of sensual allure. She builds suspense that will keep you scrolling as you journey with Caitlin in search of the answers she needs.

-- Silvia Violet, author of *Faery Treasures 2: Sword of Longing* (Loose Id)

From the moment you read the first few lines of this book, not only does the narrative grab you, there's a story here that draws you in deeply. Then just when you think you have everything figured out, the story changes and the surprises keep coming. Tension runs throughout the book -- suspense, anticipation, interpersonal and sexual. The relationship between Caitlyn and Aidan makes for some very sensual love scenes.

-- Sharon Maria Bidwell, author of *The Swithin Chronicles 1: Uly's Comet* (Loose Id)

Midnight Rendezvous is a twisting mysterious tale of vampires and murder. From the first page, I was enthralled with the heroine's plight and wanted to find out the identity of her attacker, the Slasher. The plot takes a couple of unexpected turns before it reaches that conclusion, leaving me quickly turning pages to get there.

-- Mechele Armstrong, author of *Dinah's Dark Desire*

This is a story about remembering love despite everything. He couldn't forget what they'd been like together, even though they said she was dead. She couldn't remember him, but she still wanted him. This romantic suspense is about all-too-human vampires that you'll want to read, fast as you can, until the end.

-- Treva Harte, author of *Stay* (Loose Id)

MIDNIGHT RENDEZVOUS

Michelle Hasker

Loose Id
www.loose-id.com

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This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable (violence).

Midnight Rendezvous

Michelle Hasker

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Chapter One

When warm lips pressed against her neck, Caitlyn knew he had returned. Slowly, he kissed a path down her shoulder. She shivered and turned, wrapping her arms around the mysterious man who took her to wondrous heights of pleasure, all without revealing who he was.

“Hi,” she said, then kissed his neck.

“Hello,” he whispered.

He always spoke in a whisper, and his face was always in the shadows. She’d stopped trying to uncover his identity a long time ago, and learned to enjoy the experiences she shared with him, even if they weren’t real.

Caitlyn lost the thought when his lips brushed against her carotid. She held her breath as he moved lower, his hands cupping her breasts, and teasing her nipples. He pinched one between his thumb and finger, and the other he sucked into his mouth.

“Mmm.” Caitlyn moaned and arched her back as desire swept through her, pooling between her legs.

He chuckled and pinched her nipple again, harder, until she cried out, the pain mixing with pleasure. He slid his other hand down her stomach until he reached her slick folds.

“Yes.” Caitlyn sighed, and spread her legs, giving him better access.

He slid lower, his body moving over hers, drawing a hungry groan from her as he licked his way across her stomach. He dipped his tongue into her navel and teased her before continuing lower.

“Wait.” Caitlyn gasped, and grabbed his shoulders. “Not yet. I want to pleasure you first.”

He stopped his caresses, but didn’t move.

"Please?"

He lifted his head, obsidian eyes, the only part of his face she could ever see clearly, meeting hers and holding her gaze. In a swift move, he released her and rolled onto his side, facing her.

"Do what you will," he whispered.

With a grin, Caitlyn pushed him onto his back, and crawled on top of him. She ran her hands over his hard, smooth chest. His chest wasn't the only thing hard, but she wanted to torture him first. Like he tortured her.

The burning ache between her legs grew as he reached between them and dipped his finger into her. Caitlyn gasped, and arched her back. She trembled from the effort not to ride him hard and fast until she came in a shattering orgasm.

"You said I could do what I willed. I want to pleasure you," she said as she slid lower until his finger pulled free.

Fighting back a whimper at the loss of contact, Caitlyn pinched his nipples hard. His gasp of surprise and pleasure added to her excitement. She leaned down, and swirled her tongue around first one, then the other.

When his hands fisted in her hair and tugged her lower, she let him move her until her face was level with his pulsing shaft. Her mouth watered as his cock jumped when she traced a finger down his length. He was large and filled her so completely Caitlyn knew she'd never be able to take him all the way in her mouth.

She ran her hands up and down his cock, his soft moans like music to her ears as he lifted his hips, thrusting into her touch. Caitlyn moved one hand to the base of his shaft and lowered her mouth to the tip. She licked him, tasting his precum. Her lover moaned, and she repeated the action, but more slowly. More of his salty essence escaped.

Her own desire grew as she toyed with him, running her tongue down his length, then back up. His husky moans and promises of pleasure sent a shiver up her spine. More of her juices spilled down her thighs as she repositioned herself so that she could draw him into her mouth. Taking him in as far as she could, she worked him with her mouth and hands until he gasped for air, and pleaded in a harsh whisper for her to fuck him.

Caitlyn chuckled around his cock, the vibrations drawing a moan from him. She squeezed him before taking him in her mouth even deeper. He lifted his hips, forcing her to take more of him until she gagged. His grip on her hair loosened and he rubbed her head as he pulled back.

His body trembled under hers, and Caitlyn knew he needed to be inside her as badly as she wanted it. She wondered if she could make him come with just her mouth and hands. Before she could find out, he grabbed onto her. He lifted her up until she straddled him, then she sank down onto him, taking him in completely.

She trembled as her inner muscles tensed around him. She wanted to make this time memorable for him, but she knew once she started moving on him she'd lose herself and shatter into a million pieces.

Her lover's grasp tightened and he shifted under her. Caitlyn moaned and arched her back. She'd known he wouldn't let her have control for long, but she'd hoped it would be long enough to make him come.

Giving in to his unspoken demand, she rose over him until only the tip of his cock was still in her, then lowered herself. He thrust into her deeper, and pressed on her clit, rubbing it as she moved on him, faster and faster until she trembled. Caitlyn bit her lip, trying to hold back until he reached his orgasm. He lifted her up again, and rammed her down on his cock. He repeated the action as the head of his cock pressed a sweet spot inside her that sent her over the edge into a mind-numbing abyss.

She tightened around him, her inner muscles milking him as tremors racked her body. Her night lover groaned, and released his seed deep within her as he continued to thrust into her. Caitlyn tilted her head back and screamed as another orgasm swept over her before the remnants of the last one had even passed.

The shrill sound of her cell phone pierced the air, dragging Caitlyn out of the dream so quickly her head spun. She fumbled on her nightstand until she grabbed the phone.

"Hello?" she growled.

"There's been another one. If you hurry you can beat them there." The informant spoke in hushed tones.

Caitlyn shivered. From the nagging pressure in her head, she could tell another one of her headaches was starting.

"Not again," Caitlyn whispered, fear settling thick and heavy in her stomach.

"This one was at the club Pretenses as well."

"But he never attacks this early. I wonder what's going on."

"You asked me to tell you when he strikes. You never said I needed to figure out how his mind works." Her informant laughed.

"Maybe I should have," Caitlyn said. If only there was a button she could push to mute Manny's sarcasm. He was a good friend, as well as an excellent informant, but he could also be a terrible pain in the ass. "Someone needs to figure out this madman before any more women die."

"Caitlyn, your attack was last year. It's time you put this behind you and move on."

"I can't move on without my memory." Caitlyn let out a low laugh. She knew she'd have to get over it eventually. Her memory hadn't come back yet, and she couldn't put her life on hold forever.

According to Ted, the longer her memories stayed hidden the greater the chance they'd stay hidden forever. Caitlyn hoped a face-to-face run-in with the Slasher would be the trigger she needed to remember everything.

"What are you going to do if you do find out who the Slasher is? Confront him and tempt him to kill you, too?"

"Manny!" She gasped. First sarcasm, now rudeness? Teasing along with caring concern she could tolerate, but not this. "That was uncalled for."

"No, that was being honest. You're my friend, Caitlyn. I don't want to see you get hurt." He paused for a moment. She heard his muffled voice and wondered who he was talking to and why he was hiding it. Finally he came back on the line. "Listen, I have to go. Take Ted with you to the club."

"Take Ted to the --" Caitlyn stopped talking when the phone disconnected. Take Ted with her? Was he crazy?

She needed to hurry before the police roped off the scene and she missed the opportunity to see it unhindered.

Snapping her cell phone shut, Caitlyn glanced at her clock. She didn't need Ted's help. And she definitely didn't need any more of his over-protectiveness. Not only could she take care of herself, but she'd also find out who the Slasher was without any help.

Let Ted call her crazy. She was going to the alley to see what had happened. Her curiosity and desire to capture the killer increased with each death.

This obsession of hers didn't make sense, especially since every time she went to Manayunk an intense loneliness swept over her, rendering her almost incapable of even breathing. But she would fight it like she did every other time, and do what she could to find him before he struck again. Maybe then she would finally get her memory, and her life, back.

She dressed quickly -- no time for a shower -- and rushed outside. After a glance at her watch, Caitlyn scanned the street again, impatience building.

"Cabbie!" Caitlyn shouted, as a taxi skidded to a stop on the opposite side of the road. That figured. She waved uselessly at the driver, knowing he wouldn't see her. She glanced both ways, hoping for a break in traffic, but seeing none.

Nervously, Caitlyn chewed on her lower lip, fighting the sense of urgency. Once the police arrived at the scene they'd erect barricades, wrap yellow tape around everything, and tread all over the scene, disturbing it.

"I need a cab," she growled, leaning into the street to peer around a group of pedestrians waiting to cross at the corner.

The squeal of tires and blast of a horn on her left had Caitlyn leaping back.

"I wasn't that far in the street!" she shouted at the driver, ignoring his one-fingered salute.

Caitlyn spun around, prepared to walk to the damn nightclub. It was usually never this hard to catch a cab, not even at rush hour.

An image of the dark alley behind Pretenses filled her mind, bringing with it the strong emotions that smothered her when she was near the club. The same feelings of loneliness, sadness, and hopelessness that haunted her nights. Nights when she lay awake in bed, well past the witching hour, trying almost desperately to remember her past.

Caitlyn was so lost in her thoughts she didn't realize she'd stepped off the curb and into oncoming traffic until a series of horns blasted, jerking her back into the present. Angry with herself, Caitlyn stepped back again, fighting the emotions still swamping her.

Spying a taxi trying to turn, Caitlyn signaled him and winced as the driver slammed on the brakes. The odor of burning rubber tickled her nose, making her sneeze.

"You crazy?" the cabbie shouted, sticking his head out of his window.

"Just in a hurry." Caitlyn peered into the back of the cab. Empty! A triumphant grin crossed her face.

Caitlyn opened the door and climbed in, ignoring the complaints from the other drivers. "Pretenses on Main Street, and step on it, please. I'm late."

Caitlyn watched his dreadlocks swing as he turned back to the front, mumbling, "Everybody is in a hurry, lady."

"I have a fifty with your name on it. Muhammad ... is it?" Caitlyn asked, blinking at the ID card taped to the dash. That couldn't possibly be his name, could it? With the long, thick dreadlocks, dark skin, and accent, Caitlyn knew it couldn't be true.

"It's a family name."

Meeting his gaze in the mirror, Caitlyn saw a flash of humor before he turned his dark brown eyes back on the road.

"Must be quite an interesting family."

"Ya mon, it is."

As he took the next turn at breakneck speed, Caitlyn slid along the seat, banging her elbow as she fell against the door.

"Ouch, damn it."

"Thought you wanted fast?"

Caitlyn grabbed onto the seat and nodded. If he could get her there before the cops, she'd be surprised. Then again, with his driving it might not be such an amazing feat.

Peering into the front, she tried to see the speedometer and noticed he was smoking something that looked as if it was home-rolled. It smelled strong and sweet, and made her feel more than a little odd. Squinting through the smoky interior, Caitlyn frowned as he put it out. He cracked his window, fanning some of the smoke out of the car, but there was no doubting the cloying scent of marijuana.

Caitlyn rolled down her window as well, cursing as it stopped halfway down. Shoving her face in the opening, she inhaled the gas fumes from the other cars and prayed the slight dizziness would pass quickly. She didn't need to show up at a crime scene smelling of Mary Jane and acting like she was stoned.

Hanging on tightly, Caitlyn prayed the terrifying ride would end soon. After a few minutes, Muhammad screeched to a halt in front of the club. Caitlyn tossed the fifty through the divider and climbed out of the cab as quickly as she could.

Knees trembling, she fought the urge to kneel and kiss the filthy sidewalk. Instead, she glanced around the darkened street. With a sinking heart, Caitlyn realized she'd wasted the fifty.

A white police car blocked the alley. Once again, she was too late, and this time too late and more than a dollar short. A shame the police weren't as effective as they were quick. They had no trouble finding the bodies, roping off the scene, and chasing red herrings, but had yet to discover one solid clue about the Slasher.

They couldn't even keep their chief suspect in custody. Caitlyn wondered why the man still evaded jail. Replaying the information she'd gathered in her head, Caitlyn edged toward the alley.

Aidan Devlin was their lead suspect. When they'd found him in the alley with his wife's body, they'd arrested him, but released him within a few hours. Some people said high-priced lawyers can accomplish anything, but Manny told her the police lost his wife's body and the murder weapon in the time it took to report the crime.

Other than a description of a five-foot ten-inch tall redheaded woman with green eyes, none of the cops even knew what she looked like. They couldn't find any pictures of her in Devlin's house, and the memory card in the digital camera used at the crime scene had somehow been erased.

Caitlyn was convinced that she and Devlin's wife were the first two victims of the Slasher, but the police disagreed. Caitlyn had been found elsewhere, and alive. Even the picture an artist sketched showed the resemblance between the two of them and the rest of the victims.

Caitlyn.

Her name whispered through her mind, startling her in its clarity. She recognized it instantly. It was the same agonized voice that called to her at night. The sound of his voice sent her juices flowing, and made her knees grow weak. She groaned. It wasn't nighttime, and she wasn't sleeping. How could she hear him now?

Come back to me, Caitlyn.

Not now, she wanted to shout, as a wave of heat swept through her belly. It was torture enough to feel hot, steamy kisses and soft, leisurely caresses from an invisible man at night, but to hear him now, in broad daylight?

Ignoring the voice and the desires it awoke in her, Caitlyn glanced at the nightclub's closed doors, then back at the officer in the car. He was talking on his radio.

Her thoughts returned to the chief suspect, as they often did of late. Pretenses had a select clientele. Few were admitted past its large double doors, and those who gained entry were some of the wealthiest and strangest people in Pennsylvania. Perhaps that was why he attracted so much attention from the police.

Curiosity usually got the better of her, Caitlyn thought with a smile. Or rather, it got her into trouble. But she was determined to figure out who the Slasher was and why he was killing all the redheaded, green-eyed women in Philadelphia.

Caitlyn slipped into the shadows and walked into the alley, ignoring the voice of warning inside her head, a voice that sounded eerily like Ted's.

She poked her head around the corner to see if the way was clear. Large dumpsters obscured part of her view. Well, what view she had. The lights had either been shattered or didn't work, leaving her to investigate in the semi-darkness.

Caitlyn cursed Aidan Devlin under her breath. Why couldn't the man keep this area well lit? After the death of not only his wife, but the other women as well, it seemed more than irresponsible to leave this area shrouded in darkness. It was downright suspicious.

After a quick glance behind her to make sure the officer in the car didn't see her, Caitlyn slipped around the corner. The street sounds faded as she walked past the first dumpster toward the spot she knew the Slasher dumped the bodies.

As she headed for the second dumpster, glass crunched under her boot, and she accidentally kicked a tin can, which echoed in the alley. Caitlyn froze, holding her breath, listening over the thundering of her heart as it pounded a fast tattoo in her chest. What if he was still here? The thought raced through Caitlyn's mind, panicking her. The Slasher could have come back while the cop was talking on his radio.

She ducked behind the dumpster as the sound of footsteps suddenly filled the alley, drawing nearer with each passing second. Fear raised the hair on the back of her neck and tightened her throat until she couldn't breathe. Struggling for air, Caitlyn managed to draw in a deep whiff, inhaling the sickening stench of trash.

She tried not to cough as the scent of rotting food and garbage assaulted her senses. Day-old mayonnaise and fish smells mingled with rotting vegetables. Caitlyn gagged, biting on her fist to smother the sound. She couldn't remain hidden behind the dumpsters much longer without being violently ill.

Caitlyn plucked her damp T-shirt off her chest, raising the edge to cover her nose. Gritting her teeth together until they ached, she tried to peer around the dumpster. Surely, the Slasher was gone. He wouldn't want to get caught red-handed at the scene of his crimes.

It was probably the other police officer. They wouldn't leave the body unguarded. Besides, another minute back here with the stinky trash and she'd pass out.

Caitlyn rose swiftly. She released her shirt and clenched her fists at her sides, ready to defend herself if necessary, before she moved away from the safety of the dumpsters.

Glass crunched under her foot again as she stepped into the open. Caitlyn caught sight of the man near the body. With a sigh of relief, she recognized the light blue shirt, dark pants with a blue stripe, and blazing red hair. She'd bet money it was Sergeant McHenry, her favorite Philly cop.

If she wanted photographs she needed to get them now before his partner returned. As Caitlyn stepped forward, the officer spun around, reaching for his weapon.

"Who's there?" he shouted, lifting his gun.

"Whoa!" Caitlyn lifted her arms with a smile. She was right on the money. "Evening, Sergeant."

Sergeant Liam McHenry was the lead officer in charge of apprehending the Slasher. Over the past few months, she'd questioned him, hoping to learn something important. He'd been easy to pump for information. Well, until he received a gag order from his superiors when news of the Slasher reached television, sending the city into a panic.

Unlike the police, Caitlyn figured it probably wouldn't be long before they caught the Slasher if they did speak up. With more awareness of the man and his crimes came a greater chance he'd be seen. And, just as important, Caitlyn thought women everywhere should be warned to be careful and stay in groups.

"You! What in the world are you doing here?" he asked, lowering his weapon. "And scaring ten years off my life, as well."

"I'm sorry, Sergeant." Caitlyn tried to peer around him. "I wasn't trying to startle you."

"Then what are you doing here?" He crossed his arms over his chest.

"I came here for pictures."

"How did you know we found another body?" Liam's deep Irish brogue hinted at his fatigue. His accent thickened when he was tired, a fact she'd discovered after several late nights of questioning.

"How many more women will die before you alert the press?"

"Have you taken a job working for the papers?"

Caitlyn met his narrowed gaze. "Of course not. But I still think keeping this quiet is a big mistake."

"Everyone knows there is someone killing women."

"But if you gave them more information you could save lives."

"If we went public he could go into hiding, or move somewhere else and continue killing."

Ignoring him, Caitlyn went to step past McHenry. He moved, deliberately blocking her. Smiling, she tried moving in the opposite direction. Once again, he barred the way.

"Are you going to tell me who your informant is?"

"Not a chance." Caitlyn offered him another smile.

"Caitlyn, it's not a pretty sight. You shouldn't be here. When I find out who your source is --"

"That's why I'll never tell you," she said, trying to look past him.

McHenry tilted his head, obscuring her view. Damn, he was frustrating. This was getting old. Caitlyn threw her hands in the air with a laugh.

"Want to dance?"

"No." He frowned at her. "You. Can't. Look."

"I want to help. That's why I brought my camera."

"You aren't going to find any clues we're overlooking, Caitlyn. We're very thorough."

Caitlyn rose up on her tiptoes to peek around him. His unyielding stance frustrated her. It wasn't like she wanted to touch the body or anything.

"I just want some pictures." She dug in her purse for the tiny camera.

"Sorry, but I can't allow you to take pictures. It's against the rules."

Rules? Narrowing her eyes, Caitlyn crossed her arms over her chest. "Then why are you here by yourself? Isn't that against the rules, too?"

"My partner went to make a call."

When he looked down the alley for his partner, she leaned around him and snapped off a few shots.

"It *was* him. I knew it." Caitlyn gasped, lifting her fist to her mouth. She took a step back and gagged as the sight of the mutilated body.

"Caitlyn!" The sergeant grabbed her arm, trying to turn her around. "Do you want me to arrest you?"

Ignoring him, Caitlyn yanked free and forced herself to focus on the body. The Slasher's telltale trademarks were all there. The woman's auburn hair lay scattered around her body. He'd chopped it into pieces as he'd done to the other women's. Caitlyn fingered her own long thick hair. For some reason, he'd not touched hers.

Continuing her examination, she froze at the two empty holes where the woman's eyes should have been. Shuddering, she skimmed over the rest of the dead woman's features. Caitlyn noticed several slices to the ears and neck as well as various stab wounds to the rest of the body. There was no blood on or around the body, except for a few spatters at the edges of the wounds, even though the coppery smell still lingered in the air. Had he drained their blood before he mutilated them?

"Like a vampire," she gasped, one hand reaching up to stroke the long, thin scar that stretched across her carotid.

“That’s just what he wants us to think.” McHenry maneuvered her around so she couldn’t see the body anymore. “He’s trying to mislead us, make us chase after ghosts and false clues.”

Caitlyn glanced at the back of the club, remembering the rumors about Devlin. “People say he’s a vampire.”

“What’s going on?” A loud, harsh voice interrupted them. One Caitlyn knew and disliked.

Caitlyn glanced into the red, angry face of McHenry’s partner. She recognized Officer Matthews instantly. Recognized his intimidating stance, the constant frown, and his beady brown eyes. Shuddering, Caitlyn wondered what his problem was.

“Caitlyn happened to be walking past.” McHenry spoke before she could.

“Walking past? In an alley that dead-ends?” Matthews snorted as he narrowed his eyes. “Is she a trash collector now?”

“Um.” Caitlyn backed away from him, fighting the voice in her head that whispered for her to run.

A cold sweat trickled down her back and between her breasts. Caitlyn swallowed once, then again, before she realized what she was doing. Ever since the attack last year, she avoided getting close to certain types of men. Large, angry men. Men like Matthews.

Officer Matthews took a step toward her, then stopped. Caitlyn watched McHenry run his fingers through his thinning, reddish-brown hair while she struggled to catch her breath. Finally, he turned to her with a pleading look.

Okay, she got the hint. He wanted her to leave. The photos she took would have to be enough.

Matthews laughed harshly, the sound grating on Caitlyn’s nerves. “She wasn’t even attacked here. You can’t make a connection with her attacker and the Slasher. You’re just a sucker for a pretty face, Liam.”

Caitlyn listened to them argue while she tried to find an exit other than the way she’d entered the ally. She didn’t see one, but there had to be another way out. Surely someone would notice a man covered in blood if he exited the way she’d come in.

“Well, the wounds are the same,” McHenry argued.

“But the locations are different!”

Because she hadn’t been found here, the police didn’t believe her attacker was the Slasher. That, and the fact she’d survived her attack while none of the Slasher’s victims had.

A cool breeze whipped through the alley, sending shivers up her spine. The wind died as quickly as it started, and the sweet scent of peppermint filled the air, making her feel nauseous. She didn’t know why, but ever since waking from her coma, peppermint in any form sickened her.

Caitlyn left McHenry and Matthews arguing and walked around to the front of the club. She'd had not even one flash of memory. Other than upsetting her stomach, nothing else had happened.

She'd have to move on to the next step in her plan. Contacting Aidan Devlin.

Chapter Two

Caitlyn stared at the two large men guarding the entrance to Pretenses. Frowns covered their faces and sunglasses shielded their eyes. She wondered if they were ex-military. They definitely looked the part.

Both men wore identical deep blue jackets, slacks, and dark, shiny shoes. In short, their look screamed “armed and dangerous.” They were probably good bouncers, if their standoffishness didn’t frighten away potential customers.

Rubbing a hand across her upset stomach, Caitlyn decided to try to gain admittance anyway. As the old saying went, nothing ventured, nothing gained. Besides, she couldn’t control her curiosity any longer. She wanted to meet the owner and find out if the inside of the club was as familiar as the outside.

Plastering a smile on her face, Caitlyn stepped up to them. The one on the left lowered his sunglasses and cast a quick glance at her clothes. Without a word, or any facial expression, he replaced the sunglasses and resumed his impassive staring.

Caitlyn drew in a deep breath and released it. “Hello?”

“Yes?” the one on the left asked after a pause so great she was beginning to think they were blind and deaf.

“May I go in?” Caitlyn smiled at them both, keeping her lips closed to hide her clenched teeth. *Jerks*, she wanted to say it, but she just kept smiling.

“Certainly.” The bouncer on the right, who reminded her of Tweedle Dee, a character from the book *Alice in Wonderland*, opened the door. Caitlyn happily renamed the man on the left as well.

“What?” Tweedle Dum asked.

“She’s on the list.” Tweedle Dee shrugged.

What list? As far as she knew she wasn't on any list. She hadn't even given her name yet. But Caitlyn wasn't about to argue with this stroke of luck. Before they could change their minds, or ask her for ID, Caitlyn hurried inside the building. The door closed with a click behind her.

As her eyes adjusted to the dim lighting, she sniffed the air. There was no stale cigarette smell or body sweat, just the scent of fresh flowers.

Turning, Caitlyn caught sight of a large bar that filled most of the left wall. She was amazed by the rows and rows of shelves filled with different colored bottles, glasses, and mugs of various shapes and sizes.

Two tall blond men stood behind the bar. They were both dressed in black leather vests and matching pants. Their vests were open, revealing smooth muscular chests. One of the men smiled at her, flashing an impressive set of fangs.

Vampires. She sighed. Even the employees dressed the part. With a mixture of horror and fascination, Caitlyn found herself walking up to the bar. How obsessed with vampirism were the people in here? She hoped they didn't go to extreme lengths, such as drinking blood and biting people.

As she stood there, warmth stole over her, making her feel calm and at peace. It was as if she'd come home. She felt oddly nervous, yet not frightened. Maybe she'd liked to pretend she was a vampire before her attack? Rubbing the scar on the side of her neck, Caitlyn tried to forget that vampires haunted her dreams at night.

It was ironic that she, who didn't believe in the tales, felt at home in a place catering to vampire wannabes. Maybe her nightmares weren't just dreams after all, but memories trying to resurface. If that were true, then maybe this place could make her remember.

Caitlyn glanced around the interior of the club. Several tables held vases of fresh-cut flowers. On her right, a large wooden dance floor filled the center of the room. A few people dressed in black danced to loud, live music performed by a Goth band.

"They're warming up," a man said from behind her. "Wait until later. When the place fills up they start playing some good songs."

"Thanks." Caitlyn turned to give the man a smile. It was the younger bartender. He stood there with a sexy grin and two fangs reaching below his lower lip.

Cautiously, she approached him. Were they were fake, or had he sharpened them to points? She was tempted to touch one to see how sharp it was. Her hand lifted before she realized what she was doing. Clenching it tightly in a fist, she lowered her hand and slid it into the pocket of her jeans.

"What's your pleasure?" he asked, wiping the counter in front of her.

Caitlyn blinked. Her pleasure? Did he know she wanted to feel his teeth? She hesitated for a minute, debating how to answer when she realized he'd asked for her order.

"A bottle of water, please."

With a smirk, he turned around and retrieved the water. Knowing her face was burning, Caitlyn pulled out a thin leather wallet and set some money on the counter. After sliding her wallet back into her purse, she glanced up to look in the mirror behind the bar, but there wasn't one. Turning around, she scanned the room. Not a single mirror graced the walls. At least not one that she could see.

Interesting. Then again, mirrors would conflict with the whole vampire theme. There probably wasn't even one in the bathroom.

"Anything else?" he asked, leaning close to her.

"Not unless you have some antacids back there?"

"I think we do. I know we used to have some. My boss likes to keep them on hand for the customers." He dug under the counter, resurfacing with a triumphant smile and a bottle of tablets.

"Thanks." Caitlyn accepted the container. She chose a pink one. Did this guy have a facial expression other than happy? "I don't suppose your boss is around?"

"Why? Are you looking for a job?" His eyes brightened and even though she thought it impossible, his smile widened.

Why hadn't she thought of that? As a waitress, she'd be in the perfect position to hear things. Maybe even help catch the Slasher. "Yes," Caitlyn answered, nodding.

"Show me your teeth."

"Excuse me?"

"Your teeth. Let me see them."

"Um. Okay." Caitlyn gave him a hesitant smile. What a weird request. Or maybe not, considering the strange bouncers, as well.

"No, your vampire teeth. Where are your fangs?"

"My fangs?"

"Never mind." He grinned again and winked, leaning closer to say in a soft voice, "We can fix that easily enough."

"That's good." Caitlyn took a step back.

He was too close for comfort and didn't seem to realize it. He came across very strong, too. She knew he was interested because of the way his eyes raked her body, not once, but several times. He probably hoped she'd get hired so he could train her. There was no sense worrying about it now. She'd jump that hurdle when she came to it.

"Where would I find the owner?"

"The door at the end of the bar. It's the one marked manager."

"Micah!" the other bartender called out.

"Excuse me." Micah winked at her again. "Good luck. Oh, and I'll be here all night if you need another drink."

"Thanks."

"I also get off at two," he said, glancing at her body again.

"I'll have to take a rain check." Caitlyn smiled politely instead of rolling her eyes like she wanted to. For now, it was in her best interest to be polite. At least until she got what she came here for.

It had been weeks since she'd gone out with anyone, and Caitlyn had a feeling she'd find him just as lacking as the last few dates she'd suffered through. Hell, they were all lacking when compared to her nocturnal lover.

"If you change your mind, you know where to find me," he said before turning around.

Caitlyn watched him hurry over to the other bartender. She wouldn't change her mind. Not once, since she'd awoken from her coma, had Caitlyn found a man who could sneak past her reserve and draw a response from her.

Not one real live person, that is. She had to count her midnight lover. The senses and emotions he aroused in her were so erotic her face colored at the mere thought of the way he made love to her in those dreams. The one from today was still reeling in her mind, replaying over and over as he thrust himself into her again and again. Even though she'd been thoroughly pleased in the dream, she'd ached all day for a real-life version of her nocturnal lover.

Devlin. You are here to talk to Aidan Devlin, Caitlyn reminded herself. She grabbed her water, then turned around and followed the length of the bar to the door marked "Manager."

Knocking lightly, Caitlyn waited for an answer. When there wasn't one, she gripped the knob and turned it slowly. She drew in a deep breath and willed her nerves to stay calm as she stepped into the dark room.

"Hello?" she whispered.

The light from the club filtered past her, illuminating part of the office. A framed photo of a full moon hung behind a large oak desk. In the corner, next to an unmarked door, stood a tall green plant.

Since the room was empty, and the space under the other door was dark, Caitlyn figured the owner had slipped out without Micah noticing.

She stood there in the semi-dark, debating whether to leave or try the other door anyway. After a minute, the nagging feeling she'd been here before increased until she walked toward the door, automatically stepping around the trashcan.

Caitlyn froze when she realized what she'd done. With her foot she kicked at the space she'd just avoided, and heard the unmistakable sound of a metal trashcan banging against a wooden desk.

How had she known there was something there? The light from the door didn't reach here so she knew she hadn't seen it. Yet she'd known it was there. Determined to find some answers, she walked over to the door and knocked.

Silence. After knocking once more, Caitlyn opened the door a crack. There was no one in this room, either.

More determined than ever, Caitlyn slipped inside the room. It was even darker than the last, if that was possible. Her night vision was good, better than she felt it should be, but even so, the dark frightened her.

Breathing deeply, she concentrated on relaxing until her nerves stopped their jittery dance. A little calmer, Caitlyn reached for the light switch. As she felt along the wall, the hairs on the back of her neck rose. A light breeze brushed across her arm, sending a rash of goose bumps skittering over her skin.

Confused, she stood still, puzzling out the source of the chilly air. Her instincts screamed for her to run. Caitlyn's nerves stretched taut, and her knees flexed in preparation. She used every ounce of her rapidly dwindling willpower to remain standing still.

Caitlyn was still torn between fleeing and finding the source of her panic when the scent of cinnamon tickled her nose, comforting her with its familiarity. She recognized it from somewhere, but from where, she didn't know.

Before she could say anything, someone reached around her, pulling her back against a hard chest. Panic slammed into Caitlyn, sending her heart racing and her pulse thundering in her ears. This wasn't a dream. It was real, and there was a male holding her in his tight grip.

Caitlyn opened her mouth to scream but a large hand covered her lips, silencing her. She struggled against him as he tilted her head back. Then something brushed against the back of her head, sending a rush of shivers up her spine, before coming to rest, nestled in her hair.

Her attacker inhaled a deep breath, his nose tickling the side of her neck while he sniffed her. *Sniffed? What the hell?*

Caitlyn shook her head, trying to pull away from him, but he tensed, his grip tightening.

She gave a muffled squeak as his warm lips slid across her neck. The water bottle, long forgotten, slipped from her fingers as she stood trembling in his arms while his warm breath fanned across the nape of her neck.

Great, she'd been caught by a pervert. And to make matters worse, it excited her. She didn't know if it was the scent of the cinnamon, or if it was the gentle caress of his lips. She'd obviously gone too long without a man in her bed if she could get this excited by a stranger. There hadn't been anyone since her attack, and she couldn't remember before that.

Frightened and more than a little angry at the liberties he was taking, and she was allowing, Caitlyn bit into the hand covering her mouth. A small grunt reached her ears as the hand fell away.

"My little wildcat," he whispered, "I knew you'd find your way back."

With a quick movement, he changed his hold on her, spinning her around, and pinning her up against the wall. Caitlyn started to scream but closed her lips tightly as his lips moved across her mouth in a soft caress.

Wildcat? He thought she was someone else. But it wasn't relief that swept through her, it was jealousy. Now that she knew he wasn't trying to attack her, she realized it hadn't been fear making her tremble. Somehow, her traitorous body knew he wasn't a threat.

Why did he make her knees weak? She wasn't the woman he was looking for. And she definitely shouldn't be aroused by the sweet promise of his mouth. Why was she standing here allowing him to touch her? Caitlyn wrapped her hands around his forearms, preparing to bring her knee into his groin.

"I don't fall for that one twice." His whisper tickled her ear as he leaned in even closer.

"What?" Caitlyn breathed softly, her hands tightening on his arms. He was hard. Rock hard. All over. And the way he moved his lower body against her was so seductive she didn't want to tell him he had the wrong woman. Hell, she wished she was the lucky girl.

Opening dazed eyes, she looked up and met his intense gaze. Even in the dark she could tell his eyes burned with desire. Who was he and why did he remind her of her dream lover?

"Mmm." He lowered his nose to her throat and whispered again, "You smell delicious."

Caitlyn moaned. She smelled delicious? His scent was driving her crazy. He smelled of cinnamon, soap, and spicy cologne. Her stomach tightened as she fought her body's reaction to his nearness. He reminded her of the dreams, that's all. But that was imaginary, and this was real, and dangerous.

Caitlyn struggled to breathe, his scent flooding her senses and driving all rational thought from her mind. Each brush of his lips against hers sent another little shiver up her spine.

She sighed when he finally covered her mouth with his. He must have sensed her capitulation because he released her and grabbed a fistful of hair in each hand.

"Finally," he murmured, placing several light kisses on her cheeks and forehead.

Caitlyn sighed again, closing her eyes. This man aroused senses that only her nocturnal lover had. What was happening to her?

When he released her, she almost whimpered in disappointment. He wasn't going to stop, was he? Then his mouth met hers again, his hands resting on either side of her head.

Straight, hot desire. That was what his mouth promised. And delivered. Oh, what she wouldn't give to have his mouth all over her body. Weakened by the thought, Caitlyn

grabbed onto his shoulders for support. He lowered his hands to her waist, pressing his lower body against her.

Caitlyn's arms flew around him as she became ensnared in the sensual magic in which he'd encased her. His hands ran up and down her sides as his mouth moved skillfully over hers. She buried her fingers in his soft, thick hair, meeting his kiss with a level of passion she didn't realize she possessed.

Trembling, Caitlyn arched against him as his hands crept under her thin T-shirt, thumbs rubbing in small circles on her stomach.

Lifting her chin, she granted his wandering mouth access to her neck. He trailed kisses across her cheek, to her ear, whispering words in a language she couldn't understand, yet caused her blood to heat. Words meant for another woman.

"Stop," she said, panting. "Please stop."

Hadn't he realized she wasn't who he thought she was?

His mouth moved lower, tracing a path down her sensitized flesh. His tongue flicked out, licking the side of her neck, along her scar. Caitlyn flinched and pulled away, her chest tightening painfully as she struggled to breathe.

"No," Caitlyn whimpered. How could she have forgotten about the attack?

The light turned on, momentarily blinding her. Caitlyn winced, throwing her hands up to block the sudden brightness. Strong hands gripped her wrists, pulling her arms down, then grabbed her chin, lifting her face up.

"Not a dream?"

His voice trembled. Caitlyn blinked rapidly, trying to adjust to the sudden brightness.

Breathless, she met his gaze, green eyes mirroring her reflection. There was something about him. Something familiar, but she couldn't grasp it. Caitlyn tried to remember him, but her mind refused to unlock the information she needed. Maybe it was a case of mistaken identity. Yes, he must have confused her with someone else. Any minute now he would apologize for his familiarity.

Instead, his fingers tangled in her hair once more. Those same fingers then explored her face and neck, igniting those foreign emotions all over again. How could he arouse such intense longing in her? Why did she let him? Who the hell was he?

Caitlyn drew in a deep, shuddering breath, then let it out with a whoosh. "Who are you?"

Thick black eyebrows furrowed as he pursed his lips. His voice was harsh as he asked, "What do you mean, who am I?"

Caitlyn pushed away from him and the anger in his voice. Fear clouded her mind and tightened her throat. Forcing away the panic threatening to choke her, she slid behind the desk praying he wouldn't come any closer. Her hopes were crushed when he glided toward

her. Glided? People couldn't glide. Shaking her head, Caitlyn tried to clear the fog out of her mind.

She looked up at him as he paused in the center of the room. He looked like the other characters in the club. Dressed in a long black coat over a black shirt, black slacks, and black boots, he should have looked like death warmed over, but he didn't. Adonis, maybe.

Even though Caitlyn stood five feet ten inches in her bare feet, he towered over her. Caitlyn guessed his height at close to six and a half feet. Thick black hair fell to his shoulders in loose waves, and brilliant emerald eyes stared back at her unblinkingly. He looked like a fallen angel.

Caitlyn's heart stuttered, then started to beat again, rapidly thudding against her chest so loudly she feared he heard it.

When his mouth curved in a smile so sensual her toes curled, Caitlyn forgot they were strangers. She almost forgot to breathe. Her breaths, quick and shallow, caught in her throat when his grin widened, revealing his teeth. They were straight and white. They reminded her of a hunter stalking his prey and closing in on the helpless creature.

Desire burned in her stomach, warring with her attempts to erase his kisses from her memory. If he was the killer, Caitlyn understood how those poor women would have followed him into the alley. She'd follow him anywhere, as long as he kept looking at her as if she were the most desirable woman in the world.

Seconds away from total surrender, Caitlyn tried to look away. She struggled to break eye contact, but the desire to watch him overwhelmed her. Excitement and fear slammed into her when he stepped closer. Frantically, Caitlyn backed away from the desk until cold, hard bricks pressed into her back. Caitlyn judged the distance to the door and wondered if she could make it there first.

"You don't remember me?"

The grief in his voice startled her. The gleam in his eyes frightened her as he advanced closer. She'd boxed herself into a corner, with no one to blame but herself. She shouldn't have entered the dark office.

"I won't hurt you."

His voice, low and husky, warmed her like a soft caress. He melted the icy barrier of resistance she'd carried since waking six months ago. And he had done it effortlessly. Knowing her body responded to this stranger bothered her more than anything else.

Caitlyn stood there, frozen, knowing she should flee or at least put up a token fight. Instead she stared at him, her senses going haywire. Caitlyn's heart pounded painfully in her chest, her breath coming fast, as the scent of cinnamon overpowered her.

She couldn't control the fear. She couldn't even move. It took every ounce of strength, all of her will, to remain upright.

He drew closer with each step while she pressed against the wall, her mouth opening and closing silently. Slowly, steadily, her heart rate slowed and her breathing returned to normal. She struggled to understand why her body calmed so quickly, without any effort on her part, especially when she was still frightened.

"I won't hurt you," he repeated, stopping in front of the desk.

She laughed harshly. Hurt her? At this point, she was more worried about what would happen if she threw herself at him. As if reading her thoughts, he gave a low, throaty chuckle that resounded throughout the small room.

Fighting the crazy urge to press her mouth against his and run her fingers through his thick mane of hair again, Caitlyn fisted her hands at her side. She would not give in to these ridiculous feelings. He was a stranger. Albeit a very sexy stranger.

"Why did you let us think you were dead?" He interrupted the thoughts sliding around in her head and put his hands on the desk, leaning forward over a stack of papers.

"What are you talking about?" Caitlyn squeaked as her throat constricted.

"How did you survive? Who helped you? Why didn't you let me know you were safe?"

"What?" Caitlyn raised a hand to her still swollen lips before choking out, "I don't know you. I don't even know me."

Caitlyn watched him freeze, his eyes looking her over, from head to toe and back again.

"Amnesia?"

She hesitated, drawing her lower lip into her mouth. After a minute she nodded.

"You don't remember me?"

"I know you are Aidan Devlin, but I don't *know* you."

An emotion she didn't understand filled his eyes as he reached for her. Shaking her head, Caitlyn squeezed past the desk and made her way toward the door as fast as her legs could carry her.

"Caitlyn!"

She froze in the midst of reaching for the doorknob, turned around and glanced at him warily. "How do you know my name?"

Chapter Three

Aidan Devlin stared at his wife. She was even more beautiful than he remembered. Auburn hair curled down to a waist smaller than when he'd last held her. Long, shapely legs encased in tight black jeans drew his attention down to black leather boots. Lifting his gaze, Aidan noticed Caitlyn's breasts heaved under her T-shirt, her hardened nipples straining against the thin cotton.

He returned his hungry eyes to her face and reached for her, aching to touch her one more time. But Caitlyn's light green eyes darkened in fear, and he heard the quick pace of her heart and the strangled breaths she fought to draw in.

Aidan closed his eyes and pulled his hand back with a soft curse. What had happened to her? Where had she been these past months? Why couldn't she remember him?

"I'm your husband," he said after a long, painful minute.

Aidan opened his eyes and watched Caitlyn's face as his quiet statement sank in. She blinked a few times before shaking her head in denial.

"No. You've mistaken me for someone else."

"Then why did you respond to me the way you did?"

"I don't know." She hesitated, then added, "I don't remember you."

"It's true." Aidan held out his left hand toward her, palm down. "This is the ring you gave me when we made our vows to stay together forever."

"No." Caitlyn backed up against the door. "I don't believe you."

Aidan's face paled and his hand shook as he lowered it. Not only did she not remember him, but she believed he was a murderer. He hadn't killed her. The fact that she was standing here right now was proof enough.

"No." She continued to shake her head.

If she had no memories then he'd have to make her remember him. In two short strides Aidan crossed the room and pulled her into his arms. He kissed her fiercely as he tried to awaken a response similar to the one earlier. His mouth moved over hers hungrily, his teeth nipping at her bottom lip.

Aidan remembered how much she melted when he sucked on her earlobes, so he trailed kisses across her cheek to her ear and bit gently. She moaned, the sound going straight to his throbbing cock, making him even harder.

When Caitlyn leaned into him, he pressed his lower body against hers and slid his hand to her waist. He wanted take her here and now. Perhaps on his desk like they had that one Christmas. Or maybe on the sofa. She'd seemed to like it when he'd been forceful. He reached up and cupped her breast, rubbing his thumb against her nipple.

Caitlyn gasped and pulled away. "No!" she said forcefully, then slapped his face. The sound echoed in the small space. She cringed, trying to back away from him. Aidan touched his stinging flesh while he wondered if she thought he would hit her back.

"I might have deserved that," Aidan growled, "But I am your husband. I never killed you. You being here is proof of that. You can feel it, can't you?"

"I don't believe you."

Aidan watched Caitlyn wince as his hand caressed the mark she'd left on his cheek. She really was terrified of him. The way her hand trembled as she reached for the doorknob spoke louder than any words. He had to stop her before she disappeared again. He needed to convince her he spoke the truth and find out why she couldn't remember him.

"Caitlyn." He raised his hand to stop her. "Listen to me. You don't have any memory at all?"

She hesitated before answering, "No."

"How do you know I am lying?"

"Because the police said you killed your wife. They found you standing over her body with a knife in your hand."

"Why aren't I in jail? Where are the judge and jury that convicted me?" Aidan asked.

"I ... I don't know."

As Caitlyn chewed on her lower lip, Aidan wished he could pull her in his arms and reassure her. But the painful reminder on his cheek kept him from reaching for her again.

"Because while I was in their custody your body and the murder weapon disappeared. If I killed you, why did someone else go to the extreme measure of hiding evidence that would have sent me to jail?"

Caitlyn looked at him with a wide-eyed, doe in the headlamps look. He could almost hear the thoughts whirling around in her mind. Hell, if he wanted to, he could listen to them, but he wasn't sure she'd let him in right now.

“Caitlyn, I love you. I would never harm a hair on your beautiful head.”

“I don’t believe you,” she answered finally. “I was attacked last year and in a coma for months. No one came forth as a relative or friend. If you are my husband, why didn’t you try to find me?”

Aidan cupped her cheek with his hand, her skin soft and smooth to his touch. After all this time he couldn’t keep from touching her, even if it scared her. Moisture dampened his eyes and he blinked back tears.

“I thought you were dead. They said you were dead. I saw you ...” His voice trailed off. How could he convince her he spoke the truth? How could he get her to remember?

“Look, I don’t know you. I don’t remember anything before waking up in the hospital.”

“Nothing?” There had to be something that would trigger her memory. “Not even your family?”

“Family?” She blinked at him. “I have family?”

“Yes, your sister lives nearby. Your brother disappeared after you were attacked. Do you remember either of them?”

“No. I don’t remember a thing. I don’t know who tried to kill me, and I don’t know why. I don’t remember anything that happened before this year.” She shook her head.

“No. You are my wife. Trust me, sweetheart.”

“I can’t. I don’t remember you.” Caitlyn sighed. “I need proof. Can you prove I’m your wife? Don’t you have pictures? Or a marriage certificate? You know, proof what you are saying is true?”

“I do.” He stepped closer to her and caught her shoulders with his hands. “But they’re upstairs in my apartment, along with the rest of your stuff. If you want, you can come up right now and look through your things.”

Aidan cursed the amnesia that had a hold on his wife. How much did she remember about her past? She didn’t remember people, but did she remember what she was?

“I don’t think so.” Caitlyn reached for the door again. “I’m not crazy enough to go upstairs to your apartment, alone.”

“Please, Caitlyn, don’t fear me. Don’t run away. You *are* my wife. Give me a chance to prove it to you.”

“I will not go upstairs into your apartment.”

“I know you don’t trust me yet, but once you see your things, once you are surrounded by the familiar, you should remember.”

“No. Someone tried to kill me. I can’t trust anyone right now.”

“What about your sister? Would you believe your sister?”

“Sister?” Caitlyn stared at him warily. “Twice now you said I have a sister. I don’t remember having a family.”

"But you said you don't remember anything. Did you even remember your name? Or did they read it from the engraving on your bracelet?"

"My bracelet. How did you ..." Her voice trailed off as she backed up against the door.

"I gave you a gold bracelet while we were dating. I had your name engraved on it."

Caitlyn toyed with the bracelet. Aidan wondered if that would be enough to convince her of the truth.

"It could just be a coincidence." She straightened and looked him in the eye. "It must be a coincidence."

"Fine. Why don't we go find your sister? Maybe you'll believe her, if not me."

He could sense her wavering and hoped she would trust him enough to go with him. Aidan inhaled deeply, breathing in her essence. Not one day went by without thoughts of her haunting him. Remembering her scent, her touch, had sustained him these past months. More nights than not were filled with hot, erotic dreams of her. They'd seemed so real he knew she had to be alive.

Caitlyn looked up into his eyes. They were deep pools of green with flecks of yellow, swirling around and around. Drawing her in, capturing her in their depths and mesmerizing her in their intensity.

Aidan wrapped his arms around her and hugged her close, squeezing tight enough to break whatever spell he must have cast on her.

What was happening to her? Surely she'd remember being married to Aidan. How could she forget a man like him? Handsome, sexy, and virile, he was any woman's fantasy. Stupid amnesia.

She didn't wear a wedding ring. No ring at all. His marriage certificate would prove nothing, and she already knew he didn't have any pictures of his wife. She didn't even know her last name. Her only identification lay engraved on a little bracelet.

What if he was crazy? Perhaps he had killed his wife. And if he believed Caitlyn to be his wife, didn't it stand to reason he would try to kill her? Again?

She had no idea whether to believe him or not. There were looming doubts and questions in her mind. And if she was his wife, that might not be a good thing. Not if he'd tried to kill her once before. Maybe that was why she couldn't remember. Ted had suggested she might not like the answers she sought, and she was repressing the memories herself.

The same sense of loneliness she felt when she arrived at the club assaulted her again. It hit her so hard and fast, her knees almost buckled, and Aidan tightened his grip on her.

There was something here. This place touched something deep inside her, and if she stayed long enough she might remember why. If she ran, then the answers to her past could be lost forever.

"Let me take you to your sister."

"Where is she?"

"She's at a café not too far from here. I'll take you there now if you wish."

"How do you know she's there?" Caitlyn bit her bottom lip. Could she trust him?

"It's a small café that has been in your family for a long time. She's always there at night."

"And there will be a lot of other people around?"

"Yes." Aidan sighed. "In fact, it's on South Street. There's bound to be huge crowds around this time of the night. I know you don't trust me right now, but if I didn't take you to Meredith she'd have my head on a platter for breakfast. So, we'll go see her and see if you remember anything."

"Okay, I'll go, but only if you promise to answer some questions about the Slasher for me."

"It's a deal. Let's go."

Aidan reached for her but she pulled away.

"I might have agreed to go see this woman, but I never said I believed you."

Sighing, Aidan opened the door for her. Caitlyn didn't care what he said or how miserable he looked. Until her memory returned, she was going to be very careful. Especially with him.

When they stepped back out into the club, Aidan walked over to the bar. He attracted the attention of the bartender she hadn't talked to.

"I'm taking Caitlyn over to the café. Hopefully I'll be back soon. Gregory, you're in charge until we return."

"Sure thing, boss," Gregory answered before adding. "It's nice to see you again, Mrs. Devlin."

Caitlyn's mouth dropped open and she stared first at Gregory, then at Aidan and back again. There was no way Aidan could have asked him to pretend to know her. He'd been in the office with her.

"Why did you call me that? When was the last time you saw me?"

"Last year," Gregory answered hesitantly. Aidan met the man's gaze again, sharing another one of those looks. Something seemed to pass between them before he looked at her again. "I never believed you were dead, either."

Caitlyn didn't know what to make of this. Before she could say anything, Aidan answered him.

"Thank you, Gregory, I'll be back soon." Aidan nodded at the man, then led Caitlyn through the doors and out onto the sidewalk.

A line started at the door and reached back to the edge of the alley. Several women waved or winked at Aidan while giving Caitlyn curious glances. Aidan nodded at the women and turned, speaking quietly with Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee.

Caitlyn cast a quick glance at Aidan again. His mouth tilted in an irresistible grin. He probably enjoyed the attention of the crowd of women. Hell, she didn't blame them for fighting for his attention. She wanted to take back her earlier protestation and ask him to take her upstairs, but not for proof of his claim. No, she wanted to get hot and sweaty with him. Jealousy wasn't a good emotion, she decided ruefully.

Fighting the crazy urge to press her mouth against his and experience that mind-numbing kiss again, Caitlyn glanced toward the line of people. Even the latest murder didn't keep women from lining up to gain entrance to his club. After meeting Aidan herself, she couldn't blame them. Look at her reaction to him. In the past six months she couldn't remember wanting a man the way she wanted him.

She did want to go upstairs with him, and she wasn't afraid of him taking advantage of her. No, she was afraid she'd *let* him.

As if reading her thoughts, Aidan slid his hand down her forearm and grabbed her hand, enfolding it in his. A warm tingling sensation started in her belly and spread down toward her thighs. The man could charm a nest of snakes right out of their skins.

Caitlyn vowed not give in to the ridiculous feelings. Aidan was a stranger claiming to be her husband. With luck, he was telling the truth. If not, then he was lying about everything. And he was leading her away from the crowded club and safety.

A few blocks from the club, he stopped and hailed a taxi. Awed by the speed with which he commanded one of those vehicles to stop, she climbed in without question. Caitlyn couldn't resist peeking in front of the cab.

Muhammad grinned back at her. He snapped his gum and nodded toward Aidan. "I see you found your date."

With a groan, Caitlyn shrank back into the shadows, wondering how she was lucky enough to get his cab twice in one night. She peeked at Aidan. He raised one eyebrow at her in question, then told Muhammed their destination.

Muhammad took the next turn so fast Caitlyn slid along the seat, bumping into Aidan. Afraid she'd make a fool of herself and give in to her desire, she tried to move away. Aidan's arm snaked out and wrapped around her, pinning her against him.

"Aidan," she protested, hoping he didn't notice she was out of breath. Her whole side tingled where her body touched his, and she had to curl her hands into fists to keep from touching him. Caitlyn held herself stiffly, trying to keep as much of her body away from his as possible.

"Relax, babe," Aidan whispered in her ear. "I don't bite ... hard."

Caitlyn shivered and turned, meeting his gaze. It was on the tip of her tongue to ask him to bite her hard when she realized what she was about to say.

"I don't know you," she reminded him.

"Your body says otherwise, darling." He smirked as he slid his other hand onto her thigh and left it there.

Caitlyn trembled as his touch sent a frisson of lust through her body. She grew wet from the way he slid his thumb back and forth, creating currents of something she wasn't sure she could fight.

Struggling not to give in to her urges and jump on him, Caitlyn pushed his hand away. Confusion and desire warred within her. His touch, his caresses, and his kisses were so familiar it felt as if she should remember him. Of course it could be wishful thinking on her part. Maybe he only reminded her of someone she couldn't remember.

"Caitlyn," Aidan whispered as he cupped her chin in his hand. She met his desire-filled gaze and held it. "You're killing me."

She knew what he meant. This sexual attraction probably held him as tightly in its grasp as it did her. As she stared into his green eyes she wondered if his kiss would affect her as much now as it had in his darkened office when he'd surprised her.

Overcome with need, Caitlyn leaned toward him and kissed him, cautiously at first, then more hungrily as he responded. He cupped the back of her head with his hand, and wrapped his arm around her lower back, tugging her against him. Caitlyn pressed her straining breasts against his chest and wrapped her arms around him, sinking her hands into his soft, thick hair as desire flooded through her.

Aidan slid one hand under her T-shirt, and caressed her stomach. She shivered, her underwear growing damp as his hand crept lower. Wrapped up in passion, Caitlyn took charge of the kiss, fisting her hand in his hair as her tongue dueled with his for supremacy. She pressed closer to him, her other hand creeping down his chest to rub the impressive bulge at the front of his jeans.

They were separated when Muhammad took another turn fast. Caitlyn slid halfway across the taxi. She blinked away the remaining haze of desire and glanced up at Muhammad. He winked.

"Caitlyn," Aidan began.

"Save your smooth words and one-liners for someone who's interested in you."

The rest of the ride, fortunately, was short. Sitting that close to the sexy devil and not being able to give in to her desires was testing her willpower. If it turned out she was his wife, Caitlyn doubted she'd let him out of her bed for a long, long time. Especially not after that kiss.

Muhammad screeched to a halt next to a tattoo parlor. *Back here again*, Caitlyn thought with a sigh. She loved the scents and the sights, but the hour was growing late and her feet were tired.

Anything to find the Slasher, she reminded herself. She just hoped they didn't need to walk too far.

Caitlyn glanced around as she stepped out of the cab. A group of scantily-clad women pushed past her. Aidan grabbed her hand, pulling her attention back to him. He said nothing, gesturing instead for her to follow him. As they walked down the block, neither of them speaking, Caitlyn observed the sights and sounds of Philly at night.

A loud group of tourists slowed down in front of them, stopping to take photos of each other every few feet. Aidan led her around them and on down the street.

"I hope you don't mind walking. I remember how much you loved to window shop."

"It's fine." Caitlyn looked up at him, trying to read him.

She was good at reading people's emotions, and he was easier than most. What she sensed puzzled her, made her doubt herself. She felt love, desire, relief, all things she'd expect someone to feel in this situation.

But could she trust herself? What if he was good at blocking part of himself? She'd been feeling odd ever since she'd arrived at the club anyway; maybe she was wrong. Perhaps she wasn't reading him right. Her reaction to him was probably clouding the situation.

The man at her side and the steamy kisses in his office and the taxi weighed heavily in her mind. Her lips quirked in a wry smile as she remembered the way he'd responded when she'd practically thrown herself at him in the cab. Pure, liquid heat rushed through her body. She shivered, stepping closer to Aidan.

Something about this area called to her, tugged on her like a memory she couldn't quite grasp. The feeling of familiarity grew as they walked past a pet store boasting unique collars and toys. The next store featured vintage clothing. Caitlyn hesitated next to a black faux fur coat. She glanced down at the price tag and blinked at the low cost. Well, damn, she could buy two for that price and it would only cost her one day's pay as Ted's receptionist.

"See something you like?" Aidan asked, his mouth next to her ear.

Caitlyn shivered, but didn't turn to look at him. She didn't trust herself. He made her feel as if they were a couple out for a casual date. But they weren't. She needed to remember that.

"Just window shopping."

She started walking again, smiling as they passed a store offering millions of beads at wholesale prices. Some of the jewelry they displayed in the window made her want to try designing and making her own, but she knew she didn't have the patience for it.

Caitlyn was debating between the painting of a sunset on a beach and one of a mountain lake, when Aidan tugged her in between two buildings. She wanted to protest, but

didn't when she realized it wasn't a dead end. How many times had she walked South Street and never seen this small space between the Voodoo shop and the vintage clothing store? It was shrouded in darkness, but still should have been noticeable.

Confused, Caitlyn opened her mouth to question him, then closed it when she saw the buildings once they'd exited the tiny alleyway.

In all her travels over the past months she hadn't stumbled over this section of town. The age and beauty of it amazed her. Caitlyn thought she had visited every street in the city looking for clues to the identity and location of the Slasher, but apparently she was wrong.

Aidan glanced at her with a smile before leading her across the street. Caitlyn glanced down at the cobblestones in amazement. They looked as fresh as if they'd been put down only yesterday.

They walked in silence again for about a block before stopping in front of a large café. Directly across the street, a large sign displayed two horns on the top and a picture of a red creature resembling a devil. Raising her eyebrows, Caitlyn turned to her guide expectantly.

"The Demon's Den?"

"It's a, uh, gentleman's club, of sorts."

His explanation only further aroused her curiosity, but she needed to stay focused on the task at hand. He'd brought her here to meet her sister. But where was here?

"It's hard to find unless you know what you are looking for."

He was doing his mind reader trick. *How did he do it?*

She turned back to the café. An old banner hung near the door of the cafe proclaiming this to be The Witch's Brew, established in 1682.

Aidan opened the door and stood there, holding it open for her. Sounds of soft jazz reached her ears and the soothing scent of vanilla filled her with peace. Caitlyn could feel herself starting to relax and they hadn't even stepped inside the café yet.

Would her sister really be here?

Chapter Four

Caitlyn walked through the door and glanced around. Thick white candles burned in miniature cauldrons on tables covered with cloths that looked like giant spider webs. Obviously, this place wasn't called The Witch's Brew for nothing.

The witchcraft theme didn't surprise her as much as the people. They were a loud and colorful bunch. Most were dressed in black, but the ones who weren't wore fancy costumes. All of them looked as if they thought today was Halloween. Some type of role-playing group gathering, maybe?

One by one, heads turned to stare at her and Aidan. Soon, Caitlyn felt as if every eye in the place on was them. She held her breath, waiting for someone to accuse her of trespassing. She even turned to leave, but Aidan stopped her. He caught her elbow and gently urged her forward, leading her deeper into the mass of strangers.

Caitlyn knew she shouldn't stare at them, but the costumes were amazing. Each one was decorative and made of expensive and colorful materials.

Taking a step back, she watched a woman wrapped in a dark blue velvet cloak slip past her and exit the café.

"Are you sure this is the right place?" she asked in a hushed whisper. "I can't imagine my sister working here."

"Where do you imagine her working?" Aidan looked down at her with a frown.

"I don't know. I don't even know if I have a sister."

"You do, and this is the right place."

Caitlyn sighed and looked back at the door longingly, wishing for escape. *You need to question him*, she reminded herself as Aidan moved forward, dragging her with him. She needed to know if his claim was true.

Aidan made his way through the throng of people, pulling her along in his wake. Caitlyn glanced around the room, wondering what other things they used in their witch theme. She stared at the paintings of witches, demons, and vampires covering the walls. Some depicted creatures locked in fierce battles, while others were rather erotic in their poses, causing heat to race up her neck and face.

The paintings were so realistic they looked as if they were windows, giving her a glimpse of another world. One in particular caught and held her attention. When someone distracted Aidan, Caitlyn slipped loose and stepped closer to the painting, trying to get a better look.

She stared at a couple who stood under a tree as a storm approached. The artist had painted it in such a way that she swore she could see the leaves on the tree blowing in the wind. If she leaned close enough could she feel the breeze?

Discarding the fanciful thought, she looked up in time to see Aidan's back disappear as a group of people closed the small gap between them. He must not have realized she wasn't with him as he slipped into the crowd.

She moved quickly, trying to catch up. With all these strange people filling the café, Caitlyn didn't want to lose him. Even if she made it out of the café unscathed, she wasn't sure she remembered which way led back to South Street.

Making her way through the crowd, she finally spotted him right past the band that played the soft jazz. Quickening her pace, Caitlyn squeezed between two men with long hair and pale features. They were dressed in black with capes over their shoulders. One winked at her and lifted his glass in a salute.

"It's nice to see you again," he said as she bumped into him.

"Sorry." Caitlyn forced a stiff smile to her lips. She wondered if the thick red liquid in his glass contained only tomato juice or if they served alcohol here as well. She figured he either had too much to drink or he was hitting on her.

Finally drawing near Aidan once more, Caitlyn noticed that most of the customers were drinking the same thing. A house specialty?

"There you are," Aidan said, slipping an arm around her waist. "Stay close. I don't want to lose you."

Caitlyn nodded and pressed herself closer to him. She told herself that it was for safety reasons, and not because he made her blood heat.

"Dance with me."

It wasn't a question, because he didn't wait for an answer. Before she knew what he was doing, Aidan had swung her around and pulled her tight against him, one arm wrapping around her waist. Caitlyn stepped on his foot and stumbled, grabbing onto his shoulders for support.

"I see you are as graceful as ever."

“Hey! That wasn’t very kind.”

“That’s okay, I forgive you.”

She stumbled over a comeback when she made the mistake of meeting his eyes. Looking up into his face, she met his devilish grin with a silent gasp as he pulled her closer, his arousal pressing against her. Heat flooded her body as millions of butterflies fluttered in her stomach.

Wordlessly, she moved with him to the beat, forgetting to protest, forgetting to keep her distance. Whether they were married or not, she couldn’t deny the mutual attraction. The intense desire threw her off guard and made her act out of character. She couldn’t imagine feeling this strongly about someone, or having him feel the same about her.

Thinking was a waste right now. All she could do was feel. All her senses, all her emotions, were haywire. They’d been short-circuiting all night from his proximity. Why did his touch drive every thought from her mind, except one? Sex.

He’d probably be fantastic between the sheets. Caitlyn drew in a deep, shaky breath and pulled away from him before she did something she would regret. Like asking him to take her back to his place, and not to look at pictures.

Aidan let her go, but maneuvered her so her body was in front of his as they continued across the café. His erection pressed into her lower back. She remembered how tight his jeans were, and figured he was probably trying to hide his reaction from the other customers.

Knowing she had such a strong effect on him made her smile in pleasure. Heaven help her, because she really wanted to get to know him better, whether he was her husband or not. She stopped short, enjoying the low hiss as he rammed into her back.

A waitress stepped forward with a million-dollar smile. “It’s been a while, Mr. Devlin.”

Caitlyn tilted her head to watch Aidan’s response to the costumed woman.

“I’ve been busy, Linda.” Aidan smiled at her, loosening his hold on Caitlyn.

Linda scooped up two menus, her glance resting admiringly on Aidan’s broad shoulders before she turned and led the way to a small table in the corner.

Caitlyn frowned at the petite brunette. Did Linda have a thing for Aidan? He oozed sex appeal, so it wasn’t much of a surprise if she did. After all, he’d done a number on her and she’d only known him for a few hours.

When they stopped at a small table, Linda jabbered on about how long it had been since he’d last stopped in. A sigh slipped through her lips. Caitlyn wasn’t sure if she was more relieved, or angry that he was still talking to Linda. Miss Perky apparently didn’t have to actually *work* tonight.

Caitlyn sat down and drummed her fingers on the tabletop as she glanced around the room. At least Linda had given her a chance to get her racing sex drive back under control. But she didn’t want to waste any more time, either. It was getting late and Aidan still hadn’t proven anything to her other than his ability to arouse her.

After another minute, she sighed again and glanced at her watch. Aidan must have gotten the hint because he finally sat down, offering a smile. Caitlyn smiled back, even though she knew her expression must look as strained as it felt.

As Linda handed them menus, Caitlyn studied her. She wore a long, flowing robe in a deep, dark purple and looked like a stereotypical vampire with pale skin and blood-red fingernails. In fact, she looked like someone from a B movie Caitlyn had seen on TV a few nights ago.

"Give me a shout when you're ready to order," Linda said with a wink for Aidan before waving at someone and walking to another table.

"What's with the way these people are dressed? Is this some type of cult or something? Are they gamers?"

"Something like that." Aidan winked at her.

Caitlyn frowned. What did that mean? Curious, she pointed to Linda's back. "Well? What's with the costume? Doesn't she know there's no such thing as vampires?"

She knew she was being rude, but she didn't like the way Linda looked at Aidan, nor the way she glanced back at him from across the room. That woman had her sights on Aidan; Caitlyn would bet money on it. Whether he was her husband or not, she couldn't stand the thought of Linda's paws on him.

"Are you so sure?" Aidan folded his hands on top of the menu and leaned toward her. He stared at her with such intensity that she felt her face flushing. Caitlyn broke eye contact before she could do something crazy. Like kiss him.

What had they been talking about? Oh yeah, Linda's outfit. "I'm not a little girl you can scare with stories of faeries and monsters."

"Believe me, I've noticed you aren't a little girl." Aidan spoke in that same low, husky voice that had sent shivers up her spine in his office earlier. His sultry tone had the same effect on her this time, and Caitlyn knew she was in trouble. She was in way over her head. "I'm also wondering what your problem with Linda is. Are you feeling threatened by her?"

"What? No!" Caitlyn hastily denied his ludicrous suggestion. "Of course not. Why would I feel threatened? I'm not interested in you at all."

"Really?" he asked, leaning closer and placing his hand on top of hers. "You have an odd way of showing it."

Mouth opening and closing, Caitlyn stared at him, indignation making her see red. Or was that the blush covering her face at the bit of truth in his statement? Just a little bit of truth. What woman wouldn't be attracted to him?

Reminding herself that she'd followed him here to meet her sister, not to waste time socializing, Caitlyn crossed her arms and leaned against the back of the chair, eyeing him with as much mistrust and doubt as she could manage.

"Should I order for you?" Aidan offered, gesturing to her unopened menu.

"No, that's okay. We aren't here to eat. You promised me a sister. Where is she?"

"I'm not sure," he said with a glance around the room. "She should be around. Once she knows we're here she'll find us. I'm going to order something, if you don't mind. I'm famished."

"Go ahead." Caitlyn shrugged.

Aidan looked around the room, then lifted a hand and waved at Linda. She smiled and hurried over to their table. Aidan spoke rapidly in a heavy dialect that sounded familiar, yet Caitlyn didn't understand.

After scribbling on her note pad, Linda promised Aidan she'd be right back, and hurried off before Caitlyn could ask him to translate his order.

Well, enough was enough. This was getting ridiculous. Until he proved he was her husband, she would not allow herself to experience any possessive feelings or desire for Aidan.

Time to turn the tables. Time to find some answers to the questions plaguing her. When Aidan turned, his mouth half open to speak, Caitlyn interrupted him. "So, what do you know about the murders?"

She hoped to catch him off guard and knew she succeeded when he frowned and leaned close.

"Shhh! Not so loud," he growled.

Caitlyn blinked in surprise. Not so loud? It wasn't as if she'd shouted. What the hell?

"You said you'd introduce me to my sister and you haven't. You also haven't told me what you know about the murders. I don't know you, and you certainly haven't given me any proof yet that we are married. Why did you bring me here? And why won't you tell me what you know about the Slasher?" Caitlyn's voice rose in volume with her last question.

Aidan lowered his gaze to the table. She waited for him to say something, but still, he remained silent. In fact, the whole café was silent.

Looking up, Caitlyn realized everyone was staring at them.

"I told you to keep your voice down." Aidan looked at her with what could only be interpreted as disgust.

Anger grew in her as he continued to shake his head. The silence was deafening, until someone coughed, and then everyone started talking at once.

"You hit a hot topic, Caitlyn. And this wasn't the best place to bring *him* up."

"But *you* brought me here. Why are you wasting my time?"

"I brought you here to show you your sister. I'm trying to help you remember."

Caitlyn snorted and narrowed her eyes. She'd had enough. Fear, anger, frustration, and hopelessness swirled within her, all running together, leaving her confused.

It was unnerving, everyone's eyes on her. She needed to get away from Aidan and re-center herself. If she could push aside this silly physical attraction and focus on the investigation, things would surely get back on an even keel.

"Where's the bathroom?" Caitlyn asked quietly.

"It's over there by the entrance." Aidan waved his hand toward the front of the cafe. "You aren't running away, are you?"

"Running away?" she scoffed. "I'm going to the bathroom. And my *sister* better be here when I get back."

Without waiting for a response, Caitlyn stood up. She hoped he did find her sister by the time she returned, because he was really starting to frustrate her.

People moved out of the way, staring at her as she walked swiftly through the crowd. She felt their eyes on her as she made her way to the front of the café.

Caitlyn figured they were wondering who she was and why she was here. Some might even wonder what she was doing there with a man accused of murdering his wife.

A quick glance around the room dispelled that last thought. Not only did Linda show no fear of him, but a young man stood talking to Aidan and she hadn't been gone from the table for a minute yet.

"Caitlyn!" a woman exiting the bathroom shouted, catching her attention. Caitlyn cringed, taking a step back as the woman continued, "Oh my gosh, is it really you?"

"Excuse me?" Caitlyn asked, trying to squeeze past her, into the bathroom.

"Caitlyn?" she repeated, this time with some hesitation. "You are Caitlyn Devlin aren't you?"

"Um, sorry, no. Wrong person." Caitlyn shook her head and dashed into the bathroom.

She closed the door and collapsed against it. Her hands trembled as she ran them over her face. Not just Caitlyn. The woman called her Caitlyn Devlin.

She didn't know what to make of this. Why hadn't he tried to find her? During the past six months, no one had recognized her. Now in the span of one night she'd been recognized by not just one, but several people.

Even if she was his wife, and he proved it, she still didn't know if he was the Slasher. Just because the police couldn't prove it, didn't mean it wasn't true.

Someone wanted her dead; she just couldn't remember who.

A feeling of impending doom settled heavily on her chest. How many more deaths would there be before the Slasher was stopped?

Caitlyn looked into the mirror over the sink. She had dark smudges under eyes and her hair was completely frizzy. And he was flirting with her? When she looked like this?

With a sigh, she dug through her purse for makeup and came up with only a tube of lipstick. If he kept kissing her the way he had it would be gone in no time anyway. Caitlyn dropped the tube back in her purse.

Reaching for the faucet, she turned on the water. Once it ran cold enough, she cupped her hands and filled them, then splashed her face with the crisp, refreshing liquid. Feeling rejuvenated, she turned off the water and reached for a paper towel.

As she dried her face, Caitlyn thought about Aidan's response when she'd mentioned the murders. The entire café had gone silent. Caitlyn didn't remember a time she'd felt more out of place.

When she went back out there, she'd have to see if anything felt familiar, instead of letting Aidan distract her with his strong presence. Something would give soon. If she believed it hard enough, surely it would come true.

Priorities, Caitlyn. Priorities. Find the Slasher, and your memory; then you can dissect your feelings for Aidan.

"Caitlyn?"

Caitlyn spun around in surprise at the soft voice behind her. Standing in the doorway was the most beautiful woman she'd ever seen. Long, red, curly locks tumbled down to her waist. A thin headband made of sparkly stones kept it out of her face. Her large eyes were a warm honey color that twinkled as a smile lit up her face.

"Caitlyn! It *is* you!" the woman exclaimed, and threw her arms around her, hugging her tightly.

"Excuse me?" Caitlyn shook her head, pulling away. "Did Aidan send you in here?"

"Aidan's here, too? Oh, this is a dream come true."

"Excuse me, but who are you?" she repeated.

"You don't remember me?"

"No. I'm sorry. I don't." Caitlyn winced as the beautiful stranger's fingers dug into her arms.

"I'm your sister," the woman gasped, digging her fingers into Caitlyn's flesh with more force. Great, now she'd have bruises there to match the one she was sure Aidan had given her earlier.

"I'm sorry." Caitlyn shook her head and tried to pull away. "I really don't know you."

The woman stared at her in disbelief, her eyes filling with tears. Either she was an excellent actress, or she really believed Caitlyn was her sister.

Caitlyn groaned and closed her eyes. The familiar pounding started in her temple. *Oh please, not another migraine.* Caitlyn knew the warning signs. If she didn't take some medication and get some sleep, it would only get worse.

Ted promised they would go away once she regained her memory. He'd also mentioned something about her body not being ready.

"Do you mean you have amnesia?" the woman asked, releasing her.

"Yes."

Caitlyn took a step back, rubbing her arms. Apparently, she was a dead ringer for Caitlyn Devlin. Could they be right? Was she his wife?

The pain in her head increased, so she had to stop that train of thought. Knowing she'd have to end the night early, Caitlyn decided to find out what she could about this woman. Tomorrow she could poke holes in their explanations, or accept them as family.

"What is your name?" Caitlyn asked.

"Meredith," the woman answered quietly.

"Meredith." She tested the name. It didn't ring a bell or bring any memories flooding back.

"But surely if you are here ..." Meredith left the sentence unfinished. She blinked back tears.

"I'm here because I wanted to question Aidan Devlin about his wife's murder and why the police suspect him. Since you had the same reaction to me that he did, I'm going to assume you are his late wife's sister?"

"I'm *your* sister." The woman reached for Caitlyn again.

"No." Caitlyn took a quick step back, shaking her head. Her arms still hurt from the last time.

"But if you have amnesia, how do you know if I'm telling the truth or not?"

Aidan had made the same argument. Caitlyn knew it was a good point, but her life was at stake here. No one could blame her for being cautious.

"That's a good point, and one Devlin made not an hour ago, but it doesn't make a difference. Unless you and Aidan prove what you say, or I regain my memory, I can't believe you. Someone tried to kill me. You must understand, I can't afford to trust anyone at their word. I need proof."

The woman was silent for a long moment.

"I'll give you a chance to prove it. Do you have any pictures?"

"No." She shook her head. "I don't carry them anymore. And there aren't any here because I had trouble working with the constant reminders of you."

Her explanation made sense, but it didn't help. "Okay, no pictures. How am I supposed to believe you, then?"

"You'll remember. I'm sure Aidan can make you remember."

"I'm not sure I can trust either of you."

"You caught me off guard, Caitlyn. It isn't every day you go to work and find out your sister that has been dead for six months is alive and well, and demanding proof of the relationship."

Caitlyn started to reply, but Meredith shook her head.

"There's something I don't understand. We thought you were dead. Aidan said there was so much blood ..." Meredith stopped suddenly.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"If you can't tell me everything, then why should I believe you? I need proof that I am Mrs. Aidan Devlin. This little bracelet doesn't cut it."

"Bracelet?" Meredith frowned. Her eyebrows furrowed as she narrowed her gaze. "What bracelet?"

"This one." Caitlyn showed the gold bracelet to Meredith.

"Okay." She smiled. "I wasn't sure what you meant at first."

"Did he put you up to this? Did Aidan call you and ask you to meet me here?"

Was she his wife?

The thundering in her head didn't help matters. She couldn't think clearly through the growing haze of pain. Damn this amnesia. If she couldn't remember anything, how was she supposed to know if they were telling the truth or not?

Caitlyn frowned and tried to remember the beautiful woman standing in front of her. Could she really be her sister? Was Aidan her husband?

The pain in her head intensified until the room blurred. Caitlyn grabbed onto the counter, holding on tightly while the room spun. Damn these headaches and dizzy spells. Would they never go away?

"Are you all right?"

"I get dizzy spells sometimes," Caitlyn managed to answer as she waited for the room to stop spinning. "They usually happen when I try too hard to remember."

"Oh." Meredith placed a hand on Caitlyn's arm. "We should stop then. I don't want you to pass out or anything. Look, I'm going to give you some time to adjust to this. You don't look very good."

"Gee, thanks." Caitlyn felt like sticking her tongue out for added measure, but decided against it.

"No, really. This is a shock for me to see you are still alive, but you didn't even know I existed. This has to be twice as hard for you. I'm going to find Aidan. I'll wait for you at your table, okay?"

Caitlyn nodded, staring after her in surprise.

Chapter Five

Aidan glanced around the room, wondering where Meredith was. He hoped she wasn't still feeling sick and had stayed home again. He doubted he could make Caitlyn believe anything he said if Meredith didn't show.

Growing worried, he spun around in his chair and looked around the room again. Instead of Meredith, he found Linda as she brought over a tall glass of the café's special. Aidan nodded his thanks and took a sip of the thick, rich liquid. It warmed his insides and satisfied the hunger he'd ignored to bring Caitlyn here.

He lifted his glass to Linda. "Excellent as usual."

Linda propped her hip against the table, her mouth turning up in a sensual smile. Aidan leaned back, waiting for her to speak. She'd been sending over megasignals since he and Caitlyn arrived, and he knew she wanted to tell him something.

"So where did you find *her*?" Linda asked, her voice laced with menace.

Aidan blinked in surprise. She'd never pushed beyond a light, flirtatious banter before. What was going on?

"What are you talking about?" he asked cautiously.

"Her." Linda nodded toward the bathroom. "I thought you weren't seeing anyone while you mourned the death of your wife."

"Caitlyn *is* my wife."

"Your wife is dead." Linda leaned closer to him. "You killed her last year. When your mourning is over you will take a new wife. One who will be able to *satisfy* all of your needs. Someone like me."

Aidan met Linda's gaze and let the lightest touch of his magic reach out to her. She winced, but didn't back down.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "Since you started working here after my wife disappeared, you can be forgiven for not recognizing her, but that woman you've been so rude to is my wife, and part owner of this café. I suggest you be more careful of the things you say. I didn't kill my wife, and I would never look for a replacement for her. Don't you dare forget your place again."

Swiftly, Aidan drained the entire contents of the glass and handed it back to Linda, dismissing her. As he drummed his fingers on the tabletop he felt his patience thinning. Where was Caitlyn? Was she lost? Had he found her only to lose her again?

"Are you saying she's your wife?"

"Weren't you listening?" He turned his irritated gaze back on Linda. He didn't need this. Not now. Where was Meredith anyway? Didn't she care what happened in the café anymore?

"Back off, sugar, you have no idea who you are messing with." Meredith placed her hands on her hips and frowned at Linda. Aidan felt the wave of magic she pushed at the girl, and heard Linda whimper from the strength of the power.

"We're busy tonight and you have a lot of customers waiting for service. If you want to keep your job, then you better get back to work."

Linda hissed something in a low voice before walking off.

"Forget her, let's talk about Caitlyn!" Meredith reached across the table and placed her hand on top of Aidan's. "You found her! How?"

"She found me." Aidan grinned widely. He leaned forward. "When I finished checking the supplies in the kitchen I walked back to the bar. Micah told me a young woman was looking for me and that he'd told her to go to my office."

"She found you? With her amnesia?"

Aidan sighed. "Not exactly. She wanted to question me about the murders. I told her who I was and that she was my wife, and then I convinced her to come here with me. I was sure between the two of us we could figure out a way to convince her of the truth. She didn't trust me enough to go up to my apartment and look at her things."

Meredith nodded and sat back. She was quiet for a minute before she spoke again. "We need to find out how she survived, and who's been helping her."

"I *intend* to find out what happened to her. Every last detail, including where she's been, and with whom," Aidan said.

"I can't believe she's alive."

"I'm not sure what happened to her." Aidan drummed his fingers on the table again. "I haven't questioned her. I've been too busy trying to get her to remember me."

What was taking her so long? He turned to look for her. Maybe she'd sneaked out the back door.

“Aidan? What’s bothering you?” Meredith asked, leaning closer. “Tell me.”

He sighed, but knew it was better to let Meredith know the full extent of Caitlyn’s amnesia. “She claims to not believe in vampires and witches.”

“What?” Meredith laughed. “But how can she feel that way? I mean, she is one.”

“I don’t know,” Aidan said. “But how can she *not* believe?”

“You have to find out.”

“I know.”

Meredith leaned closer, her eyes widening. “When are you going to tell her?”

As Aidan considered how to answer, he felt a wave of anger right before a shadow fell across the table. From the icy chill on the back of his neck, Aidan knew Meredith’s husband stood behind him. It was nice to know not all his senses were off tonight.

Jake never let his beloved out of sight for long. He was also angling for a fight. Ever since he’d met Caitlyn and Meredith, Jake had bristled with possessiveness. At first he focused on Caitlyn, then after Aidan had stolen her, Jake had switched his attention to Meredith. Now the man practically growled whenever she hugged Aidan. It set Aidan’s teeth on edge every time.

“Trying to steal my woman?” Jake’s voice was quiet yet deadly as Aidan stood up.

“Listen, Jake, I’ve had enough of this. I am not trying to steal your wife. Why would I? I’m in love with Caitlyn.” Aidan matched the ice in Jake’s voice with his own.

“Yeah? Is that why you killed her? I’ll never let you take what’s mine. Someone needs to teach you a lesson since the stupid police won’t arrest you, and the protectors think you walk on water.”

“Jake.” Meredith placed her hand on her husband’s arm. Aidan felt her worry, and he wished Jake would restrain himself around her. “Caitlyn’s alive. She’s here.”

“What? Where is she? How long have you known?” He grabbed Meredith’s wrists.

“We just found her tonight,” Meredith answered, trying to pull free.

“Has she named her attacker?” Jake met Aidan’s eyes.

Aidan watched Jake suspiciously as Meredith answered him quietly, “She has amnesia.”

“Amnesia?” Jake glanced back at his wife.

“Yes, she doesn’t remember any of us. Not Aidan, not me, not even her name.”

“Are you serious?”

“Yes.” Meredith frowned and glanced toward the bathroom. “Could you try not to look so happy?”

Jake ignored her, looking at Aidan again with a smirk. “And she doesn’t remember you?”

"No." Aidan tried to keep his intense dislike of the man under control. Of course, it wasn't an easy task when Jake acted like an ass.

"This is funny."

"No. It's not." Aidan glared at Jake. His fists clenched at his sides in an effort to keep from wiping the ridiculous grin off Jake's face. "It's only funny to you."

"Guys." Meredith sighed. "Can we please have a peaceful conversation, just once?"

* * * * *

As she stepped out of the restroom, Caitlyn debated returning to the table. She could slip out now and leave before Aidan even realized she was gone. Caitlyn turned to leave, then hesitated, turning back.

Since she'd met Meredith, Caitlyn realized Aidan could be telling the truth. Even the woman she'd run into on her way to the bathroom had called her by name; in fact, quite a few people acted like they recognized her. Maybe she was his wife. But if she left now she might never know.

With a deep breath Caitlyn walked back to the table. She stumbled when she noticed a large man arguing with Aidan. His arms were crossed and his legs were spread in a stance she could only interpret as angry. When Aidan's face darkened, and he glared at the other man, the instinct to protect him from the stranger almost overwhelmed her.

Their voices rose but she still couldn't make out their conversation over the music.

She noticed Aidan's fists clenched at his sides and the grim smile on his face. He didn't like this man, and his anger rolled across the room in waves.

Deciding to try to diffuse the situation, Caitlyn closed the remaining distance to the table. She reached for Aidan's hand and cupped it between hers. A small wave of shock traveled up her arm, but she ignored it.

Instead of waiting for an introduction, she made hers. "Hi, there. I'm Caitlyn. Are you a friend of Aidan's? Or Meredith's?"

His face registered shock and surprise as he glanced first at her, then at Meredith, then back again.

"I'm Jake Craine. Don't you remember me?"

"No, I don't. I don't remember anyone."

"I'm Meredith's husband."

Caitlyn shivered as he continued to stare at her. She moved closer to Aidan, trying to shake off her unease while she searched for a safe topic.

Before she could come up with anything, he asked, "So, what do you think of our little meeting place?" Jake gestured to the café.

“Well, it is different. I’m not sure I go in for all this vampire and witch stuff, but apparently it’s popular.”

“You don’t, huh?” He laughed. “Yes, fads come and go. Right now vampirism and witchcraft are in again. We even have a few shape shifters in here.”

“What?” Caitlyn gasped, looking behind her. “Where?”

Meredith frowned and elbowed her husband. “Stop teasing her.”

Jake’s face darkened as he whispered something to Meredith. Caitlyn watched Meredith grow angry. Oh no, were they going to fight because of her? “It’s okay,” she offered, hoping they’d stop arguing.

Aidan freed his hand from her grasp and wrapped his arm around her waist, pulling her close. Caitlyn fought the urge to melt against him, to turn and kiss him.

If someone had told her that it was possible to feel such an awareness, an intense desire for someone you just met, she’d have laughed at them. Now she knew better. In just a few hours she’d become obsessed with his touch. She’d relived their kisses several times already.

After months of not feeling anything for anyone she had to go and fall into lust with a possible murderer. Or, if she turned out to truly be his wife, like she suspected, a possible *attempted* murderer. All night, he’d distracted her with his nearness and she was no closer to knowing the truth than before she met him. Something definitely was wrong with her. She needed a reality check.

Instead, Caitlyn gazed into Aidan’s green eyes, her senses going haywire once again. He smelled of warm cinnamon and the scent washed over her, along with a sense of peace she’d longed for since waking six months ago. The aching loneliness disappeared when she was with him.

How could she be this close to a male and feel peace? Normally they frightened her when they were as close to her as Aidan was right now. Hell, Jake was scaring the spit out of her, just as Officer Matthews had in the alley.

Caitlyn was scared, but not of Aidan, just the way he made her feel. Maybe the amnesia affected other parts of her brain, as well.

She couldn’t afford to make a mistake. One wrong choice, and she could play right into the killer’s hands. She needed proof Aidan hadn’t tried to kill her.

“Well, Jake, are you ready to leave now?” Meredith asked.

“Leave?” Caitlyn gasped. No! She’d wanted to talk to Meredith. Why were they leaving now? “Well, I --”

“Sure.” Abandoning his angry stance, Jake helped Meredith out of her chair.

“Wait, I --” Caitlyn tried again.

“You’re leaving?” Aidan asked.

"Yes. I miss my sister, and would love nothing more than to spend the night telling her about her past. But ..." She paused and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly before continuing, "You are her husband. You need her more than I do."

"Thank you," Aidan whispered.

"I'm so glad you are back, Caitlyn," Meredith added. "I hope Aidan can help you remember the truth."

"The truth?" Caitlyn asked, but they were already moving away from the table. "Wait!"

Meredith waved as she followed Jake through the crowd toward the front door.

Well, damn. Foiled again. Caitlyn admitted she'd make a lousy detective. How could she catch the Slasher when she couldn't even question her supposed sister, or husband?

As soon as Jake and Meredith were out of sight, Caitlyn pulled away from Aidan and sat down in her seat, sliding her trembling fingers under the table. *Get control of yourself*, she thought, trying to ignore the sudden sensation of loss.

She picked up her coffee, hoping he hadn't noticed the slight shake of her hand. Caitlyn took a sip before returning the cup to its saucer.

"What did you do that for?" Aidan's fingers reached to cover hers, but Caitlyn quickly folded her hands back on her lap.

"Do what?" she asked, wondering what she was going to do about this unexpected desire. He could be a murderer and here she was acting like they were on a date. Yep, as a detective, she was a complete washout.

"Act like we are a couple."

"A couple? You and Jake looked like two dogs fighting over the same bone. I felt sorry for Meredith."

"But you didn't feel anything for me?"

Caitlyn lowered her gaze to the table. No way was she touching that one.

"You still don't remember anything?"

She shook her head.

After a minute Aidan continued, "Jake's overprotective. He's never liked me. The feeling is mutual."

"I could tell. I could feel your anger all the way across the room."

Caitlyn wondered if he read her expressions as easily as she read his. It actually felt as if she could feel his emotions as her own. Weird.

"What's the matter?" he asked after a few minutes.

What was wrong? She almost laughed out loud. Everything. And he still hadn't answered her questions about the Slasher.

"Well, where can we talk about the ..." She hesitated and glanced around the room, lowering her voice before continuing. "... murders?"

Several women looked over as Aidan let out a chuckle. She didn't blame them. His deep, sexy laugh made her toes curl.

His green gaze locked with hers. She wondered if he could see into her very soul. Before she could lose herself, Caitlyn closed her eyes, breaking the spell.

Glancing back at Aidan, she saw him smile, and for a minute time seemed to slow as his grin widened. His brilliant white teeth sparkled in the candlelight from their table. The rest of the room faded away and her focus narrowed to his smile. It looked as if two fangs grew out of his mouth, dipping past his lower lip. She blinked in disbelief and tried to lean closer to him to see if it was only her imagination when a sharp pain ripped through her head.

The pain was quick and intense, engulfing her in its tight grip. Caitlyn gasped for air and covered her ears while closing her eyes tightly as all of her senses shot into overdrive.

Aidan stared at Caitlyn in horror as her face paled, and she struggled to breathe. He tugged on her hands, prying her fingers away from her ears.

"Caitlyn?"

When she didn't answer, Aidan forced their long-dormant link open. He almost passed out at the sudden pain that shot through his skull, as if someone tried to split his head open with an axe. Battling the pain, he drew some of it from her, easing away as much as he could.

Aidan rose and stepped around the table. He put his hands on her shoulders and gently massaged the back of her neck, concentrating on each muscle until, one by one, they started to relax. Then he shifted his hands higher and rubbed the back of her head until the last of her pain melted away.

"How did you do that?" Caitlyn turned, looking at him with wide eyes. "Usually those headaches last most of the day, sometimes even longer."

"Do you get them often?"

"Yes, but not as frequently as I used to," Caitlyn answered, standing and stretching. He knew the pain made her tired. If she trusted him, he could take her home. But she didn't trust him, and he couldn't blame her.

"Come on, Caitlyn. Let's go."

"Hold on." She took a step back. "I'm not going anywhere with you. I came here like you asked and met the woman you claim is my sister, but you still haven't proven anything."

With a heavy sigh, Aidan ran his hand through his hair. What was the sense in answering her questions? She probably wouldn't believe him anyway.

"Are you willing to answer questions about the Slasher and the night ... um, the night your ... me ... you were arrested for murder?"

Aidan glanced around the crowded café. She wanted him to discuss her death and disappearance in front of a bunch of strangers?

“Not here. Will you trust me to take you home?”

She was silent for so long Aidan thought she'd refuse. He tried to think of a way to convince her his intentions were pure, but discarded them when she finally spoke.

“Okay. But my home, not yours. And before you get any funny ideas, I live with a man.”

His breath caught in his throat at her warning. “What do you mean, you live with a man?” Fists clenched at his sides, he struggled through the red haze clouding his vision and focused on her face, searching for her feelings for this male.

“Ted is my roommate, and boss. He's a doctor. I do part-time secretary work and house cleaning for him. We're very close.”

He listened to her words, and searched her mind for this roommate. He sensed affection, but nothing he needed to worry about.

Aidan held out his hand. Caitlyn hesitated a minute before placing her hand in his with a tentative smile.

Chapter Six

Aidan held her cold, fragile hand in his as he led her back to South Street. He wanted to pull her close and warm her, but he restrained himself and tried to see things from her point of view. With no memory, and someone trying to kill her, he couldn't blame her for being wary of everyone, even him. His heart twisted painfully, but his rational side said it was better for her if she didn't trust anyone. At least not until the Slasher was caught.

Instead of pushing her, Aidan walked quietly, giving her time to adjust to everything. He relived the feel of her in his arms. She felt so good. Even better than he remembered. The way she molded her curvy body to his almost made him lose control.

And her taste. Aidan groaned inwardly, wondering why he tortured himself. Caitlyn was addicting. He'd never grow tired of her.

If only there was a way to make her remember. Perhaps if he told her about their past it would trigger something.

"Tell me about the café. It's so well hidden it's a wonder anyone can find it."

Caitlyn's voice wavered as she spoke. Aidan assumed it was nerves, but he was at a loss on how to put her at ease. He wouldn't hurt her, but she didn't know that.

"Those who need to know where it is find it easily enough. It's been in your family for years, and I had many dealings with your parents. You used to help Meredith with the café when you weren't busy helping your parents."

"Parents? No one mentioned them. I just assumed they were gone." She smiled hesitantly. "I would like to meet them. Do you think they are still awake? Surely they can prove my identity."

Aidan squeezed her hand. He'd finally caught on a topic that pleased her and he was going to crush it. "I'm sorry Caitlyn, but they've passed on."

Her smile faltered, then fell. "It was too good to be true, anyway. After these past months without anyone, I should have realized there was a reason no one tried to find me."

Her wide eyes met his, reminding him of the first time he'd seen her. She'd been waiting tables, covering for a girl who was on vacation. Caitlyn had given him a quiet table in the back and then spent the better part of three hours flirting with him.

She'd worn her long red hair loose, and it had flowed down her back in waves. He'd thought she looked like an angel.

"I understand why you keep pushing me away. But when the time comes and you remember me," he said with a grin, "we won't sleep. For a few days."

Her eyes widened and her cheeks colored at his comment. He still couldn't believe she was alive, and here with him. He had to exert every ounce of willpower to keep from taking her in his arms. Aidan was positive she'd flee if he rushed her.

He knew he'd embarrassed her, but he could hear the accelerated pace of her heart, telling him she was excited, too. He pulled her closer, reveling in the fact she was letting him touch her. Trying to get her to relax even more, he told her, "Not only did you work there, but you played the role of vampire hostess to the hilt."

"What?" She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye.

"You would dress up like a vampire from some movie. I forget which one, but you walked around threatening to drink everyone's blood. Many people came to watch you and Meredith. When you died, the staff and most of the regulars came to pay their respects."

"I'm not dead."

"A fact for which I'm eternally grateful. I want to know where you've been. Who the man you live with is, and what he is to you. Where have you been the past six months?"

"Don't get excited. You still haven't proven I'm your wife." Caitlyn pulled back from him. "Until you do, you get nothing from me. Not even another kiss."

"Caitlyn, you are my wife. I love you. I ..." Aidan's voice broke and he hated himself for the weakness, but why should he hide his feelings from her? Her eyes no longer shone with the love he remembered, and it ripped him to pieces. He looked away quickly, unable to meet her questioning gaze.

Aidan drew in a deep breath and waited a beat before releasing it. He decided to let her know how much her apparent death had affected him. Then maybe she would understand his constant need to touch her, to reassure himself she was still alive.

"I'm sorry. It's just that when I saw you there on the ground ... There was blood. So much blood everywhere. When I put my hand on your neck there was no pulse. You were gone Caitlyn. Gone."

He closed his eyes as vivid images of her death flashed in his mind. Her body bruised and bleeding in the dark alley.

Halloween always exhausted him so he'd slept as late as he could before rising. He dressed quickly in jeans and a sweater and checked to make sure Caitlyn wasn't home. Satisfied that the only thing in the apartment was her cat, Mandy, he retrieved the earrings he'd bought last week to celebrate the anniversary of their first kiss.

He put the small box in his pocket, and called Meredith to make sure everything was set for tonight when he'd felt the sudden absence of their link. It ended so abruptly he knew something was dreadfully wrong.

By the time he made it to the alley behind Pretenses, it was too late to do anything. Aidan saw someone leaning over her body. He shouted and rushed over, but was too late. The man shifted into a large owl and flew up into the night sky.

Worried about Caitlyn, he decided not to give chase, but to make sure she was okay. Aidan knelt next to her, lifted her head, and saw the large gash on her neck, the stab wounds to her heart and stomach.

Blood, so much blood. He couldn't deny the severity of her injuries nor the fact that she was dead. Aidan tried desperately to resuscitate her, but he couldn't.

If he had known she was already dead he'd have followed the bastard and made him pay for his actions. Instead, the police arrived within minutes and found him holding her. Instead of listening to him, they arrested him and ruined any clues there might have been to the true killer's identity.

"Aidan?" Caitlyn tugged on his arm, bringing him back to the present. "Tell me more about the café."

"The café has been here since 1682 when Philadelphia was founded. There is no street leading into the area. There are secret entrances all over South Street though, and you could fly in there if you had wings."

"Wings." She snorted. "And why, pray tell, is that area so special?"

"Witches, vampires, shape shifters, faeries, all those things exist. And to avoid persecution, Mystickal Gardens was created."

"Mystickal Gardens?"

"Can I tell you the story, o non-believer?"

"I'm sorry." She laughed. "Go ahead. It *is* interesting."

"Steps were taken, even back then, to keep everyone safe. Did you notice all of the vampire, demon, and witch motifs? In the café and on the storefronts?"

"Yes, I noticed. Some of them were very realistic."

"There are a lot of erotic ones, too." He grinned, enjoying the way her face flushed a delicate shade of pink.

Aidan stifled a laugh. He'd seen her absorption of the paintings in the café. "Well, these people are strong believers in magic. Vampires, demons, and witches are a part of their everyday life."

"I noticed. I guess it wouldn't help to tell them they're wrong, would it? That those things don't exist?"

"There are things you know nothing about," Aidan snapped. "Do not mock these people and their beliefs."

"Are you saying those things do exist?" Caitlyn laughed at him. "Oooo, I better run home and grab my crucifix."

Aidan struggled to hold on to his anger at her mockery, but it was useless. While the anger might be the only thing keeping him from taking her in his arms right now, he felt it melting under her warm smile and gentle laughter.

"Your crucifix is in my closet."

"Right," she drawled with more laughter. She didn't even protest as he pulled her tighter against his side.

Caitlyn studied Aidan thoughtfully. If he was right and such things did exist, then where were the creatures now? It was nighttime and she'd yet to encounter anything deadly. If those things were all around Mystickal Gardens, why did they all look like ordinary humans? And why hadn't they reached South Street yet? She didn't remember it taking this long to get to the café.

Caitlyn decided Aidan was distracting her on purpose, leading her away from the reason she followed him here. Could he be her husband? How would she know for sure? He still hadn't proven anything.

That's because he doesn't have proof he's innocent, a little voice whispered in her head. And you're not smart enough to stay away from him.

Even now, her skin was aflame everywhere he touched her, along her side and on her hip where his hand rested. She needed to put some space between them before he sidetracked her again.

"I don't need a crucifix anyway. Let's talk about the murders. How did you know about this most recent one so quickly? Are you keeping an eye on the alley?" Caitlyn asked, changing the subject. She didn't want to talk about vampires, witches, or anything dealing with the paranormal.

"People tell me things."

"Tell you things? The police were upset I found out, so I know they aren't telling you."

"How did *you* know about the murder?"

Caitlyn hesitated at his question. She couldn't tell him the truth. If he was a suspect, then why would they leak information to him?

"So you are investigating these murders?" he asked when she remained silent.

All these questions. Caitlyn stumbled on the uneven sidewalk as the thought entered her mind that Aidan might be pretending to look for the killer so the police wouldn't suspect him.

"Stop trying to make me forget that *I'm questioning you*." Before she could say anything else, a wave of dizziness swept over her and Caitlyn remembered she hadn't eaten anything since breakfast.

Aidan grabbed her elbow and as a taxi appeared out of nowhere. She could never find a cab when she needed one, but twice now he'd found one with ease.

"You asked me about the murders," Aidan reminded her as he ushered her into the cab. "We can talk on the way to your house."

Caitlyn peered through the window to see if Muhammad was driving. She almost giggled in relief when she saw he wasn't.

"Okay. But you have to answer my questions."

"Okay," Aidan agreed, closing the door.

Caitlyn gave the driver her address before she realized what she was saying. Well, she'd agreed to let Aidan take her home, and if he was going to prove they were married, she'd be seeing him again, anyway.

"I'm not going to hurt you," he promised, as if he could read her thoughts.

Caitlyn paused. *How had he known what I was thinking? Hell, he couldn't know.* She had an expressive face. He'd read it in her expression, that's all. She was just jumpy from meeting those weird people tonight. First at his club, then at the café.

"It doesn't matter." Caitlyn shrugged. "I don't live alone, anyway."

She already knew she'd see hurt in his eyes and she was tired of reading his emotions. Tired of feeling them as clearly as if they were her own.

"Do you have any information you can give me about the murders? Can you tell me why the police still suspect you?"

"They won't suspect me once you tell them who the real killer is."

Caitlyn sighed and shook her head. "I wish it would happen, I really do. Maybe if you showed me some photos or something to prove I'm your wife, it would stir my memory. If those memories are there, that is."

"You have to come to my apartment, then. Hell, bring a friend with you if you want. Bring this Ted, I don't care. But please let me show you who you are. Despite your fears, I'm not trying to con you into anything."

Caitlyn was still trying to digest that when she heard a cell phone ring. Not recognizing the tone, she looked at Aidan to see if it was his, when she heard the gruff voice of the cab driver.

"What do you mean, now?"

She could hear a woman yelling, telling him to get his ass home as fast as possible.

"Sorry 'bout this folks," the driver said as he slammed on the brakes, screeching to a halt in front of Fairmount Park.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm really sorry, but you see, my wife is in labor and she asked me to come home right away."

"But ..." Caitlyn blinked in surprise. "Couldn't you take us back with you --"

"This is fine," Aidan interrupted her, opening the door and climbing out, dragging her with him. "Thanks for taking us this far. Drive carefully getting back to your wife."

The driver looked confused, but he smiled as Aidan shoved a hundred-dollar bill through his window, telling him to keep the change.

"Hey, thanks!"

"That was very generous, but now we're stuck walking the rest of the way."

"You're only on the other side of the park, and it's such a nice night for a walk."

Caitlyn turned to Aidan. "We can't cut through the park. There has been a lot of trouble in there lately. Especially late at night."

"But you've got me to protect you." Aidan smiled, grabbed her hand, and tugged her forward. "Let's go. I want to show you something."

"Show me what?" She was curious to find out what he knew, and walking all the way around would take much longer than going through the park.

"I want to show you the place we first kissed. I'm hoping it might awaken your slumbering memories."

"Hmm ..." She chewed on her lower lip. "But showing me the café and my sister didn't work."

"Come on. Give me another chance to convince you we belong together."

Aidan was tricky, but she could be tricky, too. It was time to get down and dirty. Time to play hardball. She was going to question him and this time she would get answers from him no matter what she had to do to get them.

"What do you know about the Slasher?"

Aidan glanced at her with desire burning in his eyes. She knew that right now she had nothing to fear. He wanted her as much as she wanted him. If anything happened in the park tonight, it would be consensual.

He led her into the park without answering, and remained silent as they walked past a couple kissing on a park bench. Caitlyn waited until they were far enough past the couple before she spoke again.

“Are you going to tell me about the Slasher, or not?”

He didn’t look at her or slow down, so Caitlyn yanked her hand free and stopped. She crossed her arms and glared at him.

“Look, I didn’t track you down and follow you around Philly for the exercise. If you won’t tell me what you know, then I’ll have to find someone else who will. Maybe Jake would be willing to talk to me since you won’t.”

Aidan growled and leaned close to her, showing her that her words had the desired effect on him.

“He’s a vampire.”

Caitlyn’s jaw dropped open and she stared at him in shock. The last thing she expected to hear was that Jake was a vampire.

A vampire! Like the one in her dream. No. Caitlyn shook her head. This was not the time for tall tales and half-remembered dreams.

“Now I know you’re playing me for a fool. You expect me to believe that Jake is a vampire? Thank you for wasting my evening.” Caitlyn turned to leave.

“Actually I was referring to the Slasher.”

“Excuse me?” She turned back to stare at him in disbelief. “This is ridiculous. I’m leaving.”

Aidan reached out and grabbed her hand, halting her escape. “Why do you think none of the victims have a drop of blood left in them?”

“He wants us to think he’s a vampire,” Caitlyn said, trying to pull away. “Why would he do that when they aren’t even real?”

“Listen to me, Caitlyn. A vampire could fly out of the alley without being seen. A vampire can hypnotize a woman and make her follow him into the alley. He could kill her silently and efficiently without ever being seen.”

“Have you given your far-fetched theory to the police?” Caitlyn laughed. Aidan looked as if he actually believed his idea.

“They’d never believe me. Half the people in the city wouldn’t believe me. But the other half would listen.”

“No. There is no such thing.”

“Maybe, maybe not. Maybe women would be more careful.” Aidan reached out and grabbed her arm. He tugged and started walking again.

He was certifiable.

“How do you explain the lack of blood?” he asked. “How do you explain the odd killings? The rage? The way he drains their blood?”

“There’s no such thing as a vampire.” Caitlyn jerked her arm free. “They aren’t real. Vampires don’t exist.”

“Yes, they do, Caitlyn.” Aidan threw his hands in the air. He walked away from her and then back. “Damn it, will you listen to me?”

“No!” Caitlyn covered her ears. Every night she dreamt of great winged creatures and monsters who tried to kill her. If they were real, then her dreams might be real and then ... “Stop it! Just stop it!”

Shaking, she tried to repress the memory of her dream, but failed. Caitlyn struggled to breathe as fear clouded her mind. Warm breath fanned across her neck, and a painful sensation followed as sharp teeth sank into her neck.

“No!” Caitlyn shouted backing away. Her hand rose to her throat. She brought it down and looked at it, still caught up in the memory of her nightmare. Blood, so much blood. She turned and ran as if the devil himself were after her.

Chapter Seven

For a moment, Aidan stared after Caitlyn in stunned surprise before running after her. What in the hell had happened? One minute he was trying to tell her vampires were real and the next she was running through the park screaming like a banshee.

Leaping over a bush, Aidan managed to grab her before she ducked through several pine trees. Caitlyn shrieked in his ear, arms and legs flailing as he caught her and lifted her off the ground.

“Caitlyn!” he shouted, pulling her close. “It’s me. Aidan.”

He debated slapping her, but before he could put her down and do it, she swallowed another scream.

Using the same technique he had in the café, Aidan whispered to her while using his powers to calm her heart and slow her breath.

“You can stop shaking me now.”

He hadn’t realized he was shaking her. God, what she did to him. Aidan dropped her and took a step back.

She glared at him and rubbed her shoulders. He guessed now was not a good time to point out that he’d only been trying to help her.

“What the hell just happened? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. But you’re crazy. You and your stupid vampire sh--”

She gasped when he grabbed her again, his hands tightening on her upper arms. He lowered his face to hers and bit out, “I did not try to kill you. And I am *not* crazy.”

Caitlyn wanted to disagree, but kept her mouth shut. His eyes flashed a warning even an idiot could understand. She knew better than to feed his anger. She stood there quietly, willing him to let her go.

Finally, Aidan pushed her away, clenching his fists at his sides. She watched him struggle for control. His hands unclenched and he reached for her, then stopped, running his fingers through his hair instead.

"I'm sorry," he said with a grimace. "You were upset, and running and screaming like a madwoman. I was worried you'd hurt yourself. Let's just calm down so we can talk about this rationally."

Calm down? He wanted *her* to calm down? Caitlyn almost laughed, but then remembered the look in his eyes when she'd angered him. Shivering, she vowed to never put that look in his eyes again. She wouldn't accuse him of killing his wife again. As long as he stopped with the vampire stories.

"What happened back there? When I brought up vampires, you got this dazed look on your face right before you ran away, screaming loud enough to wake the dead."

"Vampires don't exist and you can't wake the dead."

Chewing nervously on her lip, Caitlyn glanced around. The couple who'd been making out on a bench earlier were following the trail past her and Aidan. They had eyes only for each other, but their presence reassured her.

"How do you know?" Aidan leaned toward her, drawing her attention back to him. "Do you have proof they aren't real?"

"I don't need to prove they don't exist. *You* need to prove they are real," Caitlyn argued.

A cool breeze blew through the trees, chilling her to the bone. Caitlyn rubbed her hands on her arms, trying to chase away the uneasy feeling nagging at her.

"What is it? You're hiding something. Please tell me why this bothers you so much," he said after a few moments.

"I'm not hiding anything, you are!" she countered, feeling panic creeping in. Her dreams were so vivid sometimes she couldn't distinguish between what was real and what wasn't.

Aidan leaned forward, narrowing his eyes. "You *do* believe they exist. That's why you got scared when I mentioned them. *That's* why you ran from me. Admit it."

"No!" She protested automatically, backing away.

"Yes." Aidan took her hand in his, pulling her up against his chest. "Tell me, Caitlyn. Tell me what happened back there. You remembered something, didn't you?"

Caitlyn stared at him, her breath caught in her throat. His face mere inches from hers, those lips of his parted slightly as he waited for her to answer, he appeared dangerously tempting.

Closing her eyes, she drew in a deep breath, inhaling his scent, mixed with the woods around them. Did he have to be so sexy? She could only be so lucky to have him for a husband. He'd been charming, courteous, and seductive, as well. A lover like the one she dreamed of.

His breath tickled her ear seconds before he whispered, "Trust me."

Trust him? It was herself she couldn't trust. Her body yearned for his even though she didn't know if he spoke the truth. She inhaled deeply, drawing in more of that heady scent that was Aidan. She was wet from just breathing him in; what would it be like to have him buried to the hilt inside her?

Caitlyn opened her eyes and met his heavy-lidded gaze. Damn, he wanted her as much as she wanted him. She lowered her gaze as she licked her lips. His sensual mouth curved in a smile as he leaned closer and captured her mouth with his.

Caitlyn melted into his embrace as hunger swept through her. If he didn't talk, she could imagine he was her dream lover. Her body responded to the thought with a rush of juices that soaked her thong. She wanted him. Aidan. She hungered for him. She was tired of a dream lover who vanished. She wanted a real man. One like Aidan.

He grabbed her ass and pulled her lower body against his; his erection dug into her as he ground against her. Caitlyn moaned and dug her fingers into his tight, hard ass. Aidan slipped one hand under her T-shirt and reached up to cup her breast. His thumb rubbed against her pebbled nipple. A tremor rippled through her, and she tried to press even closer to him.

The sound of laughter made her freeze, but Aidan backed her up until they were sheltered under a large oak. Safely in the shadows, Caitlyn tugged Aidan's shirt free so she could explore his back and stomach. He groaned and dropped his head to her shoulder as she slid her hand to the front of his pants and pressed against his erection.

"Let me love you," he whispered.

"Yes." She sighed as he lowered his head and sucked her nipple, cloth and all, into his mouth. A rush of her juices spilled down her thighs. His ministrations felt so good, and she wanted them so much that she thought she could orgasm right then.

Aidan pulled her shirt up and released her breasts. A cool breeze blew through the park, sending goose bumps over her flesh, but then his hot mouth covered her pebbled nipple, and she forgot the cold as heat rushed through her again. He squeezed her breast, sucking on it as his other hand deftly opened her jeans, and slipped between her underwear and her flesh.

"Oh, baby." He growled. "You are so wet, so ready for me."

He pressed his thumb against her clit and rubbed it slowly. She moaned and spread her legs, giving him easier access. Since she'd lost weight recently, her jeans were loose enough that he was able to maneuver a finger inside of her.

“Oh.” Caitlyn gasped and shivered as Aidan pulled his finger back out, and slid it back in. He bit her nipple, tugging on it with his teeth while the heel of his hand rubbed against her clit, and his fingers slid against her damp folds.

Her inner muscles clenched and more of her juices escaped, coating his fingers. Aidan burned a path with his tongue to her ear. He licked her neck, then gently bit her.

Caitlyn screamed out in pleasure-pain, a memory blinding her as her body shook from the force of her orgasm. The Slasher had bit her, too.

She looked up and saw the feral light in his eyes. She gasped and lifted her hands defensively as she tried to pull away from him. Aidan growled, sending her heart thundering in her chest.

“What the hell?” Caitlyn stared at him.

Aidan froze, then quickly released her. He looked away, and when he turned back his eyes were a clear green once more. She studied him, searching for an explanation, but decided the talk of vampires and her imagination must have conjured something that wasn’t there. She should have expected this to happen when she tried to make love to someone. This was part of the reason there’d been no one since she’d awakened.

Caitlyn groaned and looked up to the sky. Heaven help her, the first man she was attracted to might have murdered his wife. If there was proof, the police would have arrested him by now, but as long as there was some doubt ...

“Caitlyn?”

She looked back at Aidan. He appeared genuinely concerned, but then he was probably really disappointed he wasn’t taking her up against this tree right now.

“Caitlyn?”

“I’m sorry.” She shook her head. “I just can’t.”

“Can’t or won’t?”

“Does it matter?”

“It does to me, damn it! I wish you would trust me.”

Caitlyn arched her eyebrows, but didn’t say a word. Trust him? If only she could. What if he *was* telling the truth?

“Why were you so upset when I mentioned the Slasher is a vampire?”

“I don’t know,” Caitlyn hedged. *The Slasher couldn’t really be a vampire, could he?*

“Yes, you do, Caitlyn.” He spoke softly this time, his hand cupping her chin and lifting her gaze to his.

Caitlyn concentrated on his face, hoping to trigger some memories. Her gaze followed the strong outline of his jaw, the sharp angles of his cheeks and the line of his nose.

“Are you okay?” Aidan asked gently. “I keep telling myself not to push it, to try and keep my hands and mouth off you. But I can’t help myself. I love you, Caitlyn. You are my

wife. I want you to remember me. No, I *need* you to remember me. I need you to remember how good we are together. How nothing else matters but you and me, together.”

Heat raced through her body. Raising her hands to her cheeks, Caitlyn felt her face grow hot. He was incorrigible. She had no doubt he was a criminal. Aidan stole hearts left and right. Hers was a prime example.

Caitlyn lowered her eyes, afraid she'd say something foolish. Her gaze landed on a bit of gold peeking out from under his shirt. She hadn't noticed it earlier, but it was hard to miss now, with the moonlight reflecting off the shiny chain.

“Aidan?” She hated the quiver in her voice. It revealed too much emotion. Hell, if he couldn't see her desire, then he needed glasses.

“Yes?” He slid his hand under the gold chain encircling his neck and tugged on it as if it were too tight. As he moved his finger under the necklace, it shimmered in the lamplight.

Caitlyn swallowed, trying desperately to remember what she planned to say. Closing her eyes, she tried to remember what they'd been talking about. An image suddenly flashed in her mind. It was of two lovers embracing, spinning and twirling on a sea of gold. Her breath catching in her throat, she realized she was remembering something. She knew that image, but from where?

Opening her eyes, she reached for the chain, tugging it from beneath his shirt. A circular medallion slipped out and dropped into her palm. A shiver ran up her spine as she stared at it.

Two lovers, entwined in a pose so erotic her cheeks burned, stared back at her. It was the exact same image she'd seen in her mind.

“You gave that to me after our honeymoon. You said it was to remind you of the pleasure we'd shared. The pleasure no other man would ever share with you. I remember the night you gave it to me.”

His voice was low and seductive. Caitlyn leaned closer to him to hear him better, when she realized what he said. Hell, she could almost picture that night, and she wasn't even sure she'd been there.

An image of the two of them embracing formed in her mind. Was it just a trick? Superimposing him over another face in her past? No, she remembered the medallion. She might even remember him. If this so-called half-memory could be trusted.

Pulling her hand away, Caitlyn rubbed her forehead. The dull pain reminded her not to force the memories to come.

“I ... I ...” She hesitated, her lips quivering as she blinked back sudden tears. Her hand flew to her lips, stilling them before she could utter the words that would damn her. She knew his kisses. That was why she was so responsive to him.

Caitlyn looked away from him. She didn't want him to see the recognition in her eyes. She might remember kissing him, but that didn't mean she was ready to accept his claim of

marriage. Accepting it meant putting herself in danger. Until she knew if he was the Slasher or not, she would not accept their marriage.

"What's wrong? Did you remember something when you looked at my medallion?"

"No!" Caitlyn shook her head. "I was just shocked at the image."

"Do you know what the other side says?" he asked softly. When she shook her head he continued, "For my love. I am yours always and forever. Caitlyn."

She swallowed hard. For so long she'd prayed and pleaded for her memories to return, and now they were. In confusing bits and pieces that proved nothing more than she might be married to a killer.

She needed to get away from him. Now. Before she betrayed herself. Until she knew if he wanted her dead or not she wasn't safe alone with him.

"I don't remember you. And I don't know if I ever will." Caitlyn sighed heavily. "I need to think."

"But --"

"I'll be okay; we're halfway through and haven't seen anyone other than that couple."

She didn't want to be around him any longer. He confused her, and she needed space to sort out these memories and emotions.

"This park isn't safe. I wouldn't feel right letting you walk through alone."

"I can take care of myself."

"The old Caitlyn thought that, too. Honey, if you don't let me help you now, by the time you realize I really am your husband it could be too late."

"No, thank you. I prefer to walk home alone. I need to think, and you aren't letting me."

Caitlyn turned and walked away. When she noticed Aidan was following her, she stopped and spun back around.

"I'll bring someone with me tomorrow and then you can show me proof that I'm your wife," she said, hoping that would placate him enough so he'd leave.

"I don't think so," Aidan said as he caught up to her and grabbed her arm.

Shivering, Caitlyn tried to jerk free. "Look here, Devlin. You haven't proven I'm your wife. So what if I respond to you? That doesn't mean anything. Until I know we are married I want you to stay far, far away from me."

"No." Aidan pulled her against him. He leaned down, his breath fanning her cheek as he whispered, "You are mine. Mine, damn it."

She struggled in his arms, but he just held her tighter.

"Stop!" she gasped, desperate to free herself.

"Calm down. I'm not gonna hurt you."

Hurt you. The words echoed in her head.

This won't hurt, whispered through her mind. The man in her nightmares promised her no pain right before he sank his teeth into her neck.

"No," she shouted. Caitlyn lifted her foot and brought it down on his instep as hard as she could. He yelped in surprise. Caitlyn took advantage of it and broke free.

Running as fast as she could, away from Aidan and the nightmares, Caitlyn zigzagged between trees before finally coming to a halt behind a large oak. She stopped to catch her breath and listened for the sound of his pursuit.

Still out of breath, she peeked around the tree to see if Aidan had found her. Caitlyn jumped and screamed when a twig snapped to her left. Spinning around, she came face to face with a tall, thin man dressed in black.

"This is a first. Usually I have to lure my victim into these woods."

Caitlyn choked, then coughed as she struggled to control the panic thickening in her throat. *He's just a boy. He's not the Slasher. Just a boy,* she repeated again and again as he stepped closer to her.

Caught in the midst of her nightmare, Caitlyn stood frozen, watching helplessly as he closed the distance between them. His cold hands grabbed her arms and pinned them over her head.

"You're a pretty one," he whispered. "I just might take my time with you."

She froze in fear. Oh Lord, not again. Caitlyn closed her eyes, remembering the flash of silver as the knife slashed at her. She whimpered and opened her eyes, praying that she was dreaming.

No, this wasn't a dream. Not again. *Don't let it happen to you again,* she told herself. Caitlyn stared at her attacker. His grin flickered but held strong as he leaned close. His breath smelled of alcohol, making Caitlyn wonder if he'd needed the liquid courage.

"You aren't putting up much of a fight." He laughed. "You'll be easier than I thought."

His cruel comments snapped her out of lethargy and into action. The training she'd had in self-defense over the past few months kicked in until her fear faded so she could push past her nightmares and see him for what he was. A man. Not the Slasher. Not a vampire.

"I don't think so!" Caitlyn yelled, bringing her knee up and catching him in the groin. He released her as he gasped and cupped himself. She brought her leg around. He fell to the ground with a thump and a groan.

Caitlyn pulled her foot back and took aim. *Disable the attacker and run like hell,* she reminded herself. She was about to make sure he wasn't getting back up when a loud curse came from behind her. Caitlyn spun around, immediately going into a defensive stance.

"It's just me." Aidan's voice echoed in the sudden quiet. "Relax, Caitlyn. I think you've crippled him. Take a deep breath and step back."

Aidan spoke in a low, lyrical tone, his voice lulling her into a sense of tranquility. Caitlyn found herself obeying him even though she didn't want to. She blinked and shook her head, trying to break free of the fog engulfing her mind.

"You'll be safe now. Go home. I'll take care of things." Aidan gazed into her eyes before continuing, "Nothing happened. We walked through the park until we arrived at your house. You are tired and need to sleep."

Caitlyn blinked. She was very tired. It had been a very long night. An overwhelming urge to go home filled her mind. The park wasn't safe at night. It was a good thing she had Aidan to protect her.

Chapter Eight

“Ted?” Caitlyn looked around in confusion. “What’s going on?”

“Where the hell have you been?” he asked, worry etched in lines on his face. “Manny called me hours ago.”

“Oh, I went to Pretenses.” Caitlyn looked around the room again. She remembered leaving Aidan outside and coming in to go to bed.

“Are you okay?”

“I think so,” she answered, pushing aside a curtain to look outside. Aidan stood under a streetlight across the street. When he saw her, he waved, then turned and walked back into the park.

“Caitlyn?”

“I’m sorry, Ted. What did you say?”

“Is something wrong?” He stepped next to her and looked out. She knew he wouldn’t see anything. Aidan was already gone.

“No, I’m fine. Just a bit dizzy.”

“Are you are sure?”

“Yes, I’m tired. Some sleep and I’ll feel better soon.”

“You look more than tired, Caitlyn.”

“I forgot to eat dinner again. It’s nothing for you to worry about.”

“Manny called, asking if I’d heard from you.”

“So?” Caitlyn gave him her best innocent face, even though she knew it was a waste of time. The good old doc was like a mind reader.

"How many times have I asked you to stay away from Pretenses and the police? Let them do their job. Your attack has nothing to do with the Slasher."

"I'm sorry, Ted, but I disagree."

"What happened tonight? Why did you walk in here looking like a zombie?"

"I'm just tired." Caitlyn frowned at him. "Look, Ted, what's wrong? You're acting weird."

"I'm acting weird? Caitlyn, you walk in here in a trance and ask *me* what's wrong?"

"What are you talking about?"

Ted looked at her with a sigh and a shake of his head. He took her arm, leading her into the kitchen, then helped her into a small wooden chair.

"Sit. I'm going to make you a hot cup of tea, just the way you like it, and you can start at the beginning."

She watched him fill a mug with water, add a tea bag, and put it in the microwave. She sat silently, trying to make sense of his comments. He thought she was in a trance?

"So what happened?" Ted frowned. He brushed back a thick black curl from his forehead before he sat down across from her.

Caitlyn tried to focus on what had happened tonight. Scenes from the bar and the café flashed through her mind as well as kissing Aidan. How much did she want to confide in Ted? Sure, he was her friend, but he was also her doctor.

"I met a few people tonight who claim to know me."

"Really? Tell me about them." Ted leaned forward.

Caitlyn sat back in her chair, wondering what to tell him. As it was, he wanted her to start taking sleeping pills so she wouldn't have nightmares anymore. She couldn't bring herself to tell him about her dream lover, and now after meeting Aidan she wondered if her dream had turned to flesh.

Would Ted tell her she had an overactive imagination again?

She jumped when the microwave dinged.

"Start talking, Caitlyn." Ted rose and began making her tea. "What can you tell me about tonight?"

"Well," Caitlyn hedged, then decided to tell him everything. Well, almost everything. "I confronted Aidan Devlin at his club tonight."

"What?" Ted spun around, wet tea bag in his hand.

"You're dripping tea all over the floor."

"Shit." He tossed the bag in the trashcan. Kneeling on the floor, he dabbed at the mess with sponge. "Why did you do something like that? What happened?"

"He says he is my husband."

Ted froze and looked up at her. "Do you remember him?"

"Nope," she said on a sigh. "I didn't say I believed him. Besides, he couldn't prove his claim. I'm supposed to go back to his club tomorrow. He said I could bring someone with me."

"Hmm. I'd be careful if I were you. Don't trust anyone that says they know you." Ted resumed cleaning, his arm moving with more force than before.

"Trust me, I won't. I know better. He's not the only one who says he knows me. Aidan took me to meet Meredith and Jake Craine. They are supposed to be my sister and brother-in-law."

"Did you remember them?" Ted asked gently.

"No." Caitlyn shook her head. "And I don't particularly care for Jake. He isn't a very pleasant person to be around."

"I would watch my step around all of them, especially Aidan Devlin. It doesn't matter if you're really his wife or not. I don't think it's safe to be near him. There are rumors that he's a vampire and a demon."

"What?" Caitlyn gasped. "A vampire? You don't believe that nonsense, do you?"

"Why not? It might be true."

"Oh, come on, Ted. Vampires and demons do not exist." Caitlyn knew she stared at him as if he'd grown three heads and sprouted wings, but he wasn't looking at her anyway. Surely he didn't believe in vampires. Did he?

"Oh, so you met him once and know for sure he's human?" Ted asked.

"Of course he's human. Vampires don't exist."

Ted turned and stared at her. Caitlyn shivered at the intensity of his gaze and the odd glint in his eyes. Another well-educated man who believed in faerie tales.

"A lot of things are unexplainable. Remember, truth is often stranger than fiction," he said, bringing her tea over to the table.

"So, in other words, you want me to believe in vampires?" Caitlyn stared at him in amazement. "But when I told you about my dreams you claimed they were figments of my overactive imagination. You said they weren't real. You even gave me pills to help me sleep!" Caitlyn fought down the irritation his comments caused. She was hungry and tired, but this ... this was just too much.

"There are things you know nothing about."

Caitlyn gasped. Aidan had made the same comment. If she didn't know better, she'd think they knew each other.

"Have you ever been to The Witch's Brew?" she asked, narrowing her eyes suspiciously.

"What?" He looked at her with a curious expression on his face. "You went there?"

"Yes. There were a lot of weird people in there dressed up as vampires and witches."

"Caitlyn." Ted sighed. "Don't be so close-minded. How do you know they aren't real witches or vampires?"

"Because witches and vampires aren't real!" she shouted, then stood abruptly, knocking her chair over. "*You* told me so yourself! Besides, they can't be real."

"Calm down and take several deep breaths."

Caitlyn slammed the chair back into position and growled at Ted. Imagine, a full-grown man, a doctor no less, telling her he believed in mythological creatures. If he weren't such a good doctor and friend she'd recommend he see one of his colleagues for a mental exam.

"He says I'm his wife. Wouldn't that make me a vampire too?" Caitlyn asked. "Other than my sensitivity to the sun I don't act like a vampire. And I'm pretty sure I would know if I needed blood to survive. Oh yeah, what about mirrors? I have a reflection."

"You are not Aidan Devlin's wife."

"Well, that sure makes me feel better, doc. He says I am and you say I'm not. Only one of you is right; do I flip a coin to see which one it is?"

"You're tired, Caitlyn. We both are. Let's get some rest. We'll discuss this later when you are feeling better."

Caitlyn watched as his blue eyes swirled, turning green before returning to blue. She blinked before saying, "I guess I'd better get some sleep. I'm so tired that for a minute there ..." She shook her head. "Never mind. Good night."

He looked at her oddly, squinting like he often did when he was confused by something.

"Night." He nodded at her.

"I'll see you in the morning, then." Caitlyn headed for the stairs. She couldn't handle anything else tonight. Ted could grill her in the morning.

"Caitlyn!" Ted called.

"What?" She turned back slowly, wondering what he wanted.

"Damn it!" Ted strode to her side. He grabbed her arm, searching her face. *For what?* She met his gaze and waited patiently.

Finally he spoke. "He did something to you, didn't he?"

"What do you mean?"

Caitlyn frowned. What was wrong with him tonight? Or was it just her? Ever since Aidan had walked her home through the park she'd felt odd.

"I'm going to bed now."

"I don't want you to go see him tomorrow."

Caitlyn looked down at her friend, who now was acting as oddly as she. "Tomorrow is a new day. I'll sleep on it."

"Okay." Ted nodded slowly. "Good night."

"Oh, Ted?" She hesitated on the top step.

"Yes?"

"Do you think my memory will ever return?"

"I hope not." He spoke so quietly, Caitlyn knew she hadn't heard him correctly.

"What did you say?"

He cleared his throat before answering a little louder, "I said 'probably not.'"

Caitlyn frowned and shrugged. She'd sleep, and then tomorrow, when her head was clearer she would try to make sense out of everything.

She wondered if her imagination had created her feelings of unease. She had nothing to fear from Ted. He was her friend and doctor. So why had she remained silent about the medallion, and the feelings Aidan awoke in her? More importantly, what was she going to do tomorrow?

* * * * *

"Caitlyn."

Feather-soft kisses brushed against the nape of her neck, sending shivers skittering throughout her body. Heat spread from that spot, down her shoulder, expanding in a web of desire that consumed her.

He was here.

A warm, moist mouth nibbled its way to her ear, where her lover whispered sinful promises of wicked pleasures. With a low moan, Caitlyn turned in his arms, sliding her hands up his well-muscled chest.

As always, his face was cast in shadows, yet she could see the dancing flames in his obsidian eyes. He had no name, this man whose touch brought her such passion, but she knew every detail of his hard body. Every whimper that set him burning. Every sweet spot she could nibble to earn her a groan from his hot lips.

"Hi," she whispered, kissing his chin.

His warm hand slid behind her back as he tugged her closer, his heated flesh pressed against hers. Caitlyn lifted her mouth to his and kissed him. Their lips met; his tongue urged her to open for him. More than willing, she melted in his embrace.

Being in his arms was like coming home. With him, Caitlyn felt true peace. It didn't matter that she didn't know who he was. Nothing mattered -- not the killer, not her amnesia. The only thing she focused on when in his arms was how right they felt together.

Cupping his face in her hands, she met his challenge and demanded more as sensation after sensation coursed through her body.

"I need you," she said when his mouth left hers to plant soft, lingering kisses on her neck and shoulder.

An answering growl rumbled deep in his throat. He rolled her onto her back, his lower body pinning her hips to the mattress. Caitlyn lowered her hands, nails digging into his shoulders as his rigid shaft pressed against her thigh.

Caitlyn gasped when he lowered his mouth to her breast and trapped one pert nipple between his lips, teasing it with his tongue. She strained underneath him, writhing, reaching for the place only he could take her.

"Please," Caitlyn begged, breathing heavily as he continued the slow, sensual torture.

Her lover chuckled, lips twitching against her belly as he traced small circles on her stomach with his tongue. When his fingers grazed the insides of her thighs, Caitlyn arched her back, hands fisting in his thick hair.

This time, she growled as he dragged his face down her abdomen, then hesitated, glancing up at her.

"Yes," she hissed, knowing he was trying to drive her crazy. It was working, too. When he didn't move fast enough she added, "Please."

With a smile, he complied, brushing his lips against her clit before sucking it into his mouth. Caitlyn arched halfway off the bed, crying out as he teased her with his tongue, back and forth, flicking the tip as he held it between his teeth. His fingers sought her entrance, mimicking the motions of his tongue. He thrust one finger inside, eliciting a moan as he tested her readiness.

Caitlyn moved against his finger and mouth, rocking in need as he continued to thrust first one, then two fingers into her. When he sucked hard on her clit, her stomach tightened in an aching ball of need. He dragged his teeth over the engorged nub and rammed his fingers into her harder and faster.

Pleasure coiled deep within her, and a delicious tingling erupted as Caitlyn felt her soul begin to shatter. Her lover rose over her and slid inside until his balls slapped against her. He pulled out and slammed in, the sound of wet flesh striking against wet flesh echoing in the room. The sound was only interrupted by her moans and pleas as he pounded into her harder and faster, bringing her quickly back to a peak.

She fisted her hands in his hair and tugged him close for a kiss. When their lips met, she tasted her essence and growled. A hunger rose in her that she couldn't explain. She wanted to bite him, to mark him.

Caitlyn broke the kiss and lowered her mouth to his neck. She kissed him, then bit down on his flesh. He cried out, his body jerking inside hers. His hot seed filled her as she clenched her muscles around him, milking every last drop from him.

He slid his hand between them and pinched her clit. Caitlyn stopped biting him to scream as she shattered. Again.

Her lover sighed and dropped his head onto her chest. His breathing sounded as struggled as hers felt. She lifted her head, wondering if this time she'd find out who he was.

He glanced up and the shadows disappeared, revealing his true identity.

"Aidan!" Caitlyn shrieked, lurching upright in her sweat-soaked sheets. Frantic, she made to push him away, her hands encountering nothing but cinnamon-scented air. Small, choked sounds of denial erupted from her throat.

Memories of Aidan's mouth on her and images of his hard body filled her head. Caitlyn tried to block the thoughts; they only served to arouse her even more. She trembled, every sense alive and tingling from her nocturnal lover's caresses.

Maybe a shower would help. Caitlyn climbed out of bed. On rubbery legs, she entered the adjoining bathroom. She turned the cold water on full force, adding only a tiny bit of hot, and stepped under the spray.

The arousal persisted. Trembling, Caitlyn tried to turn the water temperature down even more, to frigid. She scrubbed at her skin until it was red, trying to wash away the feel of him on her flesh.

As the spray beat against her back, Caitlyn covered her face in her hands and fought tears. Aidan couldn't be her fantasy lover. He just couldn't! Why did her subconscious inject his face into her dreams?

The man was a suspected killer. If he was the one behind the murders, then the scar on her throat was a result of his handiwork. Knees shaking, Caitlyn grabbed onto the ledge set into the tile wall, knocking a variety of shower gels and shampoos to the floor.

The implications of her dream terrified her. Caitlyn drew in deep breaths, trying to calm down. She didn't know anything for sure. Her over-tired subconscious had called up Aidan's face, but it didn't mean ... anything.

Yeah, right.

Focusing on a breathing technique she'd read in a New Age magazine helped calm her down enough to think about the situation with a clearer head.

Going to his place, seeing him again, and checking out his *proof* would show her the truth. If he turned out to be her invisible lover, she'd deal with that later.

After a few minutes, she stumbled out of the shower and wrapped herself in a large, fluffy towel. As she brushed her teeth vigorously, Caitlyn glanced in the mirror and dropped her toothbrush. She frowned at the heavy shadows under her eyes. Grabbing her makeup, she addressed the dark circles her restless night's sleep had left behind. Her foundation served double duty, not only covering the evidence of a troubled night, but also serving as sunscreen.

Caitlyn pulled on a pair of blue jeans and a plain white T-shirt before scraping her hair back into a ponytail. She glanced at the clock. *Ten already? So much to do and so little time to do it in*, she thought with a grim smile.

As she rushed down the stairs, the fragrant aroma of fresh-brewed coffee teased her senses, leading her into the kitchen. As usual, Ted sat at the table with the paper spread in front of him. She'd yet to rise before him and get to the newspaper first.

"How do you do it?" Caitlyn demanded, sitting down and reaching for the paper.

Ted slapped his hand down on the paper, preventing her from taking it.

"Where were you last night?"

"What?" Caitlyn frowned and tugged on the entertainment section. "Didn't we discuss this already?"

Ted sighed and pulled the paper away. "Did you happen to cut through the park last night?"

"Um."

"There was a murder last night in the park. I know you usually cut through there to come home. You're lucky it wasn't you." Ted paused, probably to let his statement sink in before continuing, "Did you see anything suspicious? The police estimate the time of death at eleven and you arrived home at eleven-fifteen. You probably just missed the murderer."

"What?" Caitlyn reached for the newspaper again. "I remember leaving The Witch's Brew with Aidan. We took a cab to the park. I saw a couple making out on a park bench, and then I recognized Aidan's medallion. It was late and I was tired, so he walked me home. We didn't see anyone else at all."

"You were alone last night in the park with a man some suspect of murdering his wife?"

"No." She hesitated. "Yes. We don't know if he's a murderer."

"I think something happened in the park and you just don't remember." Ted leaned closer. "And I think I know why."

"Oh yeah, Dr. Spooky? What do you think happened?"

"You acted as if you were in a trance. I think Aidan hypnotized you, then planted the urge to come home and sleep. He probably wanted to kill you, but was interrupted by this young man --" He jabbed at an article on the front page of the newspaper. "-- so Aidan killed him."

Caitlyn laughed. Holding up her fist, she emphasized each statement by pointing a finger toward the ceiling. "If he wanted to kill me he could have last night. We were alone in his office. We were alone in a taxi twice. We were alone last night in the park."

"I still say he hypnotized you, Caitlyn. You know you wouldn't remember if he did."

Caitlyn glanced up at Ted. He had a good point. She wouldn't know, would she?

“My repeated sessions with you probably made you more susceptible to him. There’s only one way to find out.”

Caitlyn shook her head. Ted was highly respected in his field, yet she often doubted his abilities. He hadn’t been able to find even one tidbit about her past. In fact, she’d remembered nothing in the months he’d been treating her. And now he wanted her to believe that Aidan had implanted a false memory in her head?

“Will you let me hypnotize you?”

“What? Do you really think I witnessed Aidan Devlin murdering someone last night in the park?”

“Yes. Let me hypnotize you and prove it. I want to see if you can remember.”

“I never remembered anything the other times you hypnotized me. Why are you so sure I’ll remember something now?” Caitlyn dropped the paper and leaned on her elbows. “Why are *you* acting so strange, Ted? Last night and this morning? Ever since I mentioned Aidan.”

“I am not acting strange.” Ted laughed, but it sounded almost desperate to her.

“Yes, you are.” Caitlyn narrowed her eyes. “Why don’t you tell me why?”

Ted leaned forward eagerly. “A mind is a tricky thing. I think if something happened last night we can access it because it is recent. Those memories from before your accident are most likely long gone.”

“You could be right.” Caitlyn looked back down at the newspaper. “But at this point, I’d just like to know if he’s my husband or not, and I don’t need memories to find out.”

Chapter Nine

“Well?”

Caitlyn frowned at Ted. “Give me a minute here.”

She sat up and propped her head in her hands. Ted was partly right. She did remember something she’d forgotten until now. The run-in with the would-be rapist.

She also remembered meeting Meredith and Jake at the café, the walk through the woods, and the kisses, so they weren’t implanted memories. Why had she forgotten the incident with the boy? The only rational explanation was that Aidan had indeed messed with her mind. But how? And when? She didn’t remember being hypnotized.

“Caitlyn?”

“I remember walking through the park.” Caitlyn frowned again and looked at Ted. “I can’t believe Aidan would mess with my mind like that. How could he hypnotize me and make me forget?”

Scenes flashed through her mind. She remembered running from Aidan and getting caught by the punk. Things got a little fuzzy after that.

Ted tossed the newspaper back onto her lap, bringing her thoughts back to the present. Caitlyn looked down at the article and reread it. Something strange had happened last night and she needed answers. This was yet another reason to go see Aidan.

After she talked to Manny. Perhaps he could give her more info than was contained in the paper.

“I need to talk to Manny.” Caitlyn rose and handed the paper back to Ted.

“Why?” Ted stood quickly and dropped the newspaper onto the coffee table.

“I wanna know what this John Doe looks like.” Caitlyn walked over to the hall closet to grab a light jacket.

"You ran into someone in the park, didn't you?"

"You already picked my brain, Ted. I'm sure you know the answer without making me say it."

"All right, fine. Surely you see now how dangerous Aidan Devlin really is. If I were you, I'd stay far, far away from him. Don't confront him. Not alone. He's obviously a very dangerous man."

"We'll see," Caitlyn muttered as she pulled on a baseball cap and grabbed her purse. "I might be gone a while. You don't need me today anyway, right?"

"You know I always keep Thursdays free."

"Yeah, yeah. Poker night with the boys. I'll finish that filing later."

"That's fine. And stay away from Aidan Devlin!" he called after her.

Caitlyn sighed and pulled the door shut behind her with a click. If she could remember her parents, she was positive Ted would sound just like them.

An hour later, Caitlyn stood at the bus stop at Central Park. The vision of her attacker flashed in her mind, the word *vengeance*, carved in his chest.

Her visit to the morgue hadn't accomplished much except to stir up Manny's curiosity about Aidan. And to positively identify her attacker.

She glanced at her watch. Four o'clock. Would Aidan be at Pretenses at this hour? She shook her head. He lived above the club; he'd either be in his apartment, or downstairs.

Caitlyn dug in her purse for her cell phone, notebook, and a pen. One quick call and she had Pretenses's business number. She decided to try to reach Aidan as she walked down the sidewalk toward the bus stop.

"Can I please talk to Aidan Devlin?" Caitlyn asked when the secretary answered.

"I'm sorry, but he's unavailable for the next few hours."

"But I need to talk to him now. Tell him it's Caitlyn."

"I'm sorry, but he's --"

"Yeah, yeah," Caitlyn interrupted, "unavailable for the next few hours."

"If you call back around six, I'm sure he'll be willing to speak with you."

The secretary was a good guard dog. She probably wouldn't budge an inch, even if Caitlyn threatened her with bodily harm.

"Damn." Caitlyn shoved the phone back in her purse. She couldn't wait until six. She needed to see Aidan now. If she waited, he'd probably be busy with the club and not have time to talk. Although he'd wasted no time leaving with her last night, she couldn't expect him to keep giving her time when his work was busiest. This couldn't wait, though.

* * * * *

The tall brick building looked ominous. Caitlyn shivered as she searched the dark windows on the second floor for any signs of life. Seeing none, she wondered when they cleaned the building and prepared for the night ahead.

Caitlyn knocked on the door. When there was no answer, she began to pace in front of the building, wondering what to do. Perhaps there were some workers in the back, unloading supplies, and they hadn't heard her knock.

"Caitlyn?"

The sound of her name came on the wind. She couldn't tell who it was calling her, but it sounded as if the voice came from behind the building. Were the police conducting more investigations? Was Aidan finally repairing those lights? Maybe he was getting a delivery. Her feet headed toward the back alley before she was aware of what she was doing.

As Caitlyn walked behind the building, the sounds from the street grew quieter. Even in broad daylight the shadows made her uneasy. She wondered if the Slasher hid here, waiting for a victim.

"Stop letting your imagination take over."

She hesitated and listened to see if she heard her name again. The only sounds now were those of a busy city. Caitlyn turned the corner and glanced around. The alley was empty. Who'd called her name, then?

It must have been her imagination. Caitlyn glanced up at the sky. It was a little overcast, but she doubted the Slasher would attack at this time of day.

Her throat tightened as she hurried past the chalk outline and caution tape. Why hadn't someone cleaned that up yet? Was it a not-so-subtle reminder of the danger?

Picking up her pace, Caitlyn hurried over to the back door and banged on it. The alley grew dark. She looked up at the sky and a frisson of fear raced up her spine. A large black cloud obscured the sun. A storm, and moving quickly, by the looks of it. Not wanting to get caught in a downpour in the alley, she knocked on the door even louder.

No answer. Caitlyn turned around and chewed nervously on her lower lip. She'd heard someone call her name. What should she do? Should she keep trying? If anyone was in there, they probably couldn't hear her, anyway. No one ever heard the victims' screams.

Caitlyn took a step to go back around front, then froze when a shadow moved over her. Panic crept up her spine as she stood there shivering. A shadow? Without sunlight?

Her breath caught in her throat and her heart beat rapidly. Caitlyn turned back and banged on the door harder, hoping someone would hear her.

"Oh please, oh please answer," she muttered under her breath.

Thunder rattled through the alley as a light rain began to fall. She grabbed the doorknob and yanked on it, turning it back and forth.

"Someone let me in, damn it!"

“Caitlyn.” Her name echoed in the alley behind her.

Caitlyn cried out in surprise, and turned around to see who called her. There was no one there.

“Oh God, I’m going crazy,” she mumbled. “There’s no other explanation.”

She spun back around, fist raised, prepared to bang on the door again, when she saw Aidan leaning against the doorframe. Choking down her scream, she clapped her hand against her chest to calm her racing heart.

“My God. You scared me. How’d you get out here?”

“What are you doing back here, alone?”

“I ... um ...” she stammered, trying to catch her breath.

Aidan crossed his arms and waited as if the rain didn’t bother him at all. Caitlyn took a moment to steady her nerves and looked him over.

Today, he was dressed more formally in a dark gray silk shirt with long sleeves. The top two buttons were undone, as if he hadn’t finished dressing. She admired the smooth line of his neck and broad shoulders. Where his shirt hung open, she caught a teasing glimpse of his chest. She itched to touch him there, to see if he was as hot for her as she burned for him.

Forcing herself to look away, she lowered her gaze, taking in black slacks and shiny black shoes. Shoes that were getting very wet. Good. He deserved it for having his secretary block her calls.

She looked back up at him and caught his smirk. He was attractive and he knew it. He should be used to women admiring him. Unless he was smirking for a different reason.

Caitlyn frowned, wondering why he’d called her back here and then played hide-and-go-seek. Had he wanted to startle her on purpose? Caitlyn opened her mouth to yell at him, but he spoke before she could.

“What are you doing in the rain?” he asked before she could speak.

Startled, she stared at him, her mouth still open. The sound of his deep, husky laughter filled the air as she tried to remember what she’d been going to say. Now was a good opportunity to get to the bottom of things. She wanted answers, and she wanted them before he could claim he was busy and slip away.

“What brings you here to see me?”

“Didn’t your guard dog tell you I called?”

“It’s raining, Caitlyn. Stop beating around the bush and tell me why you are here.”

“You claim I’m your wife, yet you don’t look very pleased to see me.”

“My men woke me to tell me about some deranged woman banging on the back door. They were afraid to open it in case *you* were the Slasher.”

Caitlyn choked back a laugh. Then she shook her head. “You’re doing it again. You’re distracting me. How did you get out here without me seeing you?” She stepped closer to him,

ignoring the excitement that stirred in her veins at his close proximity. "And why did your secretary say you are unavailable until six? What were you doing still sleeping?"

"Am I distracting you?" He smiled, and continued, "Tell me, what are *you* doing in this alley? Alone?"

"I came here to see you. To ask you some questions. Aren't you happy to see me?"

"Maybe I would be, if you weren't trying to get yourself killed."

"If you answered your phone like a normal person, or maybe," she paused dramatically, "if you had someone answer the door when people knocked, I wouldn't have come back here looking for you."

"It's too dangerous for you to be back here. I don't want to lose you again." Aidan crushed her against her chest.

"You're smooshing me," she croaked, trying to push against him. "I came here to get answers. When that woman wouldn't let me through on the phone, I decided to come and try in person."

Aidan relaxed his hold, but only enough to let her catch her breath. He lowered his head, rubbing his cheek against the side of her head. Shivers ran up Caitlyn's spine, and this time they had nothing to do with the weather since the rain had stopped as quickly as it started. It felt so good to be in his arms again. He was addicting.

He lifted his head and met her gaze. His eyes darkened as he whispered, "You are still alive. Nothing else matters."

Ohhh, baby. He *was* in her dream last night. The eyes weren't the right color, but damned if everything else wasn't exactly the same.

"You are my wife, and you are back home where you belong."

Caitlyn blinked rapidly and broke eye contact. *Shit.* He was trying to mesmerize her again.

"Don't think you're going to hypnotize me again, buddy."

"Hypnotize you? What the devil are you talking about?"

"Don't play innocent with me." Caitlyn pushed him away. "I know your game. I just don't know why."

"Caitlyn! What the hell has gotten into you? What happened between last night and today?"

"You hypnotized me, then a man who attacks me turns up dead. Thanks to you I'm as clueless now as I was before I met you."

Aidan grabbed her upper arm and reached for the doorknob. "Let's get inside."

"No." Caitlyn shook her head. "If we go inside, you'll distract me, and we'll once again not have this conversation. I need to know if I'm your wife or not. I want to know why you hypnotized me. Why are you messing with my mind?"

“Let’s discuss this inside, Caitlyn.”

Caitlyn shook her head. She knew she should go inside and look at the evidence, but she was afraid. What if he kissed her again? Would she have the strength to flee? She needed to know what he was up to. He might not be a killer, but she still couldn’t trust him either.

“Not yet. Even if you have proof I’m your wife. Why did you hypnotize me?”

“You don’t really believe I’m the Slasher, do you?”

“Why did you hypnotize me?” Caitlyn repeated, then cleared her throat, hoping she sounded more forceful than she felt. When he was this close all she could think about was his mouth on hers.

He sighed heavily. “What makes you think I hypnotized you?”

“My doctor said I’d been hypnotized. He helped me remember something that happened last night in the park.”

“I see. And you trust this doctor?” Aidan’s eyebrows rose.

“Actually, yes. I trust him because Ted isn’t just my doctor, he’s my friend.”

“What exactly do you remember?” Aidan asked, rubbing his palms slowly up and down her arms.

“This.” Caitlyn reached forward and undid two more buttons on his shirt. She watched his eyes widen as she slid her hand under his shirt. Her hand fisted around his medallion. She pulled it out and turned it, looking at it again.

“You remember this?”

“I didn’t tell you last night, because I wasn’t sure I could trust the memory. When we were in the park, I remembered seeing this before.”

She flipped it over, frowning at the picture of the two lovers. Glancing back up, she met his eyes and lost herself in the deep pools of green. They’d shared kisses; maybe once they’d shared more.

“What else do you remember?” he asked, grabbing her arms and spinning her around so her back rested against the door.

Her eyes widened in surprise, then pleasure, as he cupped her face in his hands. “What are you doing?”

“Trying to get you to remember me, to remember this.” He lowered his face and kissed her. His lips were gentle at first, coaxing her to relax.

Caitlyn knew she should protest but she didn’t want to. Everything about him made her weak in the knees. His sexy grin, his mesmerizing eyes, the way he cherished her with his mouth and hands.

“Open for me, Caitlyn, let me in,” he murmured softly.

Caitlyn sighed and raised herself up to meet his next kiss. She wrapped her arms around his neck and leaned into him. Aidan braced one arm on the wall next to her and snaked the other around her waist. He brushed his lips against hers.

"Mine, you are mine." Aidan growled and nipped at her lips. He trailed kisses from the corner of her mouth to her ear, where he whispered words promising her pleasure that barely registered.

Caitlyn whimpered, clutching at his shoulders as her knees weakened. Lust burned in her belly and spread through her veins like a forest fire.

With a moan, Caitlyn quickly unbuttoned the rest of his shirt and pushed it off his shoulders. Once his smooth skin was exposed, she devoured him first with her eyes, then with her hands and mouth as she nibbled at his nipples, then licked them until they hardened.

Aidan hissed when she slid her hands down to his pants. She fumbled with the zipper until she finally released his bulging erection. Caitlyn grabbed him, and slid her hands over his velvety soft skin. Her mouth watered. She wanted to know if he'd taste as good as he had in her dream. Caitlyn dropped to her knees, wrapped both hands around him and guided him to her mouth.

She flicked her tongue over the tip of his cock. He tasted salty, and jumped under her touch. Feeling and hearing his pleasure made her grow wetter.

"Caitlyn." Aidan moaned her name as she sucked him into her mouth. He jerked, and braced his hands on her shoulders as she continued to draw him in deeper before pulling back, and then taking him in even further.

"Sweet gods, woman."

His breathless words sent a shiver of excitement up her spine. She was wet. So wet, and ready for him, but the husky sounds he made encouraged her to ignore her needs and satisfy his.

He was too large for her to take all the way in her mouth, so she compensated with her hands, wrapping them around the base of his shaft and gently squeezing him. As she worked him with her mouth and hands, he sank his fists into her hair and moaned.

"Stop." Aidan pushed on her shoulders.

Caitlyn ignored him until he tugged her upright.

"I want to be inside you when I come. Let's go upstairs," he whispered, nibbling on her ear.

"Yes." She sighed and opened her eyes to look at him. The triumph in his gaze brought her out of the sensual haze he'd wrapped around her.

What did I almost do? What is wrong with me?

Caitlyn pushed him away. Damn him, he was doing it again. She should have listened to Ted and just stayed away.

“What’s wrong?” He grabbed her shoulders.

“Stop. Just stop.” Caitlyn pushed him away again. “Ted was right.”

“Forget about Ted,” he growled as he closed his pants. “This isn’t about *Ted*. Or is it? How close *are* you and Ted?”

She blinked and his face was inches from hers. His warm breath fanned her cheeks as he added, “You are mine. Mine, damn it.”

He crushed his lips against hers, holding her tightly.

“Stop.” Caitlyn pushed him away before she got swept up in passion again. “You haven’t answered my questions. This is just another one of your tactics to avoid answering them.”

“I am not avoiding your questions. I have nothing to hide. Ask me anything.” Aidan crossed his arms and waited.

“When we were in the park, did you see anyone who looked suspicious? Did you see anyone else at all? Before or after I left?” Caitlyn watched his face eagerly.

“You mean you want to know if I killed that man and carved the word *vengeance* on his chest.”

Chapter Ten

Caitlyn stared at him as he put his shirt back on. Aidan knew exactly why she was here. He was also pretty sure there was more to her doctor than she thought. Somehow, she'd remembered the young man who'd attacked her in the park last night, and figured out he was murdered. And he'd been so close to losing control when she'd taken him in her mouth.

He needed to find out how much she remembered so he'd know what to tell her. No, he needed to tell her the truth and remind her she was his wife.

Caitlyn needed to be under his protection before the killer struck again. The Slasher wouldn't stop until she was dead. Even then, it might be too late to stop him. The murder last night was a warning. Someone had been watching and waiting. He was angry. Very angry, judging by the wounds he'd inflicted on Caitlyn's attacker. Hopefully, he would make a mistake. If he did, Aidan would be right there, waiting, to take him out.

"Aidan?"

"It wasn't safe in the park. After that kid attacked you, I knew I needed to get you home quickly."

"I handled the attacker last night without your help. Thank you very much."

"He was human. We all know how well you handled the Slasher the last time you were face to face with him. I don't want him to have a second chance to kill you. I prefer to keep you alive."

Caitlyn raised her brows and opened her mouth to speak. He knew she was going to argue, so he just plowed on.

"I hypnotized you to make you leave. Then I hypnotized the boy to make sure he'd never hurt anyone else."

"You hypnotized him and hoped his behavior would change?"

“Yes. His mind was very weak, so it took no time at all, and I was able to follow you home. Did I appear to be in the frame of mind a killer would have been? Was I suffused with rage when he attacked you? Did I appear angry enough to use a knife to write the word vengeance on his chest?”

Caitlyn gasped, her eyes widening in fear. “That’s another thing, how did you know that?”

“I told you, I have my sources, just like you have yours. I left him standing there, alive and relatively unharmed. That blow you sent to his groin was still bothering him, though.”

“But I didn’t see you following me. How do I know you’re telling the truth?”

Confusion clouded her green eyes. Aidan hoped she would believe him. If the Slasher got a hold of her now, she didn’t stand a chance against him.

“Please, Caitlyn, believe me. I left him leaning against the tree and followed you all the way back to your place. I stood under the streetlight, watching you until you went inside. I know you saw me when you looked back out.”

“You messed with my mind, Aidan. How can I trust anything you say?”

What could he say or do? The damn Slasher had framed him once again for a crime he didn’t commit. It made him wonder if he was the target, or Caitlyn. Aidan sighed and shoved his hands into his pockets. He needed to get to the bottom of this.

Suddenly, a slow shuffling sound reached his ears as someone rounded the corner. Damn it, why hadn’t he felt the person sooner? Aidan let his magic flow to touch the person as he moved slowly and steadily toward them. Aidan didn’t recognize the magic, but he could smell the stench of evil that had taken hold of the human puppet, and suspected the man was a minion of the Slasher.

“Go inside,” he growled pushing Caitlyn toward the door.

She resisted, looking down the shadow-filled alley with a frown.

“Who is it? I can’t see anything. Why didn’t you fix the lights yet?”

“I did fix them. They’re on a timer. Now get inside!” he shouted as the wind whipped through the alley and the rain picked up, pelting them with cold, hard drops.

He reached for the door again, but Caitlyn called out to the stranger. “Manny! What are you doing here?”

Aidan grabbed onto Caitlyn and pushed her behind him. “It’s not who you think it is.”

“What?” she shouted into the back of his neck as her fingers dug into his shoulder.

Aidan waited for the man to answer. Something or someone very powerful, with the knowledge of puppetry, thought to test him, and Aidan didn’t like tests.

He checked for other intruders. Where there was a puppet, there was usually a puppet master. Maybe even other puppets.

“I followed you here after you left the office.” Manny stopped and glared at Aidan.

"But why did you follow me?" Caitlyn asked.

"You're investigating the Slasher. I knew you'd lead me to the murderer."

Aidan tuned back in to Manny, irritation making his blood heat. Caitlyn gnawed on her lip and Aidan touched her mind to see what thoughts were running through her head. He sensed confusion and an edge of unease. But he also felt her genuine affection for this man. Aidan tried to touch the man's mind and found it blocked. He didn't bother to push against it, not when he was sure the Slasher was pulling his strings.

"Yes. I see you came here to test my theory," Manny said.

"What do you mean?"

"Don't play stupid with me, Caitlyn. I know you too well."

Aidan growled a low warning as the man walked closer.

"You don't scare me, Mr. Devlin. I don't care how much money you have, you can't buy your innocence this time. I know you killed the man in the park. And if you have your way, Caitlyn is next."

"What are you saying, Manny?" Caitlyn gasped. She tried to push past Aidan and step toward Manny, but Aidan grabbed her and pinned her to his side.

"He's accusing me of being the Slasher." Aidan's low voice reverberated through the alley.

"What?" Caitlyn shouted over the sudden roar of wind that tore through the alley. "Aidan didn't kill him. He couldn't have."

"I heard everything you two said. You can't talk your way out of it this time, Devlin."

Aidan sensed Caitlyn's unease. "You weren't in the alley while Aidan and I were talking. How could you hear anything?" she asked.

"I heard everything."

Caitlyn stepped closer to Aidan. What in the world was happening? Why was she defending a man who had hypnotized her? And why was her friend acting like a madman? One with supersonic hearing, at that.

"He's going to kill you. Just like he intended to do last night."

"You're wrong." Aidan's voice rang out low, soft and melodious.

Caitlyn could feel Manny's hatred. It reverberated off him in hot waves of anger. It shook her as nothing else could. Stepping in between the men, she held up her hands trying to keep them apart.

"Manny, I know you believe that. But you're wrong."

"No, you're wrong. He's brainwashed you. He hypnotized you again." Manny's voice rose in pitch with every word.

How did Manny know she'd been hypnotized? Unless he had heard their conversation, but that was not humanly possible.

Manny's anger seemed to grow in intensity as if something was feeding it, fueling his rage. He wasn't acting like his normal self. Manny, the man who always had a kind word for everyone, was standing here throwing accusations at Aidan.

She glanced at Aidan to see if he could feel it as well, and noticed that he wasn't even looking at Manny. He was looking at a large gray cloud that hovered over the alley right behind Manny.

"Caitlyn, you need to get inside now!" Aidan commanded her, but she stood there paralyzed.

The cloud looked as if it had wings and a large, grayish body. It was beating like a heartbeat, steady and quick. But that wasn't possible. Clouds were inanimate.

Rubbing her eyes, Caitlyn looked back up and screamed when a shadowy figure dropped out of the cloud onto the ground.

"Damn it! I told you to get inside!" Aidan grabbed Caitlyn, pushed open the door, and shoved her inside. He pulled the door shut before she could react.

When she realized what he'd done, Caitlyn reached for the doorknob and turned. It wouldn't open. She glanced down at the knob. There wasn't even a lock.

As she searched the door for a deadbolt or locking mechanism, something rammed into the door, shaking it so hard she wondered if it would collapse. Caitlyn heard a howl of rage and pain as the door rattled again. With horror, she realized who'd made that sound. *Aidan.*

Either Manny or the weird creature that had fallen from the cloud had attacked Aidan. He needed help. She could talk to Manny, try to find out why he was acting this way. But first she needed to get back outside.

Spying a tiny latch that opened a little window in the door, Caitlyn slid it open and peeked outside. It didn't open very wide, but she could see Manny, Aidan, and three shadow creatures through the opening. Manny was staring in horrified fascination as the three things attacked Aidan.

In one surge they leapt at Aidan, slamming him back against the door. Screams echoed in her ears as she backed away.

The door shuddered again and Caitlyn realized the screams were coming from her. She shoved her fist into her mouth and blinked back tears. They were going to kill Aidan and she couldn't do anything to stop them.

Caitlyn scanned the hallway for a weapon, or something she could use to open the door and fight those things.

Be still, Caitlyn. I can't fight them with your fear clouding my mind.

Caitlyn shrieked and backed against the wall. She glanced around the nearly empty hall. Aidan was outside. How could she hear him?

Glancing through the tiny window again, she watched one of the beings strike Aidan in the back, knocking him down. With a loud roar Aidan rose, throwing the creature off of his back. Caitlyn flinched when it hit the door with a thud. It turned and looked at her, lifeless, beady black eyes staring at her before it slid out of sight. Rising, it scratched at the door, trying to claw its way inside.

Caitlyn screamed and slammed the window shut, hoping the thing couldn't get in. The door shuddered as the creature let out a high-pitched scream of frustration.

"Oh God, oh God, oh God," Caitlyn whimpered. What the hell were those things and why were they attacking Aidan?

"What the hell?" A harsh voice came from behind her, echoing her thoughts. "Who are you and how did you get in here?"

Caitlyn screamed again and turned around so fast she lost her balance, ending up on the floor.

"Caitlyn!" The tall, lanky man beamed in pleasure as he reached for her hand and pulled her to her feet. He looked at her disheveled clothes before asking, "What are you doing in here?"

A loud roar came from the alley, followed by another high-pitched shriek Caitlyn assumed came from the creatures.

"The fool!" the man shouted. "Taking on termuvins by himself!"

"Termu-what?"

"Termuvins. Demons that feed on energy and evil. Aidan's an idiot if he thinks he can handle them by himself."

"But --"

Pushing her aside, he yanked the door open and charged outside. Caitlyn caught the door before it could close. She looked around in desperation. She needed a weapon. There. A door prop. She tested the weight of the large piece of wood. It would have to do. Holding it like a bat, she followed the man out into the alley.

As she watched, he pulled one of the creatures he'd called a termuvin off Aidan and flung it further than humanly possible. Aidan turned and grabbed another one of the other creatures while his friend fought off a third.

The first termuvin scrambled to its feet and launched itself at Aidan again.

"Look out!" Caitlyn cried out.

The termuvins all turned as one to look at her. They let out an awful, high-pitched cry before merging into one large black mass. Caitlyn backed against the door as the thing approached. Her heart thundered in her ears so loudly she could barely hear Aidan yelling at her to get back inside.

Fear rose in her throat as it advanced. She adjusted her grip on the wood. Her hands were slick with sweat but she didn't want to risk taking the time to dry them on her jeans. Raising the makeshift bat, she prepared to swing.

When the termuvins were close enough, Caitlyn swung as hard as she could. The wood went right through the things as if it were made of air.

The mass wrapped around her, engulfing her in its chilling grip. Lethargy stole through her, gluing her feet to the ground and her arms at her sides. Caitlyn wasn't sure she could raise the bat, let alone swing it.

How did you fight something like this? She felt as if her energy was draining. As she grew weaker the mass increased in size. *Demons that fed off energy and evil.*

Caitlyn trembled and gripped her weapon tighter. If she found the strength to swing again, she would. This was just like her nightmares, only worse. At least in her dreams she'd been able to touch them, to fight them. But this wasn't a dream and she was helpless in the creature's grasp.

"No!" She gasped, struggling for breath as pressure pushed against her chest. Her heart stuttered and stopped before it beat again, thudding painfully.

Panic clawed through her as six beady black eyes focused on her once more. She stared into those eyes knowing they would be the last thing she ever saw.

"Caitlyn!" Aidan cried out.

He grabbed them and pulled backwards, trying to pry them off of her. A cloudy haze filled her mind. Why could Aidan touch them but she couldn't?

With an earsplitting shriek, the termuvins released her and turned on Aidan. Caitlyn watched in awe as he narrowed his eyes, challenging it. Suddenly and without warning, his features twisted in an expression of shock and he crumpled to the ground.

Manny stood over him, staring down at Aidan, a knife in his hand. Blood slid from the knife and dripped to the ground, forming a puddle at his feet.

"No!" Caitlyn's scream echoed that of Aidan's friend.

The termuvins turned and charged toward her again. This time, when they reached her they swallowed her whole, enclosing her inside a swirling, shadow-filled mass. Her hair stood up straight, as if she'd been zapped by static electricity.

Her body grew numb. Caitlyn dropped weakly to her knees, no longer able to stand. She stared through the gray fog at Aidan's inert body.

Dead. They'd killed him. She choked back a sob as the piece of wood slipped out of her grasp. Her hands dangled uselessly at her side. They were all going to die. Just like in her dream.

Caitlyn silently watched the stranger subdue Manny. Her energy continued to fade as the termuvins increased in strength.

“Aidan?” Caitlyn called out, hoping he could hear her. To her ears, it sounded as if her voice was coming from far away.

The stranger knelt next to Aidan. Aidan moved ever so slowly. First his head turned, then he lifted it and looked at her. She watched his mouth move and wondered what he was saying. She’d never been good at reading lips. Telepathy was always easier.

Telepathy was easier? She wasn’t telepathic, was she? She had heard Aidan’s voice in her head earlier, so maybe ...

Aidan!

Don’t shout, love. I can hear you.

Are you okay?

I’ll live. Can you break free from them?

I don’t know how.

They’ll kill you unless you get free. Do it now!

With renewed determination, Caitlyn tried to rise, but couldn’t move. They’d drained almost all her energy. The more she struggled, the faster they sapped her strength. There had to be a trick to beating them, but what?

Caitlyn looked over as Manny slowly got to his feet. He raised his knife, turning it on Aidan’s friend.

“Manny!” she shouted. Oh God, he was insane. Caitlyn tried again, this time with her mind. *Manny, stop!*

He turned toward her, his eyes meeting hers. Caitlyn could see his anger wavering and the confusion clouding his mind.

Do you want to be a killer, Manny? Do you want to live knowing that you’ve destroyed the lives of innocent people?

Manny stared at her, blinking in confusion. She could see him struggling with himself.

Weakened even more with her struggle to communicate, Caitlyn fell the rest of the way to the pavement, her head hitting the ground with a painful thump. She stretched her hand toward Manny for help.

“Help me,” she mouthed desperately.

There was no hesitation as he raised the knife in his hand and charged toward her. *No!* He wasn’t supposed to attack her. As Manny reached her she closed her eyes and prayed for a quick end.

“You weren’t supposed to touch her!” Manny shouted.

Caitlyn opened her eyes and looked up in surprise as he hacked at the termuvins with his knife. Pieces of the creatures broke off and fell, dissolving into the ground.

Slowly, some of Caitlyn's strength returned, as the creatures were destroyed. Briefly, she wondered how Manny's knife damaged them when the wood went right through them. Manny dropped the knife and looked up at her.

"You killed him," she whispered.

"I ... I didn't mean to," Manny stuttered.

He looked down at his bloody hands and the knife on the ground, staring at it as if he had never seen it before.

"It doesn't matter if you meant to or not." The stranger rose and advanced toward Manny. "I plan to make sure you don't hurt anyone ever again."

"I'm not dead." Aidan coughed, and his body shuddered in response. Caitlyn tried to rise, but couldn't get up past her knees. She crawled across the short distance, ignoring the way the loose stones cut through her jeans and tore her flesh.

"Aidan," she cried, burying her face against his neck, the only spot not covered in blood. She sat up, her body shaking with reaction as she tried to examine his wounds.

"It's okay, love. I'll be just fine."

Caitlyn looked at him tearfully. He didn't have to pretend to be strong for her. She could tell by the depth of his wounds that he wouldn't survive.

"Honestly, I didn't mean to hurt him. I don't know what came over me." Manny grabbed her. "I ... I ..."

He broke down and sobbed against her. Caitlyn stared at him in disbelief. What the hell was he crying for? She tried to push him away but it was too hard.

"Caitlyn?"

The voice sounded as though it came to her from a distance. She couldn't even tell who had spoken. Even as she tried to figure out who it was, she slid to ground again.

Chapter Eleven

Caitlyn awoke slowly, opening her eyes in confusion. Why was she sleeping on a sofa? And an unfamiliar one at that? Groggy, she sat up and winced as pain shot up her spine. With a groan she glanced around the room, her gaze passing over a set of dark wood bookshelves and a matching entertainment system before returning to the bookshelves. Someone had a very impressive collection of books.

“Where the hell am I?” Caitlyn asked out loud.

When no one answered, she turned around. The wall on her left was covered in dark curtains. Were there windows behind it? She was about to stand and go look when a door opened and slammed shut.

The sound of two voices, raised in anger, reached her ears. Caitlyn turned quickly to see who it was. As she did, the room blurred. Dizzy, her stomach rolling, she closed her eyes and clutched the arm of the sofa until the nausea passed. Opening her eyes once more, Caitlyn looked into the hallway as Aidan and his friend came through the door.

“See?” he snapped at Aidan. “I told you she was fine. You’re just lucky you didn’t die out there in the alley while I carried her in here.”

“Aidan!” Caitlyn started to rise. “Are you okay?”

“Stay there; it won’t help me if you pass out again,” the stranger shouted.

“But he needs a doctor.” Considering the numerous deep wounds he’d received, she was amazed Aidan could stand at all. Maybe they were mostly superficial, but it wasn’t worth the risk. “We need to get him to a hospital as quickly as possible.”

“It’s all right. I can take care of him.”

“No offense, but I don’t know you from Adam.”

In all the excitement she'd accepted his help without question. Now, Caitlyn realized she didn't know him or what his intentions were. He was obviously a friend or loyal employee of Aidan's, but he wasn't too bright if he thought Aidan didn't need medical attention.

She studied him suspiciously. He was tall, almost as tall as Aidan, but not as big and certainly a few years younger. He was just as handsome, with the same slightly tanned skin and bottomless green eyes. He wore his thick, dark hair short.

"I'm Aidan's younger brother, Adam." His lips twitched at the corners.

Caitlyn frowned. "What's so funny?"

"You don't know me from Adam?"

"Oh." Caitlyn shook her head. She'd forgotten she'd used that cliché. "His brother. Yes, I can see the resemblance."

Adam shifted his hold on Aidan and turned back to the hallway. She watched him struggle under Aidan's weight. Apparently Aidan couldn't stand on his own. He needed to go to the hospital.

"We've got to get him to a doctor," she called after them as they moved away.

"No," Adam said.

Caitlyn sighed and wobbled after them. "If you think he's too weak to move, maybe I could get one of my doctors to come here. Maybe Ted. He's been known to make house calls every once in a while." Caitlyn followed them into a large bedroom.

"No, he doesn't need a doctor. The knife had been bespelled. No doctor can fix the damage it did. I can take care of Aidan on my own. Can you sit here with him while I get a few things from the bathroom?"

Caitlyn nodded as Adam helped Aidan onto the bed. When Adam went into the bathroom, Caitlyn sat gingerly next to Aidan. The knife had been bespelled?

Aidan coughed and shuddered again, blood running down his sides, soaking the dark blue comforter.

Caitlyn frowned, changing her mind. "We need to call a doctor."

"No."

Caitlyn leaned over him angrily. She opened her mouth to order him to let her call an ambulance when an image formed in her mind. She saw the two of them arguing, Aidan leaning over her telling her to stop being so damn stubborn. Then he'd pinned her to the bed, his mouth covering hers before traveling down her body intimately, tasting every inch of her exposed flesh. Caitlyn fought back a moan as she closed her eyes. Instead of going away, the image became even more vivid, a scene of the two of them, limbs tangling in the sheets, getting hot and sweaty.

Was this a memory? It had to be, because it would be a sick fantasy since the man was dying. Forcing her eyes open, Caitlyn stared at his face. She didn't have time to try and remember anything else. If Adam wouldn't let her take him to a doctor, she'd need to call someone to come here.

There was no way she was going to lose him. Not when she just discovered he might be her husband. Her heart clenched at the thought of him dying. The pain was almost unbearable.

Get a grip, girl. Caitlyn shook her head. She focused on his wounds, gauging which were the worst. Deciding to work on Aidan's chest first, she bunched the bottom of his shirt in her hands and started to raise it, but stopped when he hissed out a curse. Caitlyn whispered an apology and leaned in to place a quick, gentle kiss on his lips.

This time, she grabbed the material where it was already ripped and tore it open the rest of the way, exposing his chest and abdomen. There were several slices and cuts that didn't look too bad. But at least four appeared deep enough to pierce vital organs. Caitlyn hoped she was wrong.

Aidan coughed again, more of his precious blood spilling on the bed. She hoped Manny hadn't punctured a lung with the knife. *Please let him be okay*, Caitlyn prayed.

"I'll be okay." Aidan's voice was low, yet steady.

"But you've lost so much blood." Would she ever get used to him answering her unspoken questions? She shook her head. "We've got to get you a transfusion. You need x-rays to see if any of your major organs have been injured."

"I'll be fine. Just let Adam help me."

As if on cue, Adam came out of the bathroom with a couple of damp washcloths and an armful of towels.

"Why don't you go out in the living room?" He smiled gently at Caitlyn. "I promise he'll be fine."

"What are you going to do?" Caitlyn frowned as Adam rolled up his sleeves. "We really need to get Aidan to the hospital. He needs blood, lots of blood. There's nothing you can do to help him."

"Caitlyn." Aidan sighed. "Leave us, please."

Panic consumed her. Did Aidan know they wouldn't make it to a hospital? If he wanted to be alone with his brother then she would grant him that request. She, for one, couldn't bear to sit and watch him take his last breath.

Shivering, Caitlyn rose and hurried out of the room, heedless of the tears pouring down her face. All this was her fault. If she hadn't come to see him immediately after talking to Manny, then Aidan wouldn't have been attacked. He wouldn't be lying on his bed dying. Sometimes she was stupid. She'd known something was bothering Manny.

Caitlyn paced around the living room for a few minutes until her muscles gave out. She stopped and grabbed onto the back of the sofa. So many things had happened in the past twenty-four hours. This was all too fantastic to be real, but it was. She'd used telepathy to communicate with two people. She remembered Aidan and knew they had been intimate in the past, but still couldn't remember being married to him.

Was he the Slasher? Had he tried to kill her? She doubted it. She couldn't imagine he was responsible for such a vicious attack.

Caitlyn collapsed on the sofa. She should call Ted, but had no clue where to find a phone. Her cell phone was in her purse, which no doubt lay discarded in the alley. And really, she didn't have the strength to argue with Ted right now, anyway.

Caitlyn.

She jumped, then glanced around the room. How long would it take to get used to this telepathy. Was Aidan was calling her back to his room? Maybe he wanted to say good-bye to her.

Slowly she rose, taking her time. Married or not, he'd once been very important to her. As she walked down the hall, her heart thundered in her ears. Caitlyn swallowed several times, trying to ease the pain and tightness in her throat. *Be strong for him*, she repeated over and over as she approached his bedroom door.

She turned the knob and pushed the door open. Was he already gone? Almost gone?

Nothing could have prepared her for what met her eyes as she looked across the darkened room.

Adam sat on a chair next to the bed with his arm extended to his brother. Aidan held Adam's hand while he sucked at his brother's wrist. She had no doubt he was drinking his brother's blood.

What the hell? A vampire? Her hand rose to her mouth to stifle a gasp. Adam sat, reclined in the chair. He was paler than a ghost and sat still, too still. Would Aidan kill his own brother to save himself?

Aidan's eyes, which focused on Adam's wrist, were like those of the monster in her dreams, cold, harsh, unblinking obsidian orbs. He licked a drop of blood off his lips before he released Adam's wrist.

"What?" Adam opened his eyes and looked at his brother with a frown. "Why did you stop?"

"I can take no more." Aidan squeezed his eyes closed. Caitlyn could tell he was in pain. She took an involuntary step forward but stopped as Adam spoke.

"You must. You need blood."

"I need you more than I need to feed. Why don't you go see if you can find someone willing? I fear I've taken too much from you."

"The club is open; I can go down and feed anytime. But I'm not about to leave you alone and vulnerable. Damn it! Why did you have to block me when you were being attacked?"

"I was trying to block Caitlyn. Blocking you was just a side benefit."

Aidan winced as he shifted his position on the bed. Suddenly, his nostrils flared and his head turned toward her. As his eyes focused on her she knew a moment of pure terror.

She shook her head. How was he going to explain this? Caitlyn rubbed her eyes and then looked at him again. Nothing had changed. Aidan stared at her curiously while Adam shoved his bloody wrist in Aidan's face.

"You're awfully funny for a man so close to death. Good thing you're a vampire; otherwise, you'd be dead," Adam said.

Caitlyn must have made some kind of sound because Adam turned to face her. The fierceness in his eyes startled her. Her heart pounded so fast she was afraid it would explode. Breathing became a painful chore and her chest tightened until she feared she might pass out. Again.

Slowly, she backed up, putting one foot behind the other. Caitlyn watched Aidan's gaze narrow as he licked his lips again.

"I ..." Caitlyn opened and closed her mouth, trying to think of what to say to get herself out of here.

Adam rose, reaching for her. What would they do to her now that she knew their secret? Caitlyn panicked and turned to flee. Lightheaded, she grabbed onto the door. Damn it, she'd never fainted in her life, and now she was going for a new world record. Fighting the darkness, she yanked the door open and stumbled into the hallway.

"Caitlyn." Adam grabbed her shoulder.

Oh, shit, she thought as he caught her. Then everything went black again.

* * * * *

The room was dark when Caitlyn awoke. Not only did her bed feel different, but her room smelled funny. Instead of the normal scent of her incense, the room smelled of lavender. Had she fallen asleep with a candle burning?

Lifting herself up on her elbows, Caitlyn pushed a lock of thick hair out of her eyes and found herself face to face with Aidan. She screamed, scrambling back on the bed until she slammed into the wall.

"Good, you're awake."

"God, you scared me." Caitlyn blinked, panting, her heart racing. She banged on her chest to make sure her heart kept beating. Where was she and why was she in Aidan's bed?

Remembering the dream, she glanced down at the comforter, searching for even the slightest trace of blood. The comforter was spotless. The whole incident must have been a figment of her imagination.

“What happened? Why am I in your bed?”

“Are you okay?”

Aidan put his hands on the arm of the chair and rose slowly.

“I think so.”

Frowning, Caitlyn glanced around the room. Even though the lighting was dim, she could easily see the details in his bedroom. The walls were bare and painted a deep, dark blue, matching his bedding. Glancing up, Caitlyn blinked in surprise. He’d painted the night sky on the ceiling. With the addition of quiet ocean sounds, Caitlyn felt as if she were at the beach, relaxing on a beautiful night.

“What’s your name?” Aidan’s voice was gruff with some kind of emotion she couldn’t identify.

Caitlyn glanced up, trying to read him. He probably hoped she didn’t remember seeing anything earlier. She could play dumb if it would save her life. Oh, God. Had he bitten her already?

Hand flying to her neck, Caitlyn felt for a fresh wound and sighed in relief when she didn’t find one. Okay, he hadn’t bitten her, but what about ...?

Quickly, she lifted the comforter and a wave of relief washed over her once again, this time because she wasn’t naked. Yet.

“What the hell am I doing in your bed?”

“Don’t you remember?”

Aidan sat on the edge of the bed. Gently, he brushed several loose strands of hair off her cheek. The look of concern on his face seemed genuine enough, but now Caitlyn knew beyond a shadow of doubt she wasn’t his wife, and the intimacy made her nervous. Granted, she remembered being intimate with him, she wanted to be intimate with him again, and again and again, but she couldn’t have been married to him. Impossible. No way could she be married to him when she wasn’t a vampire.

“I’m not sure how or why I’m in your bed. I know I came here to question you. I guess I passed out and had a weird dream.”

“Caitlyn, do you really think you imagined what happened in the alley this afternoon? Do you really think your imagination could have done this to me?”

Aidan grabbed the bottom of his T-shirt and pulled it off in one quick, fluid motion.

Caitlyn stared, mouth dropping open. Raw, red marks stretched across his broad chest and abdomen. Tears sprang to her eyes as she reached involuntarily toward him. Her fingers traced one line crossing dangerously near his heart.

No dream. Manny had attacked him. The things in the alley had been real, too. Quickly, her gaze rose to his face, a vivid image of him feasting on Adam's blood flashing before her eyes. He was a vampire! And now she knew his secret.

Her hands rose to her neck again as disappointment filled Aidan's eyes, the corners of his mouth turning down. What in the world did he have to be disappointed about?

"I didn't bite you," he growled. "Yet."

"Yet," she repeated.

"Not that it would matter if I bit you or not."

"I don't understand," she said.

"No, I don't suppose you do." Sighing heavily, Aidan crossed his arms. He studied her face before adding, "Relax, I'm not going to bite you."

"Why not?"

"You're too weak to bite. I like my women willing and able," he said with a wink.

His eyes deepened to pools of a mesmerizing green, threatening to pull her into their depths, drowning her. Caitlyn tried to turn her thoughts away from Aidan and the pleasure his eyes promised her.

"What happened? Why am I in your bed?"

"You fainted." He grinned, flashing those straight white teeth again. She had to stop looking for fangs.

"How long was I out?"

"A few hours. It's close to nine o'clock. Are you hungry? If you want, I can have something brought up."

"What about Manny? What happened to him and the termuvins?" Caitlyn pulled her knees up to her chest, wrapping her arms around them, as images of the creatures sprang to mind. "I know I'm not dreaming. At least not this time."

Even though the last was said quietly, Aidan picked up on it right away. "What do you mean this time?"

"I thought they were just dreams," Caitlyn said more to herself than to Aidan.

"Tell me about these dreams," Aidan demanded.

"I just dream they are trying to kill me."

"I think they are minions of the Slasher. Only where they succeeded with those other women, and the rapist, they haven't yet with you."

"What exactly are termuvins?"

"Termuvins, or *ventouse de la vie*, are demons that suck the life out of every living thing they touch. We thought we got rid of most of the ones on the East Coast. We knew there were some renegades in the mountains, but we didn't know there were any near a populated area."

Caitlyn looked at him helplessly. It all seemed like a strange dream. Yet she had seen them, *felt* them. Felt the way they sucked the energy and life out of her body. But if they were real, why didn't anyone know about them? Caitlyn couldn't remember ever hearing a news report about monsters that attacked the city at night, draining people of their energy.

"They usually work in tandem with other creatures. They team up to capture the victims, and then after the termuvins take what they need, their partners move in for the leftovers."

Caitlyn shivered. She had a million questions, and no idea where to start.

"You were near death a few hours ago. How are you sitting here almost completely healed?"

"I have very good regenerating and healing abilities."

"How is that possible? Is it because you're already dead?"

"Dead!" Aidan grabbed her hand, pressing it against his chest. "Do you feel this? Could a dead man's heart beat? Would his skin burn like fire for you? Could a dead man have a reaction like this?" He lowered her hand so she could feel the heat of his desire burning her through his pants.

Pulling away, Caitlyn rubbed her tingling palm against her leg. Damn, even knowing he was a vampire didn't dampen her desire. "Okay, so you're not dead. But what are you? You aren't human. I saw what you did to Adam. He's not human either, is he?"

"No, I'm not human, and neither is Adam. I'm what you would call a vampire, although I am nothing like the monsters human imaginations conjure up to display on television screens around the world. I do not hunt or lure humans into my cave and drink their blood. I don't *turn* humans into vampires. Not even the ones who have begged for the honor.

"If I need blood, I simply take what I need and then send the person on their way with no memory of what happened. No one is hurt and I don't ever kill innocent people. Some of the things you've heard about vampires are true, but not all."

It was the innocent part that gave her pause. Why the qualification? Did that mean he *did* kill people, but only the wicked? *Of course. He's a vampire; it's his nature to kill*, Caitlyn told herself. But how did he decide who deserved to die? And why did he think he had that power? Didn't that make him a murderer?

"I have killed people," Aidan admitted, apparently reading her thoughts. "More people than I care to admit, but I've also lived a very long time. When members of my race turn evil, I'm one of the few who are called in to stop them."

"I don't understand." Caitlyn rubbed the back of her neck. She could feel one of her headaches starting.

"When a vamp turns evil he will prey on humans until we catch him and stop him."

“Are you telling me the Slasher is a vampire who’s turned evil and you are trying to stop him?”

“Yes.”

“But all vampires are evil.”

“No, we’re not,” Aidan growled.

Caitlyn climbed out of bed so she could pace back and forth. The cobwebs cleared slowly as she digested the information. It all made sense in a strange sort of way. The people in the café were real vampires and witches. Yet no one had hurt her. Maybe they really were nothing like movies and television portrayed them to be?

Caitlyn no longer believed Aidan had tried to kill her, but she didn’t believe they were married.

“Well, at least I’ve learned one thing from all of this.”

“Oh, and what is that?” Aidan asked, lifting a questioning brow.

“I’m not your wife.”

Chapter Twelve

“What do you mean, you’re not my wife?”

“If I was your wife, I’m pretty sure I’d be a vampire.”

Caitlyn smiled, waiting for her words to sink in. The relief that flooded through her at the realization didn’t surprise her. What did was the slight disappointment that stung her heart. She shrugged it off. What woman wouldn’t want a man like him to call her own? Even if he was a vampire.

“What are you trying to say?”

“I’m not a vampire, Aidan. I don’t drink blood.”

“Yes, you are a vampire.” Aidan frowned. “What I can’t figure out is how you can deny it when you need to feed. How have you been feeding all this time?”

“I’m not a vampire, Aidan.”

“Yes, you are.”

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, but I don’t drink blood.”

Aidan stepped toward her, his hands clenched at his side. Pushing back against the wall, Caitlyn held up a trembling hand to stop him.

“I don’t drink blood. Aren’t you listening to me?”

“You must, otherwise you’d be dead by now.” He leaned in close.

“I’m not a vampire.”

Aidan shook his head, “You are Caitlyn Devlin, my wife. You have to be.”

“I do remember you, Aidan. I’ve had two flashes of memory. I know we have a history together. But I am *not* a vampire.”

Aidan cupped her face in his hands. "I don't know what happened, or why you don't need blood, but you are mine," he whispered, brushing his lips against hers.

Oh, hell. Caitlyn shivered, heat rushing through her as she relished the feel of his hands on her. *Kiss him or push him away. Just don't stand here like a pile of mush.*

"I ..." She hesitated, pulling back. How many times did she need to repeat herself? "I don't remember being married to you. I also know I don't drink blood and I don't have fangs."

"No." Aidan growled. He moved closer, pinning her again. "You are my wife. You are a vampire."

He wasn't taking this very well. Well, if she was going to be honest, she did feel a tinge of regret. What would it feel like to have his mouth on her neck, his lips and teeth moving over her flesh as he bit her and tasted her blood?

She opened her eyes and met Aidan's searching gaze. What did he see? Could he feel her fear and fascination? Did he know that even though she dreaded it, she wanted him to bite her?

Pine and cinnamon swamped her senses. Caitlyn groaned, trying not to breathe in his delicious scent. She couldn't think when he was this close to her. He confused her, made her feel weak and vulnerable, and oh, so desirable. Caitlyn closed her eyes and swallowed hard. Was he going to bite her? Did she care?

Aidan grabbed her and pulled her against him, wrapping one hand around her neck and lowering his mouth to hers.

"Don't do this, Aidan," she said, twisting her head to the side so his mouth missed her lips and landed on her neck. Undeterred, he blazed a path up to her ear with his tongue.

"Caitlyn," he whispered.

She stilled. His voice in her ears, his hands on her body -- both were making her weak. She didn't want to resist him. She wanted to let him do what he wanted, what she wanted. Was he using hypnosis on her again?

"No," she protested weakly.

"Yes," he whispered, brushing his lips against hers.

Heat flooded her stomach, spreading throughout her body, setting all her nerves on fire. She wanted him to kiss her. Again, and again, and again. Caitlyn bit her trembling lip as his breath fanned across her mouth, teasing her, the touch light as a feather.

Then his mouth was on hers as he kissed her tenderly, his lips moving over hers in a slow caress. Caitlyn surrendered to the kiss, matching his demands and giving her own. She sank her hands into his thick black hair and pulled him closer, nibbling on his lip.

Her heart raced, thumping loudly in her chest. She could feel the urgency in him growing, matching the wild rush of sensations flooding her body. Caitlyn wanted his hands on her. She wanted him to follow his hands with his mouth.

Arching her back, she pressed her straining breasts to his chest and ground her hips against him. Aidan's growl sent a shiver up her spine.

"Let me love you," he said.

Aidan slid his hands down her sides and under her shirt, caressing her stomach before moving higher to cup her breasts. Sighing, she arched her back again as his lips moved down her throat, nuzzling her sensitive flesh.

Deftly, he undid the clasp on her bra and pushed it aside. Caitlyn moaned as his hands moved over her, caressing her with skillful fingers. He teased her nipples, drawing sounds of pleasure from deep in her throat.

Caitlyn closed her eyes, giving in to the sensations. He knew her body intimately, knew exactly how to please her. She wasn't a fool; she knew they'd made love before, and very well, judging by what he was doing now. Why not give in to it?

She reached down, pulled off the rest of her clothes, and tossed them aside. Once she finished Aidan resumed his caresses. He licked his way down to her navel and dipped his tongue inside. Caitlyn shivered, and spread her legs as he moved to kneel in between them.

Aidan cupped her heat with his hand, his thumb brushing against her folds. "Mmmm, feels like you're ready for me."

"Yes." She sighed.

He rubbed his thumb against her clit. Caitlyn moaned and arched into his touch.

"Definitely ready," he murmured before replacing his thumb with his mouth.

Aidan slid one finger into her welcoming dampness as he sucked her clit between his lips. Caitlyn hissed, digging her fingers into the sheets as he slid his finger in deeper. Slowly he withdrew it, then inserted two deep inside her.

A delicious pressure built between her thighs as Aidan continued to move his fingers in and out. Caitlyn moved under him, lifting her hips to meet each thrust.

"I need you in me." She panted as she moved her head from side to side. She dug her fingers even tighter in the sheet as tiny tremors rippled across her thighs and stomach.

"Mhmm," he murmured against her clit.

Caitlyn gasped and arched her back as tremors raced up and down her body. When Aidan nibbled on her sensitive nub, she shrieked, spasming as her orgasm rocked through her body.

Quickly, Aidan rose over her and impaled her with his long hard length. Caitlyn cried out and grabbed onto Aidan's shoulders. He pulled back and rammed into her again and again, until the pleasure and tension built until she couldn't breathe.

"My. God." She gasped and writhed beneath him.

"My love, my heart," he murmured against her throat.

His teeth grazed along the side of her neck, sending a shiver down her spine. Caitlyn screamed out his name as she shattered into a million pieces.

As she gasped for air, he moaned against her neck, and she felt his teeth scrape against the skin covering her carotid, snapping her out of the sensual haze he'd wrapped her in. Once before she'd felt teeth on her neck. Caitlyn remembered the sharp pressure and pain as long fangs sank deep into her neck.

"No!" Caitlyn pushed against Aidan with all her strength. Caught by surprise, he released her and sat back on the bed.

"What's wrong?"

Ignoring him, Caitlyn wiped her palm across her neck. The memory had been so real, so vivid she was surprised she wasn't actually bleeding. She pulled her hand away and glanced down at it, wondering why she could still feel the bite.

"Caitlyn? What's wrong?" Aidan asked again, trying to take her in his arms.

"I feel as if I've been bitten." Caitlyn rubbed her hand against her tingling neck, trying to ease the feel of a bite he hadn't given her.

"I said I wouldn't bite you," Aidan growled fiercely.

"But I felt it."

"Go look in the mirror. I didn't bite you. There's no wound," he said between clenched teeth.

Caitlyn eyed him carefully before getting up and stepping over to a large mirror hanging above his dresser. She tilted her head to the side, examining her reflection. Only smooth skin met her searching gaze. After a moment, she turned, leaning against the dresser.

It felt so real, how could it not be? *Oh no*, she thought in sudden panic. Another memory? Aidan and the emotions he aroused in her must be causing her to remember.

"I did not bite you," he repeated harshly.

"I can see that," she said and sighed, tracing the outline of her scar with her index finger.

"Then what the hell is going on?"

Groaning, Caitlyn rubbed her forehead as a dull ache started behind her eyes. "The Slasher is a vampire."

"I know. Why do you think I'm so worried about you?"

"No," Caitlyn shouted, caught herself, and stopped. She took a deep breath and tried again. "No. I am telling you that I remember the Slasher biting me on the neck and drinking my blood."

Aidan blinked at her before asking hoarsely, "You can remember? What else can you remember?"

“Shit.” Caitlyn moaned, burying her head in her hands as she shivered. She didn’t want to remember anymore. It was bad enough learning vampires existed, but now that she thought about it, really *thought* about it, she realized she was well on her way to becoming one. Her strong sensitivity to the sun, her pale skin, the way she liked her steak so rare it could moo -- those were all warning signs, she was sure of it.

Caitlyn groaned and turned away from Aidan. How many more bites did she need before she turned? One more? Two? Wasn’t it three bites and then you turned? Or was that another movie myth?

Did she remember anything else? Caitlyn winced as her headache exploded in full force. *Stupid girl*, she chastised herself. She knew they grew stronger the more she tried to remember.

He came up behind her and draped something over her shoulders. Caitlyn looked in the mirror and saw he’d pulled on his pants. She sighed. She was making a mess of everything.

“Another headache?” Aidan asked softly.

When she didn’t answer, he slid his hands up under her hair and massaged her scalp. His fingers were like heaven, and soon the pounding lessened to a dull ache.

Aidan shifted his focus to the back of her neck, where he soothed her tight, aching muscles. Slowly, one by one, her muscles relaxed and the pain in her head faded until she sighed in relief.

“You’ve got wonderful fingers,” she purred.

He chuckled softly. “Thanks. I’m glad you enjoy my touch.”

Caitlyn pushed away from him as if he’d burned her. Hell, he might as well have. She couldn’t allow him to make love to her again until she remembered how things really were between them.

She pulled on her clothes while she decided how to focus on the problems at hand. She now knew she wasn’t Aidan’s wife, but they had been -- were lovers.

Caitlyn also knew she was close to becoming a vampire, but not by how much. Since the Slasher was a vampire, Aidan would have to stay on the list of suspects. Adam, and countless other would have to be added, but non-vampires could be eliminated.

Deep inside, she didn’t think Aidan was the Slasher. The more time she spent with him, the less she believed he’d tried to kill her. He’d had plenty of opportunities, yet here she stood, still alive and unharmed.

“I should leave.” She turned to the door, but hesitated. Being with Aidan triggered memories. So far, she’d remembered a few different times from the past. If she stayed, she might regain all of her lost memories. She turned back.

“I’m hungry.”

Aidan studied her for a moment before giving her another one of his devastating smiles. Caitlyn wondered how he could make everything remind her of sex.

"What would you like?" his smile turned suggestive, leaving no doubt in her mind what he wanted her to ask for. Would he keep his promise not to bite her? Or would she be begging him to before the night was over?

"Food." She wanted to slap herself for her lustful imaginings. "Whatever's the easiest. I don't want your chef to go to any trouble."

"It's no trouble. At this hour, he won't be too busy. I'll have him make you tonight's special."

"Thanks."

Caitlyn watched him walk out of the bedroom and down the hall. She could hear him speak in a hushed voice. Another of the benefits of becoming a vampire? Her senses seemed to grow stronger every day.

"Your food will be ready soon," Aidan said, walking back in. He crossed over to where he'd tossed his shirt, picked it up, and pulled it on.

"What's the matter?" he asked, crossing the room and sitting on the bed. "Do you need some more rest? This has been hard for you."

"What other abilities do you have? Can you turn into a wolf or maybe fog?" Caitlyn stiffened, suddenly worried. "Are you reading my mind again?"

"Yes." Aidan winked. "And seeing what you imagine."

"God." Caitlyn groaned, her face heating. How mortifying. Nothing would be a secret around him.

She'd have to watch herself around him. She had no intention of acting on any of her thoughts and desires, so it would be better not to think about it at all. Unless there was a way to keep him out of her head.

"You do have the power to keep me out of your mind."

Caitlyn looked up at him quickly. She did? Well, hell, why hadn't he said so sooner?

Aidan winced and cleared his throat. He opened his mouth as if to say something, then closed it.

"I don't suppose you're going to tell me how I can do that, are you?"

Aidan shook his head after a minute of silence. "No. I enjoy the way you think, and the things that you imagine the two of us doing together." He grinned at her.

A knock sounded at the door, saving him from further interrogation.

"Stay here and rest. I'll be right back."

Aidan left the room, pulling the door partially closed. Caitlyn heard the main door open and close. When the sound of voices reached her ears, she recognized Adam's voice. Hoping they would talk for a few minutes, Caitlyn decided to snoop around Aidan's room. It

wouldn't take long for him to thank Adam and bring the food, so she would have to be quick.

Starting with the closet, she opened the door and peered inside cautiously. Suits in assorted shades from black to grays to blues hung from a wooden rod that ran the length of his closet.

Caitlyn pushed aside the suits to see if he hid anything behind them. She wasn't sure what she was looking for, but she thought it was safer to be thorough. Not only was there nothing behind his clothes, but feeling along the wall didn't reveal any secret openings, either.

Growling in frustration, Caitlyn looked up at the shelf. Boxes sat lined up in a neat row, from one end to the other. She doubted there would be enough time to search them, so she turned to his dresser instead. Opening drawers quickly, she rifled through his undergarments, socks, and pants. She was once again disappointed to find only clothes.

The voices grew louder and she realized Adam wasn't the only one who'd come upstairs. There were several voices she didn't recognize.

Hoping they'd keep Aidan busy a little longer, she turned to the second closet. As her hand wrapped around the doorknob, an eerie sensation crept up her spine, chasing shivers throughout her body. She released the knob and rubbed her hands up and down her chilled arms.

Gathering her courage, Caitlyn grabbed the knob again and turned it quickly. The door swung open easily, perfumed air wafting across her face. Caitlyn sneezed, then turned guiltily, to look around the room.

She could still hear Aidan talking to someone in the other room, so she returned her attention to the closet. The sweet jasmine scent lingered, stirring something in her mind. The memory hovered on the edge of her consciousness, just out of reach. After a minute, she stopped struggling to remember and pulled the door open wider.

"Oh, man." Caitlyn sighed and closed her eyes. The closet was full of women's clothes. Were they hers, or did they belong to another woman? Maybe one that was a vampire like Aidan.

Had Aidan saved everything, hoping she'd return? He said he'd never believed she was dead.

Beneath the perfume, the closet and its contents smelled freshly laundered. The boxes on the shelf looked as if they'd only been placed there today. Hard to imagine the stuff had been sitting since last year.

Caitlyn ran a fingertip across the top of a box and wasn't surprised to see her finger come away clean. Only an obsessive man could continue to wash his loved one's clothes months after she'd died. *Or a man who'd truly loved his wife.*

A small, flat white box on the right caught her attention because it looked as if it had fallen to the side. She reached up and pulled it off the shelf.

Should I open it or not? Caitlyn stared at the box. Chewing on her lower lip, she reminded herself that he'd given her permission to look through the stuff, although she was sure he hadn't meant for her to search his belongings as well. Caitlyn giggled, recalling the white boxers with neon yellow happy faces.

With another sigh, she decided she'd procrastinated enough, and lifted the lid. An assorted mix of items lay inside. There was a booklet from a play, tickets from a few movies, and some dried rose petals. Pushing those items aside, she dug deeper until she found something sparkly. Pulling it out, Caitlyn stared.

It was a gold cross covered with red stones. Rubies? She traced the delicate edges of the charm. Caitlyn wrapped the thin gold chain around her hand and studied the cross. What was it doing in a box of old memories? Was it a gift from someone?

Caitlyn stepped back and held it up to the light, watching the way it sparkled. The tickling sensation the perfume had caused earlier started again.

"Curious."

Caitlyn fisted the cross in her hand, and closed her eyes. The memory skirted round and round as she tried to grasp it.

Ignoring the pangs of pain signaling another one of her headaches, she pictured the cross in her mind's eye.

"Remember," she whispered. "Remember."

Slowly, in her mind, Caitlyn widened her view around the cross until she could see party decorations in the background. Red and blue balloons were tied to the four ends of a table that held a large cake decorated to read "Sweet Sixteen."

"Momma?" she whispered.

The cross grew warm in her hand as the memory rushed at her like a wave crashing on the shore. Her parents had given her the cross for her sixteenth birthday. If it was in the closet with the rest of the clothes, then most likely it all belonged to her.

Caitlyn slid the cross around her neck and smiled at the feeling of peace that welcomed her. Opening her eyes, she looked at the clothes with a more discerning eye. At least she had good taste. Caitlyn smiled, counting the pairs of dark jeans that hung in a row.

When she heard Aidan shout, Caitlyn realized he'd been gone too long to get only food. Tucking the necklace under her shirt, she replaced the box, and closed the closet door.

Until she figured out why she'd been lovers with the man and remained human, she couldn't put all her trust in him. So far, he'd been telling the truth about her belonging to him, but he claimed she was a vampire and she wasn't. Yet.

Aidan shouted again. Curious, Caitlyn crept down the hall to see what was going on. Had there been a problem in the club?

Chapter Thirteen

“What is going on?” she demanded when she saw Adam and Aidan arguing. Adam was using his body to block the door.

“Adam brought up your food. It’s probably cold now. Why don’t you take it into the kitchen and heat it up?” Aidan crooked his head to the right, gesturing toward the room across the hall.

“Why are you arguing?”

“Later.” He met her gaze and held it.

“Later?” she repeated in disbelief. Was he dismissing her?

Aidan chuckled and handed her a tray of food. “Go heat this up and eat. You’ll need your strength for later.”

“What?” Caitlyn shouted, grabbing the tray with enough force to make Aidan stumble. She frowned and suggested in a lower voice, “I think you’re the one who needs to eat and rest.”

“Are you offering?” Aidan asked with a gleam in his eyes.

All the blood drained from her face as she stared at him in horror. She’d forgotten he didn’t *feed* like she did.

Aidan laughed and leaned down to kiss her cheek. Then he put his hand on her lower back and pushed her toward the kitchen. “I was just teasing, love. Eat. I’ll be right back.”

“Where are you going?” she asked.

“I need to check on the club. At this rate, I’ll go out of business before they catch the Slasher.”

“Okay. But when you get back, I have questions you need to answer.”

She waited until he nodded, then turned and walked into the kitchen. She paused and looked back when she heard the men start arguing again.

"Where are you going?"

"Downstairs to make sure everything is all right."

"Aidan, I know you have trouble letting people help you, but I'm your brother. If you can't trust me, who can you trust?"

Aidan sighed and tried to squeeze past him. "I do trust you; I just like to see things for myself."

Adam barred the doorway, challenge blazing in his eyes. He met Aidan's gaze unflinchingly. Caitlyn admired Adam's courage. She doubted many men would dare to stand up to Aidan, even at half health. Then again, since they were both vampires, perhaps that evened the score.

Just when she was beginning to wonder if either one would budge, Aidan backed down with a sigh.

"Okay, okay. I do trust you. I won't go down."

"Thank you."

Adam closed the door and pushed Aidan toward the living room. He looked up and saw Caitlyn. She felt uneasy at his curious glance. When his eyes moved to her neck, she decided to scam before he got the urge to snack on her.

A tingling in her spine and shoulders warned her he was behind her. Ignoring him, she lifted the lid of the tray. The aroma of a rare steak, baked potato, and a freshly tossed salad with French dressing made her stomach growl. Odd fare for a bar, but then again, perhaps vampires liked a hearty meal when they were out partying.

Caitlyn looked around the little kitchen. A tiny table sat in the middle of the room. On her right a large black fridge dominated the room. She wondered if he stashed blood there, then realized that was silly since he'd had to drink Adam's earlier.

The tingling spread to her neck and Caitlyn wondered if Adam had fed while he'd been in the club.

She removed the salad, then picked up the tray and walked past the fridge to a small black microwave. Were all vampires into black? She opened the door, put the steak and potato inside the microwave and set the timer for a few minutes.

"You're gonna burn that."

"I doubt it; the steak was so bloody it could have walked off the plate." Caitlyn froze, blushing. She liked her steaks super rare, but she'd be damned if she let him know that. He'd insist it was proof she was like him.

Caitlyn turned the other way and caught Adam staring at her, again. Deciding she'd had enough, she glared at him. "What?"

“What?” Aidan echoed in confusion, as he entered the room.

She ignored him, watching Adam expectantly. “Well?”

“What?” Aidan repeated.

“I want to know why Adam keeps looking at me like that.”

“Like what?” Aidan frowned.

“Like I’m lunch.”

“Adam?” Aidan crossed his arms as he turned toward his brother.

“I was not.”

“You were staring at my neck. Blatantly staring.”

“Oh, well.” He paused, cleared his throat and nodded toward the bedroom. “I was just wondering. You know. If you ... you know ... when you were in there.”

A tense silence filled the room as Aidan leaned closer to Adam. “What did you just ask her?”

“I was looking for a bite mark.”

“Why?” Aidan frowned.

“You usually feed when you make love.”

“So?”

“You like to mark your women.”

“Get to the point, Adam!”

Adam rolled his eyes. “Did you two do the wild thing or not?”

“No, we did not!” Caitlyn shouted, blushing furiously. She glared first at Adam, then at Aidan, before turning her back on both men to watch the meat spin in the microwave.

“What’s wrong with you?”

Aidan’s low-voiced question made her smile. Good, let him tear into his brother. That question went beyond rude. It embarrassed her and made her think about doing something that she shouldn’t do right now.

“You shouldn’t mention other women in front of my wife. That was in the past.”

“Come on, Aidan. I’m sure she knew you’d been around.”

She sneaked a peek at them out of the corner of her eye. How could they stand there discussing Aidan’s sex life as if she wasn’t in the room? With a sigh Caitlyn let her gaze travel down Aidan’s body and back up. Caitlyn dragged her gaze away from the sight of his jeans where they molded to the sexy curve of his rear. Of course he’d have had many women.

The microwave dinged and the light went out. Caitlyn opened the door and pulled out her meal, listening to the men as she crossed the small space to the table.

“Well, I don’t know why you haven’t boffed her yet.” Adam turned and smirked at Caitlyn. “I mean, what are you waiting for? I’ve seen the way she looks at you.”

Caitlyn set her dinner on the table with a thud, juice from the meat spilling onto the tabletop.

"I guess all men act like boys, no matter their species," she said, eyeing the potato. She was really hungry, but it might be worth losing her dinner to see Adam wear it.

"She's my wife. You will treat her with respect."

Caitlyn looked up in time to see Aidan poke Adam in the chest.

Adam sighed. "Damn, you're no fun. Is this what marriage does? Make you old and cranky?"

"I am not old!" Aidan growled and grabbed his brother by the collar. Caitlyn gasped as he lifted Adam up and slammed him into the wall. He held him there, pinning him with a steely glare.

What was Aidan doing? Would he kill his brother for making a rude comment? Okay, several. But he was too weak to fool around like this. Caitlyn took a step forward, reaching for him.

"Okay," Adam choked out. "You aren't old."

Aidan released his brother, and then staggered into him.

"What the hell?" Adam grabbed onto him, eyes wide with surprise.

Caitlyn started toward them, ramming her knee into the leg of the table. She cursed and rubbed her knee as she limped the rest of the short distance to Aidan.

"Are you okay?" Caitlyn asked, holding her palm to his forehead. "You're hot, and sweaty."

"I'm a little weak from blood loss," Aidan answered quietly. "Even though I almost drained Adam, I still didn't get enough to help me finish healing."

"I don't understand. You seemed fine a few minutes ago."

"He was maintaining a front." Adam sighed and started to drag Aidan back to his bedroom. "I'll just put him to bed and give him more blood. He should be back to normal in the morning."

"But ... wait a minute. If he almost drained you earlier, then why are you fine and he's not?"

"I fed while you two were closeted, alone, in the bedroom."

"Knock it off, Adam." Aidan dug his heels into the carpet.

"I'm sorry; you're weak and I shouldn't have egged you on. I was hoping you'd make her remember you so we can get to the Slasher and stop him."

"Even if we had slept together it wouldn't be any of your damn business," Aidan said.

"Fine. Meanwhile, you need to feed." Adam tilted his head toward Caitlyn. "So unless Caitlyn is willing to offer her blood, I guess I'll have to do it."

"I am not going to take your blood again. Not even if you did replenish it," Aidan argued. "It's too soon."

"Hell, I don't care, Aidan. I'd give my life for you. Take it if you need it."

"I'd give my life for you, too. I will not take any more blood from you tonight."

Caitlyn chewed nervously on her lip. If he didn't take Adam's blood, then how was he going to feed? Could he go down to the club and find someone to volunteer?

"You aren't ..." Caitlyn stepped back and blocked the hallway. "You aren't going to go find a woman to feed on, are you?"

Aidan laughed before answering. "I do prefer women to men."

"But ... Why?"

Aidan stared at her, a twinkle in his mesmerizing eyes. "That should be obvious."

"Aidan," she growled, frustration getting the better of her.

He held her gaze and said softly, "I need blood to live. Unless you're offering, I need to find someone who is willing."

Caitlyn barely registered the fact that Adam had released his grip on Aidan and was squeezing past her. Aidan reached for her, one hand caressing her cheek while he leaned closer. Heat flooded her as she leaned toward him.

"Me?" she asked breathlessly. "But you said you didn't want me."

"No, I said I wouldn't turn you. I admitted wanting you." As he spoke, his hand dropped to her neck, still caressing her lightly.

"I can go out there and find a woman more than willing to share her blood with me." Aidan brushed his lips over hers once. "But I'd much rather have yours."

"How much blood? Do you have to ... bite me?" *Damn, what a stupid question.* How else would he take her blood?

"I only need a little blood to survive, but right now I need more to heal."

"I don't want to become a vampire." She cringed at the whiny tone in her voice.

"You already are a vampire." Aidan sighed when she crossed her arms. "All right, I won't argue with you. But I do need blood. If you aren't offering, then get out of my way."

"Well." Caitlyn paused. Did she really want to let him drink her blood? What if it was the last step to turning her into one?

"It's okay, Caitlyn. I'll find someone else."

Remembering his kisses and the feel of his mouth on her neck, the way he set her body on fire with a look and how she melted under his touch, made her knees grow weak. Did she want to let him be that intimate with another woman?

Jealousy raced through her as he stepped past her toward the door. Suddenly, he stopped and swayed, leaning against the wall. Caitlyn took a step toward him. He couldn't go downstairs. He was too weak to lure a woman back up here.

Just the thought of another woman in his bed made her feel ill. Caitlyn didn't want anyone else to have him. It didn't matter if it turned her into vampire. She wanted him. Wanted him with all her heart, and well, if she turned into a vampire, it couldn't be much worse than what she already was.

"Aidan?" Caitlyn called, taking the few remaining steps to his side.

"Caitlyn?"

"I can't let you go down there."

"Why not?" Aidan asked.

"I don't want you to."

Aidan turned around, a hopeful expression softening his pained features. "Does that mean you'll give me your blood?"

Caitlyn nodded without hesitation. She slid her arm through his, wrapping it around his waist as she led him back to his room. "I need you to help me catch the Slasher."

Aidan turned his face so his breath brushed her cheek. "And here I was beginning to think you cared."

"I apologize for being rude and for whatever else I've done. I know you were telling me the truth about a lot of stuff and I didn't believe you."

"Do you finally believe me?"

"Yes and no," she answered softly, entering the bedroom. "I do know that we knew each other, but I can't imagine you marrying me without turning me into a vampire."

"We are married and you are a vampire." He laughed before she could argue and added, "I know, I know. You aren't a vampire. I really wish you had your memory back. I'm worried about your safety. I think the Slasher influenced Manny to come after me tonight."

"But the Slasher isn't after you. He attacks women."

"I know." Aidan sighed. "Maybe he thinks that once I'm out of the way he can get to you? He pulled out the big guns tonight. They will report back to their boss and tell him you live. He'll come after you even harder next time." Aidan took her hand and pulled her up against him. "That's why I want you here. I think you should move back in with me."

"No!" she protested automatically.

"Yes." Aidan lowered his mouth to hers. He kissed her softly, his lips burning with a passion her body answered hungrily.

"No," she repeated breathlessly.

He was addictive. Each time he touched her she craved him more than before. Would she ever get enough of him?

"I need your help. I really want to catch this guy. I need to know if he's the man who did this to me," Caitlyn said softly.

“Did what to you?” Aidan asked, staring into her eyes with such ferocity that she would have fled if he didn’t have a hold on her.

Now what? Should she admit that she thought she was turning into a vampire?

Chapter Fourteen

Aidan's gaze challenged her. Caitlyn flushed deeply, her face burning. She clamped her mouth shut. *Damn it.* She hadn't meant to say that. The words had slipped out the same way she'd accidentally mentioned her dreams of termuvins. When would she learn to keep her mouth shut?

"Just forget I said anything. I don't want to talk about it. Just take my blood and get it over with."

"You don't know what you're asking me to do."

"Yes, I do," Caitlyn countered. She knew exactly what she was doing. But saving him was more important than her remaining human.

"You aren't fully aware of the repercussions of this."

"What do you mean? Why don't you fill me in?"

"Have a seat."

"No, thanks. I'd rather stand. So tell me, what are these repercussions you need to warn me about?" Caitlyn's voice quivered slightly. Bouncing on the balls of her feet, she waited for an answer, praying he wouldn't say anything terrible.

"It will hurt a bit at first. I'd like to put you in a trance so you don't feel the pain."

"Trance, as in hypnotize me?"

He nodded.

"Absolutely not. There will be no hypnotizing going on in here. I am willing to give you my blood because you lost yours defending me. But I refuse to allow you to mess with my head again."

"Caitlyn, I won't take advantage of you."

"No."

"I promise."

"No," she growled.

"Okay." He held up his hands in a gesture of defeat. "I won't hypnotize you."

"Anything else you need to warn me about?"

"You may find yourself attracted to me sexually afterwards."

Caitlyn couldn't stifle the giddy laughter that bubbled up inside of her.

"What's so funny?" Aidan frowned, his eyebrows furrowing and his nostrils flaring slightly.

"I think we've already established the fact that I'm attracted to you." Caitlyn tapped her foot, her courage fading fast. If he didn't get this over with soon, she'd probably change her mind.

"You will be weak after this. You'll need to eat and drink and rest."

"Yeah, yeah. It's like giving blood to the Red Cross. Except you aren't going to give me orange juice afterward, are you?"

"No, I'm not," he said with a laugh.

"Let's just do it."

Caitlyn shivered and braced herself for the pain. Holding herself stiffly, she extended her right arm toward him, palm up.

"What are you doing?"

She opened her eyes at his deep, husky laughter. Wasn't this how he'd taken blood from his brother?

"What do you mean?" she asked, frowning in confusion.

"Relax, Caitlyn. I'm going to make this as painless as possible. The calmer you are, the easier this will be. Trust me, relax."

Aidan spoke in a low, soothing tone as he reached out, putting his hand on top of hers. But when he ran his hand up and down her arm, Caitlyn tensed. Knowing what he was didn't frighten her; her fear stemmed from what she'd become.

"You can change your mind."

Change her mind? Was he crazy? He needed blood and it was going to come from her and no one else. Caitlyn grabbed the necklace and pulled it out of her shirt.

"See this?" she asked.

"Yes." Aidan grinned. "You were snooping."

"Yes, but more importantly, I remember."

"Tell me, how much do you remember?" Aidan grabbed her arm and tugged her onto the bed with him.

"I know those are my belongings in that closet."

"So you admit you are my wife!" He grabbed her and squeezed her tightly.

"No," she choked out, trying to pull free. "I don't believe we were married. You'd have made me a vampire if we were."

"You really don't drink blood?" he asked, lifting her face up to meet his gaze.

"I really don't drink blood." She placed her hand on top of his and squeezed it gently. "I understand your confusion. My clothes hang in your closet, and you claim I am your wife and a vampire."

When he opened his mouth to speak she shook her head. He frowned, but remained silent.

"I do remember you. I know how I feel about you now. And it's probably the same way I felt before. But those feelings don't change the fact that the woman you remember isn't the same woman I am now. I'm not a vampire. Not yet, anyway."

"Not yet?"

Damn, another slip and he'd honed in on it at once.

"Look, I have a sensitivity to the sun, but I don't drink blood. I eat my meat cooked. I can walk around in daylight. I have a reflection in a mirror. I can wear this cross. I eat garlic --"

"Stop." He interrupted her. "I told you to put the movie perceptions away. They don't work in this case."

"Fine, whatever. The biggest thing is that I do not need blood, or drink it. Explain that."

"I can't."

"But once you bite me I will, right? I'll want to drink blood and sleep all day. Well, I do that last one anyway," she admitted with a smile. Drawing a deep breath, Caitlyn continued, "But I'm not going to change my mind. Let's get this over with."

"You're sure?"

"Yes."

"We still need to talk."

"Okay, but we'll talk when you aren't so weak." She lifted her wrist and pointed. "Drink my blood now."

Aidan's brows rose, but he lifted one hand and wrapped it around the back of her neck, drawing her close.

Caitlyn gathered her courage and leaned forward to meet him. A shiver ran up her spine and left her neck tingling in anticipation where his hand rested.

Aidan's kiss was slow and gentle. His lips brushed over hers once, then again before rubbing against them slowly.

Sighing, Caitlyn closed her eyes and leaned into him, his mouth warm and familiar. *Like coming home.*

When his tongue touched her lips and taunted her, urging her to let him in, Caitlyn relaxed, enjoying the fluttering sensations in her stomach as his hands ran up and down her back.

Aidan groaned, deepening the kiss. Didn't she realize what she was doing to him? Her scent, her touch, her very essence made him crazy with hunger. He could smell the thick, rich blood pumping through her veins.

He wanted her now. He wanted to take her fast and hard, listen to her scream his name in pleasure as he drank her blood, and shared his with her.

Instead, he closed his eyes and drew in a deep breath. She was his everything. He would put her pleasure before his.

Aidan struggled to control the monster that awoke with Caitlyn's surrender. Her taste, her scent, and the feel of her were imbedded in his memory. His body remembered her and reacted as if he hadn't fed in over a year.

Caitlyn whimpered when his hands settled on her waist. He turned her and pushed her down onto the mattress, shifting until he straddled her. Aidan studied her carefully. She met his gaze boldly, a mixture of emotions racing across her expressive face.

He knew she was waiting for him to sink his teeth into her flesh. She expected pain, but he intended to give her pleasure, and then more pleasure, until she begged for mercy.

"Aidan?" Caitlyn asked. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," he answered. Why was he sitting here thinking when he could be doing?

"Did you change your mind?"

"Never."

He leaned in, kissing her hard and fast, plundering her mouth like a pirate raiding for treasure. He wanted all of her, nothing held back.

Emotions he'd buried when she vanished blazed to the surface. Desire, hot and strong, begged for release. He wanted her with a desperation born of long, lonely nights and the knowledge she was out there somewhere.

Giving in to the emotions, he gripped the hem of her T-shirt and he pushed it up, over the curves of her breasts, where they strained against the smooth satin of her bra. He slid his hands up her soft belly, over her ribs, stopping over her heart.

His hunger increased with each pounding beat beneath his palm. Moaning, Caitlyn arched under his touch, pushing her breast into his hand.

When she whispered his name, a hot flash of desire ripped through him, leaving him breathless with anticipation. She felt so good, so soft, so right.

Burying his face in her neck, Aidan drew in a deep, shuddering breath, trying to rein in his libido. He'd take her like a madman if he didn't calm down.

Caitlyn caressed the back of his head, her touch calming his inner beast. He wanted to make love to her while he feasted on her blood, but he wouldn't. She'd offered her blood, nothing more.

With a deep breath, Aidan pulled back and looked into her eyes. Caitlyn gently ran her fingers through his hair. Aidan lost himself in the dark jade of her eyes, sensing the desire humming through her veins. It matched the steady tempo of his pulse. Already, her heart was readjusting and matching itself to his tempo.

With one finger he traced the scar on her neck. This time she didn't flinch away, and Aidan swept his mouth across the path his finger had taken.

Caitlyn moved against him, wrapping her arms around him tightly. When she moaned, Aidan gave in to the desire to bury himself deep inside her.

He undressed her and removed his clothes at lightning speed before returning to kneel between her pale thighs. She was so beautiful, even more so than he remembered.

Aidan braced his hands on her hips and slowly entered her, inch by agonizing inch. Her sweet moans of pleasure made it hard to stay in control.

When she lifted her legs, and wrapped them around his waist, he slid in the rest of the way. Caitlyn moved against him, her inner muscles squeezing him. Aidan groaned and increased his pace and the force of his thrusts as the sounds she made increased in volume.

Her fingers dug into his arms as she tightened even more around him. Slowly, he traced a small circle on her neck with his tongue before pressing his mouth against her soft skin. His body screamed for release. Even as he sank his teeth into her flesh he hoped this wasn't a mistake.

Caitlyn made a small, pained sound and tensed, her hands fisting in his hair. Aidan forced himself to feed slowly. He didn't want to hurt her, but he desperately needed the blood.

She tasted warm and sweet. He slid his hand up to cup her breast.

Whimpering, Caitlyn clutched at him, holding him to her and whispering for him to continue. Aidan listened to her plea and drank deep and long, her blood sending a euphoric rush through him.

Growling, Aidan sucked and licked while Caitlyn moaned and writhed beneath him. She arched her back and screamed his name at the same time he lost control. Aidan growled as his orgasm increased his hunger for her blood. Caitlyn moaned when he sucked harder on her. Guilt rushed through him. He'd fed on her more than he'd needed. Shame made him pull back and close the small bite marks.

He knelt above her, studying her expression. Her eyes, blurry with desire, stared at the ceiling.

He loved this woman more than anything. Once, he'd thought she was lost to him forever. Finally, she was back in his bed, back in his arms, and he never wanted to let her go again.

"Mine," he whispered, bending down and kissing her neck. He sat up and looked down at her with a soft smile. "Caitlyn?"

When she didn't respond, he frowned and called her name again. Her lashes fluttered closed. Though she smiled, he noticed how pale she was, how quiet and slow her heart now beat. Cursing himself, Aidan remembered how weak the termuvin attack had left her. Had he taken too much blood and damned himself to an eternity without her?

"Caitlyn?" He grabbed her shoulders and shook her lightly. Still, she didn't respond. His heart leapt in his chest, tightening painfully, threatening to burst. Had he found her after so long, only to kill her?

Please open your eyes again, sweetheart. Focus. Focus on me.

Aidan cursed at her silence. He'd taken too much, made the same mistake he'd made earlier, with Adam. What was wrong with him?

"Let me get some help. I'll be right back."

Aidan stood up quickly. There wasn't much time, and she was too weak to take his blood, so she needed a transfusion. Moving toward the door, Aidan remembered her claim that she didn't drink blood. All vampires needed blood, so how was it possible for her to survive without drinking any?

Aidan froze in mid-step as he remembered she lived with her doctor. Would good old Ted be able to explain her ability to survive without feeding? Glancing at the clock, Aidan decided to pay the doctor a visit and demand he heal Caitlyn. Adam would have to keep an eye on her until he returned.

Aidan hesitated in the doorway. She was so still and pale. He could feel her life force slowly ebbing away. He watched the slow rise and fall of her chest. She was barely breathing. As a vampire she didn't need to breathe as often as a human, but Caitlyn had said she wasn't a vampire. Aidan knew better, but he'd feel much better when he solved the mystery of how she'd gone for so long without feeding.

As he watched, her breathing slowed even more. She was fading faster than he'd anticipated, and she needed blood. He'd force-feed her if he had to.

He returned to the bed and extended a claw on his left hand. He sliced along his right wrist. A steady stream of blood oozed from the tear.

He sat on the bed and lifted her head. He held his wrist to her mouth, hoping the scent of his blood would revive her instincts and she would feed on her own.

Instead, she turned away. Aidan growled in frustration. What the hell was wrong with her? Why wouldn't she feed?

He dipped a finger in the blood and smeared it on her lips, and in between them. Caitlyn moaned, tossing her head, whimpering and trying to pull away. Aidan dressed quickly, then wrapped his robe around her. He pulled her into his arms.

It's all right, love. I've got you.

He tried to keep his frustration under control. Even in her sleep she denied him, denied the truth. Again, Aidan tried to force her to take his blood, and once more she resisted.

Aidan?

The faint whisper echoed in his head. Aidan rose from the bed and lifted her in his arms, pulling her against his chest.

I've got you, love.

He remembered where she lived. He just hoped the good doctor was home. Aidan nodded his head toward the far wall. A hidden door slid noiselessly open, letting in a wet, chilly breeze. Caitlyn shivered as he tucked her head against his chest.

Holding her firmly, Aidan leapt through the opening, flying high into the sky. He used his powers to close the door and put his safeguards in place.

The journey was quick and uneventful, but keeping both of them cloaked, invisible to anyone who might look up while he flew through the rain, exhausted him.

He dropped to the ground in front of Caitlyn's place. As Aidan carried her up the walkway, Adam landed behind him. He hadn't noticed Adam behind him, but he'd had more important things on his mind.

"Caitlyn?" A tall, thin man rushed off the porch. He stared at Caitlyn, who lay limp in Aidan's arms, then glanced up, flashing Aidan a look of hatred.

"What did you do to her?" the man asked, reaching for Caitlyn.

Aidan stepped back, narrowing his eyes. "Can you help her?"

"Yes. Do you realize you almost killed her?"

"Yes. But if someone hadn't made her forget she was a vampire and needs blood to survive --" He broke off when Adam grabbed his shoulder.

"She needs blood, doc. Can you help her?" Adam asked.

"I'll help, but I want you two to go away and leave her alone. She's safer here than with you." Ted tried to grab Caitlyn again. "You had no right to feed from her."

"They were attacked by termuvins," Adam offered.

"Attacked? By *what*?"

Everyone turned toward the porch as a beautiful young woman stepped forward. Aidan watched her eyes widen when she looked at Caitlyn.

"Molly! Don't just stand there. Get the door. Set up the prep room; Caitlyn needs a transfusion immediately."

Molly hesitated. She took a step back, glancing around the yard, her hand going to her throat.

“Are you going to help her or not?” Aidan growled. What was wrong with her?

“Ted?” She called out, her voice shaking.

“It’s okay; he’s a friend of Caitlyn’s.” Ted turned to Aidan. “Aren’t you?”

“I’m more than a friend.”

“We’ll see about that. She might not feel the same way when she heals.”

Ted glanced up, the warning in his eyes coming through loud and clear, and anger coursed through Aidan in a rush. Who did Ted think he was? And why the hell was he so protective of Caitlyn? If she wasn’t so sick, he’d tear the doctor apart and feed him to werewolves. But it was his fault Caitlyn needed blood so he’d listen to the lecture and nod until she was well. Then Ted would pay dearly.

Aidan followed Ted into the house. The doctor moved quickly past the living room, down a hall, and then down some steps that were hidden behind a secret door.

Before Aidan could ask why Ted had a hidden room in his basement, they stepped into a stark, white, hospital-like room. The sterile walls and tiled floor glowed in the fluorescent lighting. Aidan winced at the brightness, but carried Caitlyn over to the small bed in the center of the room. Gently, he put her down and waited for Ted to work his magic.

“You two go upstairs and wait in the living room.”

“I’m not leaving her,” Aidan said.

“We don’t have time to argue. Your aggression isn’t going to help right now. Go up and wait.”

Aidan met Ted’s gaze and held it for a minute before he nodded and turned away.

Chapter Fifteen

Caitlyn awoke gradually. A small beeping sound reached her ears, giving her a momentary panic until she recognized the hushed voices of Ted and Molly. Opening her eyes, she tried to blink away the fuzziness and glanced up into a blurry face.

"Ted?" she mumbled.

"Shhh," he answered, pushing damp hair off her forehead. "Everything is okay now."

Ted lifted her hand, his fingers resting on the pulse in her wrist. After he checked her heart rate, he released her. Caitlyn shivered and tried to pull her arm under the blanket, but something stopped her.

Frowning, she glanced down and tugged again. As her vision cleared she saw the long tube of an IV running from her arm to a bag of blood on a pole next to her bed.

"Blood?" she croaked, jerking on her arm.

"Calm down. You've lost a lot. I've already given you some medication and this is the last bit of blood. You'll be fine."

"Where am I?" Caitlyn licked her dry lips and glanced around the room in confusion. The last thing she remembered was being with Aidan. "Where is Aidan?"

"I asked him to leave. He's done enough damage, don't you think?"

"No." Caitlyn shook her head. She remembered offering him her wrist. She remembered the termuvins as well. Shuddering, she looked at the door, wondering where Aidan had gone and why he'd left. "We were attacked. He saved me. I offered him my blood."

"You offered him your blood?"

"He saved my life." Caitlyn frowned. "What would you have me do? Let him die?"

“Better him than you!” Ted erupted. When Molly placed a calming hand on his arm, he looked at her. Her smile, soft and full of love, seemed to calm him. Caitlyn had never been more grateful in her life, because her head ached fiercely and she didn’t need a lecture. When he continued, his voice was gentler. “You almost died, drained of blood. Would you like to guess why?”

“You were right.” Caitlyn sighed and shifted uncomfortably on the bed. “Vampires do exist. So does something else that you failed to warn me about.”

“What would that be?”

“Termuvins,” Aidan answered.

Caitlyn glanced toward the door. Deep lines etched Aidan’s face. He didn’t look very well. Had he taken enough blood?

“Yes,” Adam spoke up, slipping past Aidan into the room. “I saw them, too.”

“When they attacked me, Aidan shoved me inside the building and tried to fight them all by himself,” Caitlyn added.

She knew Aidan wouldn’t accept credit for trying to save her. She sensed the anger radiating between the two men and wondered at the cause.

“Termuvins?” Molly repeated, grabbing Ted’s arm. “You said that --”

“Shhh,” Ted hissed.

Caitlyn glanced at him in surprise. She’d never heard him take such a harsh tone with Molly. Apparently the other woman didn’t like it, either, because she turned a fierce glare on Ted before checking Caitlyn’s IV.

After a moment, Molly looked up at Aidan. “What are termuvins doing here?”

“They were following orders.” Aidan frowned at Ted before he walked over to the bed. He looked down at Caitlyn, his eyes softening. Gently, he ran a hand through her hair.

“Orders. You’re sure?” Ted asked.

Aidan nodded, but kept his gaze glued on Caitlyn.

“I wonder which one of you is the real target.” The doctor moved around to Caitlyn’s other side.

“Caitlyn, have you remembered anything from your attack?” Aidan asked, turning to stare at Ted.

“No.” Caitlyn frowned and closed her eyes. Maybe Ted was right; maybe she’d never regain her memory. “I don’t remember anything. Maybe one of you should hypnotize me again.”

“I don’t think that would be wise.” Aidan’s eyes narrowed as he bent down and scooped up several empty vials from the trashcan.

“And just why not?” she demanded.

"I think the doctor is playing us for fools." Aidan dropped all but one vial back into the trash.

"You are mistaken." Ted shook his head and stepped back.

"This," Aidan said, holding up the empty tube, "this is going to take effect soon, Caitlyn. And you won't remember what happened tonight."

"What are you talking about?" Caitlyn reached for the vial, and bumped into Molly's arm as they both tried to grab the tube.

"That is a necessary medication." Molly frowned at her. "Ted was only giving it to you out of necessity."

"Necessity, my ass," Aidan hissed, walking closer to her with each word. "She's my wife and you've been hiding her, experimenting on her, and keeping her from remembering me."

"No." Molly backed away from Aidan.

Caitlyn didn't blame her. Hell, he was vibrating with anger. She needed to intervene before the situation got totally out of hand. "Ted is my friend. He wouldn't do anything like that. Tell him, Ted."

"You suffered a serious trauma. While you might feel ready to remember, I'm willing to bet you aren't. Right now, you aren't ready to hear anything unpleasant."

"What?" Caitlyn sat up, clutching the railing on the side of the bed as the room spun.

"It was necessary. You were hysterical. Between the nightmares and the memories, you weren't recovering at all. I drugged you to help keep them repressed."

"Aidan's right? You've been drugging me?" Caitlyn reached for the IV leading into her arm.

"Stop!" Three voices shouted in unison. Caitlyn hesitated.

"Why?"

"You need the blood," Aidan said quietly. "No matter how much of that drug is in it."

"Am I a vampire?" Caitlyn held her breath as she waited for an answer. When no one said anything she repeated the question. "Am I a vampire? Or just part vampire?"

She watched Ted carefully. Was Aidan correct about *everything*?

"I'm a lot stronger than you think," Caitlyn said, after a tense silence. "I can handle the truth."

"I want to know the truth, too, *doctor*. Either you tell her, or I'll beat it out of you." Aidan took a step toward Ted.

Ted didn't flinch, or back away. He met Aidan's fierce stare impassively. "I'm not afraid of you. But I see no point in hiding the truth from her any longer. Caitlyn, I don't doubt your strength; otherwise, you would never have survived tonight, or the original attack. I was afraid you would try and exact revenge before you were fully healed."

“So you’ve been drugging her and using hypnosis to keep her from remembering *me*?” Aidan growled.

“I’d never met you, Aidan. How was I supposed to know if you tried to kill her or not? I came into the alley just before the police and saw you kneeling next to her with the knife in your hand. My God, Aidan, who would believe your innocence?”

Caitlyn couldn’t believe what she was hearing. She knew the details, but Ted hadn’t ever mentioned he’d found her in an alley. He claimed he found her in the park. How much of what he had said was a lie?

She looked at Aidan to see how this revelation affected him. His eyes blazed with fury and his fists clenched at his sides. His arm muscles were bulging with restrained anger. He looked like an avenging angel.

“You became judge and jury and convicted me without a trial?” Aidan shook his head and squeezed his fist, breaking the vial he still held. “How long did you plan to use this medication to keep my wife from remembering me?”

Ted’s eyes narrowed as he answered, “She’s my patient. I decide what is necessary to keep her safe.”

“She’s my wife. That right lies with me!” Aidan shouted, banging his fist against his chest, the broken pieces of glass falling to the floor.

“I’m trying to keep Caitlyn alive!” Ted shouted back with a snarl.

“My God! You’re one, too!” Caitlyn gasped as his canines extended down past his lower lip. What the hell! But of course, he had to be a vampire if he knew what to do to keep her alive all this time.

“Honey.” Molly tugged on Ted’s sleeve.

“Shit.” Ted shook his head and turned away.

Caitlyn looked around the room at all the machines running, doing God knew what. The room was like a miniature hospital.

Ted’s revelations shocked her. Who was he? Certainly not the friend she once believed him to be. And he certainly wasn’t an ethical doctor. Apparently, he wasn’t only a psychiatrist either.

Caitlyn closed her eyes, then quickly opened them, battling the sudden exhaustion sweeping through her body. Eyeing the broken pieces of glass on the floor, Caitlyn knew the contents were to blame. She would sleep, and when she awoke, all of this would be gone, hidden in the deep recesses of her mind once again.

“When I found her, I took care of her. I made sure she would live, and I kept her safe. I was doing a good job of it, too, until you came along.”

“But I’m her husband,” Aidan shouted. He reached over and grabbed Ted by the neck, lifting him off the floor. “Who the hell do you think you are?”

“Her brother.”

Ted’s words had barely registered when Aidan suddenly transformed before her eyes. His teeth sharpened and grew into fangs. His fingers turned into talons and he lifted a hand, bringing it down hard and swiping his nails across Ted’s face.

Screams filled the room, and Caitlyn realized with surprise that her voice had joined Molly’s. She slammed her mouth shut and reached for the IV. They were both insane. She had to get out of here before they killed each other.

Ripping the IV out of her arm, Caitlyn rolled off the bed. The scent of blood filled the air, stirring something deep inside her. Fighting the craving that cried out for her to drink, she stumbled toward the door.

She made it only a few feet, when Adam stepped in front of her. Shaking her head, Caitlyn tried to step around him, but her legs gave out, and she collapsed against him, surrendering to the dark abyss.

The scent of blood fed his anger until Adam’s shout captured his attention.

“Aidan, stop it!”

“Bring her back to the bed,” Molly said.

Bring her to the bed? Aidan froze, glancing toward Adam. Caitlyn lay unconscious in his arms. *Shit.* In his anger, he’d forgotten the most important thing, taking care of Caitlyn.

With a growl, Aidan shoved Ted across the room. He turned, striding over to the bed. He grabbed Molly and shook her. “No more mind-fogging drugs. You will give her blood, and nothing else. Understand?”

Molly looked over at Ted, fear in her eyes. Ted nodded, then glared at Aidan, as Adam placed Caitlyn on the bed.

“What happened?” Aidan asked, releasing Molly and grabbing Caitlyn’s hand in his. “What’s wrong with her?”

“I think the drugs kicked in,” Adam said. “She was trying to leave when she collapsed.”

“Is that true? The drugs you gave her caused her to pass out?” Aidan asked, releasing Caitlyn’s hand and rising. He growled, ready to rip Ted’s throat open.

“Yes,” Ted ground out. “I wanted to make her forget you, and everything else that happened. I have been keeping her safe these past few months. Then you came along and she’s been attacked twice. Once by the termuvins, and once by you.”

“I didn’t attack her.”

“You helped yourself to her precious blood and almost killed her. That makes you a monster.”

Pushing Molly aside, Aidan scooped Caitlyn into his arms. “That’s it! I’m taking her home.”

"She still needs blood," Ted said. "How are you going to get blood into her while she's unconscious?"

"I don't know. I don't care. As long as she's nowhere near you."

"Aidan," Adam spoke softly, stepping in front of him.

"What?"

"Stop!"

"No. He's just going to make her forget me again. I want my wife back."

"You'll have her back." Adam promised. "Isn't that right, Ted?"

When the doctor didn't answer, Adam grabbed him and slammed him against the wall. "I *said*, isn't that *right*, Ted."

"Lucas!" Molly cried out.

"Lucas?" Adam snorted, in disgust. "Even your name is a lie? Tell Aidan you'll give Caitlyn her memory back."

"She'll get her memory back. She tore out the IV before enough of the drug could get into her system." Lucas wiped blood off the corner of his mouth. He pushed Adam away. "Lay her down and Molly will start a new IV, this time with only blood."

Aidan glared at the trembling woman. He hoped she was terrified of him, because if Caitlyn woke up without any memory of him, there would be hell to pay.

"Adam, watch her like a hawk."

"Yes, Aidan." Adam sat on the bed and watched as Molly inserted an IV in Caitlyn's other arm. "So, Molly, come here often?"

Aidan almost laughed. Almost.

"Why'd you do it, Ted?" he growled, leaning into his face. "Or should I call you Lucas? Are you even her brother? You were traveling abroad when I met Caitlyn and married her. How do I know you are who you say you are? And why did you vanish when your parents were murdered?"

"You could see the resemblance if you took the time to look. You could ask Meredith if I'm telling the truth."

"Meredith believes you're dead, too. Why did you kidnap Caitlyn and hide from the rest of your family?"

"I was trying to protect Caitlyn from you."

"From me!" Aidan laughed. "Why don't you tell me why I'm so dangerous? And maybe you would like to explain why you attacked my wife and killed your parents?"

"You know it wasn't me."

"The only thing I know for certain is it wasn't me. Come on, start spilling your guts before I decide to use you as a punching bag."

"You're a violent man by nature, aren't you?" Lucas shook his head. "Adam, surely *you* can see why she needed to stay away from him."

"Lucas," Adam said softly, "if you kidnapped my wife and let me think she was dead, I'd probably redecorate my living room with your body parts."

"This is quite an elaborate set-up." Aidan gestured around the room. "You created a new name for yourself, kidnapped my wife, and kept her from me? Why?"

"She's my sister. I didn't want to see her end up like our parents." Lucas sighed and gestured toward Caitlyn. "When I found you standing over her with the knife, what was I supposed to think, Aidan?"

"The same thing as the police, obviously." Aidan growled, but he managed to slam the lid on his inner beast. "Keep talking."

"I thought she'd heal and tell me what happened. Unfortunately, it wasn't that simple. Even after she healed, I had to keep her sedated." Lucas's voice broke.

"Explain." Aidan watched him with narrowed eyes.

"Caitlyn was plagued by nightmares. They tormented her night and day. She couldn't eat. She couldn't sleep. Her body and mind couldn't handle it. If I hadn't taken those memories and buried them, she probably would have continued to get worse."

"You're lying!" Aidan lunged at Lucas. He grabbed him and pinned him against the wall.

"She didn't want to live," Molly said, trying to place herself between the two of them. "She wanted to die, Aidan. And Lucas thought it was your fault. Hell, *she* blamed you."

"No!" Aidan released Lucas and reached for Molly. He wanted to make her retract her lies, but before he could grab her, Lucas pushed him. Aidan flew backwards, slamming into the far wall.

"Damn it," Aidan roared, his body vibrating from the contact. Growling at the younger man, Aidan charged him.

"Stop it!" Molly screamed. "Stop fighting and listen! When Lucas found Caitlyn in the alley, he scooped her up and brought her to me. Together, we repaired what damage we could."

"When she regained consciousness she was plagued by nightmares. We decided that in order for her to heal, we needed to help her forget those memories until she was better able to handle them, physically and mentally."

"You chose to make her forget me and our life."

"Aidan," Molly said softly. "He loves her as much as you do. What we did, we did to help her. Since we stopped the drugs, her memory should return."

"Should?" Aidan repeated in disbelief. "You mean it might not?"

“Since we’ve been using the medication and hypnosis to keep her memories at bay, once we stop, they should return.”

“Unless you used too much of the drug. Then her memory loss could be permanent,” Adam said.

“It might be better if not all of her memories return.” Molly looked at Lucas with worry in her eyes. Aidan could read the helplessness in her frightened gaze as she added, “Tell him everything.”

Lucas nodded slowly. “Perhaps I should.”

“What?” Aidan growled in frustration. Oh, how he would like to wrap his hands around Lucas’s neck and squeeze.

“When I returned from my journey abroad, I brought Molly back with me. I wanted to introduce her to the family.” Lucas paused. Molly grabbed his hand and squeezed it.

“Go on,” Aidan said.

“When I walked into my parents’ house, everything was quiet. I left Molly in the hall and walked back to their bedroom.” Lucas paused again and swallowed.

“I know what you saw.” Aidan frowned. He wasn’t supposed to feel compassion for him. He struggled to find the anger he’d had minutes before.

“My next thought was to find Caitlyn and Meredith to see if they were okay. I found Meredith working at the café. She told me where you lived.” Lucas looked down at Caitlyn before continuing in a soft voice. “I knew you were married, but I was too busy to come home. I got the invitation, but I thought there was plenty of time to get to meet the man my sister chose to marry.

“Well, time isn’t always on our side. I rushed to your club and heard the struggle in the back. I could feel the monster’s strength. He was running high on the power he’d gained from killing my parents. As we rounded the corner, he saw both of us and took off into the air.”

“You saw him?” Aidan didn’t believe him. “Both of you were there? Then you *know* it wasn’t me.”

“Not exactly. I saw a blur of wings as the vampire took off into the air. I had to make sure Caitlyn was okay, so I didn’t pursue him.”

“You’re the one I felt but couldn’t see.” Aidan whispered softly.

“I saw you arrive but I didn’t know who you were so I cloaked Molly and myself to see if you would try and finish killing Caitlyn. I was about to make myself known. I was going to confront you, but you fell to your knees and started to curse. Then you picked up the damn knife and smeared your fingerprints all over it. The police were no better. Molly and I cloaked Caitlyn and walked out of there without anyone noticing.

Aidan knew what he wasn’t saying. “You were the one who made her disappear.”

"Yes."

"Why did you take her? Why didn't you let the police see that she was still alive?"

Lucas swallowed and looked at Molly. Tears filled her eyes as she walked around to Aidan. She took both his hands in hers and looked up into his eyes.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "I wish that ..."

"What?" Aidan thought about slipping into her mind, but Molly answered him.

"She was pregnant. We couldn't let the police find the baby. They would have noticed the ... abnormalities."

"Pregnant?" Adam asked, placing his hand on Aidan's arm.

Aidan shrugged away the comfort. Caitlyn had been pregnant? That monster had not only taken his wife, but his child, as well?

He glanced around the room for something to destroy. Anything. He hadn't even known she was pregnant. Why hadn't she told him?

"What did you do with my child?"

"We buried him with Lucas's parents."

"Aidan." Adam reached out and grabbed onto him. Aidan shoved his brother aside and headed for the door. He couldn't breathe. He needed air, and space to vent his anger.

"That is why we took away her memories," Lucas called after him. "You know how *you* feel right now? Imagine losing your mother, your father, and your child. She almost died. Molly and I pieced her together and we made sure she healed. But we left the scar on her neck. It's a reminder that she isn't invincible."

Aidan turned.

"Don't you see?" Lucas looked back and forth between Aidan and Adam. "We did this to help her. She couldn't handle the memories."

"But you didn't give her back to me." Aidan tried to make sense of their explanations. "I could have helped her."

"Maybe, maybe not," Lucas said. "How do I know you didn't try to kill her?"

Aidan took a step forward. Lucas lifted his hand. "I hope I'm making the right decision, but I'm going to trust you. But even if you aren't the Slasher, we know he knows she's still alive. The more people we can surround her with the better we can protect her."

"*Now* you're going let me protect her? I should have had that opportunity from the start!" Aidan shouted, taking a few steps toward Lucas, his control starting to slip.

"She's my sister. I did what I needed to do. You'd have done the same. Think about it, Aidan. I didn't know you. How did I know you'd take care of her?"

Aidan growled and would have leapt on the man, tearing him to pieces, if Adam hadn't put his hand on Aidan's shoulder to stop him.

"Can you get the medicine out of her system?" Adam asked.

“No.” Lucas shook his head. “But it should wear off fast enough. Then she’ll remember you, me, the attack. Promise me you’ll stay with her and help her through this. When she remembers ...”

“I can take better care of her than you,” Aidan spat at Lucas.

“Then why did you bring her to me?”

“You know why.” Aidan spoke through clenched teeth.

Lucas checked her vital signs. When he was finished, he turned to Aidan. “Her IV is finished. Take her with you, but know that when she wakes she’ll be confused and need your guidance. And as the medication and mind blocks wear away, she’ll need you even more.”

“Fine.” Aidan lifted Caitlyn into his arms and turned to the door. He was halfway across the room when he heard Lucas clear his throat.

“Take care of her,” he whispered. “I only tried to do what was best for her.”

Aidan heard the love and concern in Lucas’s voice. Now that he’d banked the anger, he could sense the other man’s emotions, and realized they were genuine.

“I will,” Aidan assured him. He would take care of her, even if she didn’t remember him when she awoke.

Chapter Sixteen

Caitlyn awoke to the soft, soothing sounds of jazz. With a frown, she wondered when Ted started listening to jazz.

Slowly, she opened her eyes and glanced around the dark room. Why were there stars on the ceiling? Where was she? As her vision cleared, she saw someone sitting in a chair next to the bed.

Think, Caitlyn. She remembered coming to see Aidan about something in the newspaper. What was it?

“Caitlyn?” Aidan whispered, standing up. She contemplated pretending she was asleep, but decided he wasn’t dumb enough to fall for such an obvious ruse. Not when he’d seen her eyes open.

“Where am I?”

“What do you remember? Do you remember your name? Do you remember me?”

“Yes, I know who I am and who you are. Is this your room? What am I doing here?”

Aidan sighed and sat on the bed next to her. “I know you are very confused right now, but it’s because Ted has been messing with your mind.”

“What?” Caitlyn pushed up on her elbows and looked around the room again. “Where is he? Why am I here? What the devil are you talking about?”

“How much do you remember?”

“I’m not clear on how I got here, or exactly why.” Caitlyn frowned and looked at Aidan. “You better start talking, and it better be good.”

Thirty minutes later, Caitlyn’s head felt ready to explode. She eyed Aidan warily.

“So, Ted is really my brother Lucas, and he thought he would keep me safe by hiding my memories from me and keeping me hidden from the rest of my family?”

“Yes. I know it’s a stretch, but it’s the truth. We don’t have much time. The Slasher will come after you again.”

“And I am just supposed to take your word for all this? I’m supposed to believe everything you tell me as if I were a naïve child?”

“As your memory returns, you’ll realize I’m telling the truth. Right now, you are in shock. Listen to your instincts,” Aidan pleaded. “You’ll know I’m telling the truth, as strange as it sounds. And you’ll realize your place is here, with me, where I can protect you.”

“Shock? Someone is trying to kill me. I just found out my own brother has been lying and manipulating me, that you are really my husband, and I am a vampire. I think it’s understandable that I’m in shock right now. I think I should go. I’ve wasted enough time here; someone has to find the Slasher and stop him before he kills again.”

“Are you feeling well enough to go out and search for clues to the Slasher’s identity?”

Caitlyn wanted to continue arguing with him, but why bother? Her legs wouldn’t hold her weight, so she couldn’t walk away from him. While Aidan had told her his story, she’d tried to stand and had almost fallen. As much as she hated to admit it, he was right. She wasn’t in any condition to go out traipsing around Philadelphia. But that didn’t mean everything he said was true.

“No.” She sighed, clenching the comforter in her fists.

But she couldn’t just sit here, staring out the windows. Or could she?

That’s it! Caitlyn smiled and unclenched her fists. She pulled the comforter up to her chin and sank a little lower in the bed. She could stay here and watch the alley. Let Aidan *protect* her, while she kept a look out for the Slasher. As soon as she recuperated, she’d try and lure the monster into the open.

Deciding to let Aidan think he’d convinced her to stay here under his protection, Caitlyn changed the subject. “So, you’re saying my memories will return once the drugs are out of my system?”

“They should.” Aidan nodded.

“Is there anything I can do to speed things along?”

“I doubt it. Unless you want me to bite you, drink your blood, and give you mine?”

“Ha ha.” Caitlyn frowned at him. She was tired of all of this. Tired of being afraid someone was going to find her and kill her. Tired of not remembering her past. She could understand not remembering the attack, and what had happened immediately before. But to not remember anything? She’d actually *lived* with her brother, and hadn’t even recognized him. How could that be possible?

She wanted to talk to Ted. Or Lucas. Whatever his name really was. Caitlyn laughed out loud. This whole thing was ridiculous, in a bad soap opera kind of way. Her brother

drugging her and pretending to be someone else to keep her from her husband, who might have tried to killed her, or might not have.

"I want to be alone." Caitlyn lowered her gaze.

"I don't want to leave you alone." Aidan sighed. "You've been through a lot in a short time."

"You're just afraid I'll disappear on you."

He looked at her quietly, not denying her accusation. Finally he spoke. "I'll be in the living room if you need anything."

"Thank you."

Need anything? She needed her memory back, but she didn't think he could do that. Right now she didn't know if she was safe here, or if she'd be better off back at Ted's. Lucas. She needed to remember his name was Lucas.

Caitlyn automatically reached for her cross and discovered she wasn't wearing it anymore. Frantically, she lifted up her shirt. Nothing. She felt around on the bed, moving the sheets, lifting the pillows, and even standing up and shaking the blankets. Had she lost it at Lucas's? Maybe Molly had removed it when she was setting up the IV or something.

A sick feeling settled in the pit of her stomach. Had she lost it outside in the alley? Had someone removed it and placed it in her purse?

Caitlyn rose from the bed and crossed the room to Aidan's dresser. She reached for her purse and picked it up, when Aidan opened the door. He glanced at her purse then met her gaze, his expression fierce. "Where do you think you are going?"

"I ... I need to find something." Caitlyn shivered under his piercing stare.

"You aren't going anywhere." Aidan stepped into the room, slamming the door shut behind him. As he stomped toward her, Caitlyn heard the lock click, even though she knew he hadn't touched it.

Trying not to think about how he'd done that, Caitlyn planted her feet firmly and put her hands on her hips. "You can't tell me what to do."

"The hell I can't!" he roared.

Caitlyn paled beneath his fury. His hands shook as he raised them to run his fingers through his hair.

After several deep breaths he spoke again. "It's not safe for you to go out right now. Surely, after the attack this afternoon, you realize the danger you are in."

"I'm in greater danger being here," she said. Where had the gentle man from a few minutes ago gone?

"No." Aidan shook his head. He closed the distance between them and pulled her up against his chest.

Closing her eyes, she breathed in his scent. Cinnamon, pine, and soap. How he managed to smell like the outdoors when he lived in the city, she couldn't imagine. She drew in another deep breath and felt her fear slip away.

Caitlyn shivered, suddenly confused. Was the necklace that important? Aidan's hands moved soothingly over her back, easing her tense muscles.

"I can't stay here," she whispered, pulling away. She couldn't even think when he was near her. She could only feel.

"Let me keep you safe." Aidan cupped her chin in his palm, tilting her face up.

"Why do I feel so weak?"

"You lost a great deal of blood." His thumb brushed against her lower lip.

Breathlessly, she closed her eyes and leaned toward him, reveling in the delicious heat brought on by his sexy eyes and devilish grin.

"Yes."

He rubbed his lips over hers sending shivers through her. Caitlyn grabbed onto his biceps as her knees buckled.

"See," he whispered, hands rubbing against her lower back. "You're still weak. Stay. Let me protect you."

"No." Caitlyn shook her head. "While I stay in here safe, other women fitting my description are being killed. I have to do something."

"I want to stop him as much as you do, maybe even more. At least spend the day here. Regain your strength. Wait until tonight or tomorrow before you leave."

Frowning, Caitlyn lowered her gaze. She watched the pulse in his throat beat steadily. The beat echoed in her ears, until another joined it, the sound like that of a favorite song. One she'd forgotten the words to, but remembered the melody.

Aidan smelled so good Caitlyn wanted to cuddle up and bury her face in his neck. He swallowed, his hands tightening on her as she moved in closer.

Her tongue flicked out to wet suddenly dry lips. Caitlyn leaned forward and licked at the spot on his neck that called to her like a siren's song. Aidan's body tightened under her light caress. She reveled in her power to excite him with one small touch. Repeating the caress, Caitlyn lingered over the spot before she placed several slow kisses on his jaw and cheek, working her way up to his ear.

Aidan shivered and clenched her shoulders. His mouth covered hers and he kissed her fiercely, his coarse five o'clock shadow on her soft flesh igniting a pleasant tingling between her thighs. Aidan deepened the kiss, plunging his tongue into her mouth, and Caitlyn moaned, eagerly arching into his embrace.

Finally, Aidan pulled back, drawing several deep breaths. In those few moments, Caitlyn felt his withdrawal and realized what he'd done.

Without one protest from her, he'd distracted her. She'd completely forgotten about the necklace. Hell, she'd completely forgotten about everything but Aidan.

"I wish you'd stop mesmerizing me."

"I didn't mesmerize you, woman. What you feel is desire, love for me. Why can't you just admit it?"

"You keep tricking me. I don't know what or who to trust. Someone is trying to kill me, remember?"

Aidan guided her hand to her neck, pressing her palm against the mark on her neck. "Feel that?" He purred in her ear. "I will *not* allow anything to happen to you again. You will stay here, Caitlyn. That is not negotiable."

She felt the line of her scar, the reminder of the attack. Caitlyn shivered and looked up at him. Meeting his gaze, she saw he was looking at the scar, and the look in his eyes terrified her to her very soul. Anger. Raw, undiluted anger. For a moment, Caitlyn feared he'd turn those emotions loose on her.

Aidan watched Caitlyn as she pulled free from him, turning away and putting some space in between them. He knew she was confused. Hopefully, that meant she was close to remembering. He shook his head. The drug's effects would have to wear off, and there was no telling how long that would take. Hopefully not much longer.

When Caitlyn had licked him on the neck, he'd almost lost control. He'd used up every ounce of his willpower in order to keep himself from throwing her down on the bed and making love to her in every way possible.

"I don't think it's a good idea for me to stay here," Caitlyn said. Finally, she turned to look at him, her face still flushed. He smiled, amused by her embarrassment.

Aidan wanted to plunge his hands into her thick, curly hair. He wanted to wrap the silky auburn mass around his fists as he took her hard and fast. But he couldn't. Not yet. Not until she remembered him. Not until she remembered everything.

With a soft groan, Aidan shoved his hands into his pockets hoping to hide the evidence of his arousal. The last thing he wanted to do was frighten her. And obviously, he'd come close to doing just that.

"You should stay in bed and rest. You're still weak. I know the Slasher is out there watching and waiting for you. You'll need all your strength to fight him."

"Yes. I know."

Good. She wasn't going to argue with him. "Lucas saved you from the killer, but now the Slasher is killing every redheaded woman he finds. He must be hoping one of them is you."

"I think you're right. In any case, I really think he won't stop until he kills me." Caitlyn looked at him with wide eyes. The thought obviously frightened her, but she maintained a tough façade.

"If you believe he's after you, then why do you want to leave? Why take such a risk? Aren't you afraid this time you may not live?"

"If he did manage to kill me, then maybe his senseless slaughtering of women would come to an end."

"You look as if you truly believe that." Aidan shook his head. "You're forgetting he's a rogue vampire. Once a vampire kills for pleasure, he won't stop until his life is ended."

Caitlyn stared at him. He hoped she was listening and thinking about what he said. He needed her to realize the truth. Time was running out. Until she remembered who the Slasher was, the murderer had the upper hand. Hell, he could walk in the door right now, and no one would recognize him for what he was. A killer, with Caitlyn as his main target. The thought made him sick.

She remained silent, chewing on her bottom lip. Fine, let her think. Aidan stood up and stretched, clenching and unclenching his fists. Fear and worry warred within him, and his muscles ached from carrying Caitlyn's limp body twice across the city.

"I'm going to take a hot shower while you think. I want you to rest. Your memory should start to return soon. Then I'm sure you will see I'm telling you the truth. And whatever you do, do not, under any circumstances, let anyone else in this room."

"What's the difference between you and him?" she asked suddenly. "You both need blood to survive. You've both killed people. What makes you so different?"

"He kills for pleasure. I only kill when I must." Aidan hesitated, wondering how to explain this so she'd understand and believe him. "When a vampire gets out of control and starts to break the laws, he needs to be punished. A vampire can't be locked behind bars, sentenced to life in prison, or a given lethal injection. We're not mortal, so you can't address the threat the same way.

"When humans have a serial killer, what do they do with him? Life in prison or the death penalty, right? Well, we have only one option. Death. They would never be able to keep a vampire in jail. And we know from experience that you can't rehabilitate one, either."

"Who decides if a vampire is bad or good? You?" Caitlyn sounded as if she thought he were a rebel who ran around doling out punishment wherever he saw fit. Did she think he took matters into his own hands?

"We have several leaders, located all across the world. They make the laws, not I. I'm one of the few chosen to enforce them, though, like a policeman."

"Are all of the lawmakers and enforcers male? Do women have any say in anything?"

"Actually, our leaders are female. One of them, Isabel, doesn't live too far from here, but she's still young. A lot of the troublemakers are playing on her inexperience and creating

havoc. I have great hopes for her, though. I'm sure everyone will rally together under her reign."

"Why is she in charge if she's so young?"

"She's young, but very intelligent. In three hundred years she's attained more knowledge than most vampires twice her age. I have faith in her, and believe she can do the job as well as, if not better than, our leader."

A vision of Caitlyn's mother sprang to his mind. She had been a great leader.

Until her untimely death. Slain in her home, along with her husband, most likely by someone they trusted. Aidan's stomach churned at the thought. And that someone was after his wife. Again. When he found the traitor, Aidan would slaughter him like the pig he was.

"Will you stay here? Give yourself a chance to recover? Give me a chance to prove myself?"

She didn't answer, just stared at the floor, a miserable look on her lovely face.

"I owe you for giving me blood when I needed it. I know I took too much, and I'm sorry. It won't happen again. I promise you will be safe. I won't touch you while you're here. At least, not unless you ask me to."

If only she would stop fighting him and give in to the magic that drew them together. She was the one he wanted to spend the rest of his life with, but waiting for her to realize she'd once felt the same way was pure hell.

"I'm going to take a shower now. Think about what I've told you. If you still have questions, I'll gladly answer them for you. But please, stay here and rest."

She tilted her head to the side, reminding him of the way her cat used to watch him. He'd have to remember to call Isabel and ask her to return the cat.

Mandy mourned Caitlyn worse than Aidan had thought possible. She'd been inconsolable, meowing constantly at the door, at the window, all over the damn club, until finally Aidan couldn't stand it anymore, and sent her to Isabel.

"Aidan?"

"Don't go anywhere. Please." He smiled, hoping she'd listen for once. She gave him a half-hearted smile in return, but he decided it was a start.

Brother or no, Aidan would enjoy making Lucas pay for keeping Caitlyn from remembering, but not until they'd found the Slasher and dealt with him.

Chapter Seventeen

If Lucas and Aidan were vampires, then Meredith and Jake were, too. In fact, Jake had given her a bad case of the creeps. She didn't like him, and knew Aidan didn't either. But a bad feeling didn't make him the Slasher. What possible reason could he have for wanting her dead?

Not anger over a jilted love. He'd married Meredith and they looked very happy together. No, Jake didn't behave like a scorned lover. In fact, he acted like he believed Aidan was the Slasher.

A low ringing sound startled Caitlyn out of her thoughts. She glanced around the room, trying to pinpoint the location of the sound. Realizing the ringing came from her purse, which she still held in her hand, she uttered a nervous laugh.

Now you're getting paranoid, Caitlyn. It's just your cell phone. She needed to get a grip and stop jumping at shadows.

She pulled the phone from her purse and flipped it open. There was a number displayed on the screen, but no name. Only a few people knew her number, and Lucas wasn't likely to give it out. She pressed the talk button. "Hello?"

"Caitlyn?"

"Yes, who's this?"

"Oh good, I have the right number. It's Meredith. How are you? Feeling better?"

"Yes, I am, thank you. And I have good news, I think. My memory is supposed to start coming back now. According to Lucas, anyway."

"Lucas!" Meredith screeched into the telephone. "You've seen Lucas? Where is he? Where's he been hiding?"

"Hiding?" Caitlyn snorted. "He's my doctor, and he's been erasing my memories. I suppose I will get them back soon though, now that Aidan made him stop drugging me."

"Drugging you? What has that boy been up to? You know what? Do you feel up to having a visitor?"

"Let me guess. Aidan told you what happened and asked you to come here and watch me." Caitlyn chewed on her lower lip. She could guess their plan. Let's keep an eye on Caitlyn and make sure she doesn't get killed.

Meredith laughed, a sweet, tinkling sound that echoed in Caitlyn's ears. She pulled the phone away from her ear until Meredith grew quiet.

"I miss my sister and want to see her. So do you want company or not?" Meredith asked.

"Yes, please come over."

"Wonderful! I'll be there shortly."

"I'll be here." Caitlyn sighed. *Whether I like it or not.*

She disconnected the call and snapped the phone closed, feeling a small sense of relief. With her sister here, Aidan couldn't seduce her.

The thought brought her up short. Her sister. Meredith was her sister. Not because someone else *said* she was, but because Caitlyn remembered her. Her memory was starting to return.

With a smile, she slid her phone back in her purse. Now that she knew Meredith was her sister, Caitlyn wanted to learn as much as she could from her.

Aidan peered out of the bathroom door and smiled.

"I see you're still here."

"Yes." She nodded.

Damn, he looked absolutely godlike with his hair slick from the shower, and his white T-shirt clinging to his damp chest. She drew in a deep breath, the fresh clean scent of his soap tickling her nose. A hunger started to burn, the kind she couldn't blame on a lack of food. She wanted him. She wanted him in a way that terrified her. And she wanted him over and over and over, until neither one of them could walk.

"Did Meredith call?"

"Meredith?" Caitlyn blinked, trying to erase the vivid images her mind had painted of Aidan's wet, naked flesh. "Um, yes. She's coming over."

"Good." He smiled again. "I thought you might feel more comfortable if we weren't alone."

"Thanks." Since when had he worried about her discomfort at being alone with him? This was a side of him that surprised her.

"Do you want to shower while you wait for her?"

“Yes, please.” She nodded gratefully.

“Just be careful. Leave the door cracked so I can hear you if you call.”

Caitlyn’s cheeks grew hot and she ducked her head. He wanted her to shower, to undress, without even a closed door between them?

“I don’t want you to pass out and drown in the shower.”

“Um, yeah.” She hesitated, plucking at her stained T-shirt. “I don’t have anything to change into. Would you have a pair of sweatpants and a shirt I could borrow?”

“Pick something out of that closet.” He pointed across the room. “It’s full of your clothes, remember.”

Remember? Hardly. Biting her tongue, Caitlyn waited for him to walk away.

“Did Meredith say if she was bringing Jake?” He looked as if he didn’t care either way, but his hand tightened on the doorknob until his knuckles were white.

“No, she didn’t say.” If Jake did come, Caitlyn hoped the men behaved. She didn’t want to referee a fight. They were like two male cats fighting over the same female. Only Aidan didn’t act as if he was attracted to Meredith, and she had eyes only for her husband. So why the hostility?

“Are you okay?” Aidan asked.

“Yes, thank you. I’ll be fine.”

Aidan nodded. “I’ll be right out in the kitchen if you need me.”

He gave her a quick smile before leaving the room, leaving the door partially open behind him. Caitlyn sighed. He was the sexiest man she’d ever met. Why did she keep resisting him?

Pushing aside those disconcerting thoughts, Caitlyn went to search the closet for something simple. After grabbing a pair of jeans and a shirt, she hurried to the bathroom.

“Caitlyn?” Meredith called out.

“Be there in a minute!” Caitlyn shouted.

Her stomach growled, reminding her she hadn’t eaten. She tugged on her shirt, hoping Meredith brought food. Even vampires had to eat.

“I’m in the living room!” Meredith said. “Hurry up. I sent Aidan down to the club to brood, so we can have some privacy.”

Sighing with relief, Caitlyn left the safety of the bathroom. She entered the living room, finding Meredith standing in front of the television, playing with the remote control.

Even though they were both dressed in jeans and plain cotton shirts, Meredith made Caitlyn feel shabby. She doubted her sister ever looked terrible. The woman would probably look glamorous no matter what.

"How are you doing?" Meredith asked, turning with a smile. She set the remote down and walked over to Caitlyn, giving her a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

"I'm fine." Caitlyn watched Meredith's expressive face fill with doubt. "I'd be better if I had all my memories back, but apparently Lucas is to blame for that."

Meredith's brows wrinkled and she tilted her head to one side, as if she were waiting for something. "What exactly happened? Spill it."

"You mean Aidan didn't fill you in?" Caitlyn stared at her in disbelief.

"Of course he did." Meredith laughed. "But I want to hear your version."

Caitlyn smoothed the hem of her shirt over the loose jeans while contemplating what to say. Meredith had already heard Aidan's version, anyway. What would be the harm in confiding in her sister? It wasn't as if she had many friends she could talk to about the situation.

"Have a seat." Caitlyn gestured toward the sofa. "There really isn't much point, since I don't remember anything. Aidan probably gave you the same version he gave me."

"Okay." Meredith sat down and patted the cushion next to her. "Why don't you tell me how you're holding up? It's got to be nice to finally have your family again."

"I don't trust any of you," Caitlyn said. She tried to ignore Meredith's wince. She didn't want Meredith to think she was just going to smile, nod her head and believe everything they said. "And I'm not sure I can ever trust Lucas or Aidan again."

Caitlyn sat next to her and told her everything. About waking from her coma and living with "Doctor Ted." She also told Meredith about the events she could remember from the past few days. After she finished, Caitlyn sat back and watched as Meredith adjusted to the news.

Meredith blinked back tears. "It's hard to believe. All this time, all these months, Aidan and I thought you were dead, but Lucas knew you were alive. He kept you safe, but hidden from the ones who could have helped you."

Caitlyn sighed, her chest tightening, as she remembered the long nights she'd lain awake wondering why no one ever stepped forward to claim her.

"Sorry." Meredith laughed, grabbing some tissues, and drying her tears. "Let's blame it on my hormones."

"Your hormones? Are you pregnant?"

Meredith nodded, rubbing a hand on her belly. "Yes, although I'm not showing yet."

"That's great! Congratulations!" Caitlyn leaned close and hugged Meredith. "Wow, an instant family, and now I'm going to be an aunt!"

"Yes." Meredith's smile faded as something flickered in her eyes. "But let's not talk about babies. I want to talk about you and what you've been doing."

"Okay, but we talk babies later."

Meredith rose and walked back over to the television. "Or better yet, we can watch a movie and hang out. I brought a few videos. Sound good?"

"Depends on what you brought." Caitlyn relaxed on the sofa, propping her feet on the coffee table. For the first time in a long time, she felt comfortable, and happy.

"I thought we could have a Dracula fest."

"What?" Caitlyn sat up quickly. "You're kidding, right?"

"No." Meredith pointed to a stack of movies on top of the VCR. "I've got some vampire movies, a mix of horror and comedies. I thought they might cheer you up."

"Vampire movies will cheer me up?"

"Well, sure, why not?"

Caitlyn shrugged and eyed a paper bag lying on the coffee table. "Okay, I'm game, but do you have anything to eat? Please tell me you brought comfort food. Aidan hasn't fed me yet." Caitlyn grinned as her stomach growled.

"Sorry, I don't have much in there." Meredith nodded toward the table. "But help yourself."

"Breath mints!" Caitlyn grumbled, digging through the bag. "Where are the chocolates? The high in fat and cholesterol foods? What kind of a pregnant woman are you?"

Meredith stared at Caitlyn with her eyebrows forming a V. "You must be starving. When's the last time you fed?"

Caitlyn clapped her hand over her mouth. "I forgot you're one, too. You act so normal."

"We all act normal, Caitlyn. Every single one of us." Meredith laughed and walked over to the sofa. "Go get something to eat so we can start the movie fest."

"I can't imagine spending my whole life in the dark and having to drink blood to survive."

"It's not as bad as you think." Meredith popped a tape in the VCR and hit play. "Okay, let's have some fun."

* * * * *

It was dark, but Caitlyn could see everything clearly.

"What am I doing here?" she asked, her voice echoing in the empty room.

There were no pictures on the walls, no furniture, and no sign of life, not even a mouse or spider.

"Where am I? How did I get here?" she whispered, spinning around in a slow circle.
"Whose house is this, and why isn't anyone here?"

When no one answered, Caitlyn walked into the hallway. She looked to the left and saw the front door. She started toward it, wanting to leave, but something tugged at her, calling her back.

Turning around, Caitlyn continued down the hall. She reached out, trailing her fingernails along the wall. There were empty spaces, the wallpaper less faded, where paintings once hung. She looked down. The floor, too, held evidence that not long ago, rugs had been scattered throughout the hallway.

As she approached a curved staircase, shivers ran up her spine. She placed her foot on the bottom step and her stomach lurched. Trembling, she took another step, a light sweat breaking out on her chilled skin.

Something terrible was about to happen. She could feel it. She could almost taste her own terror as she hesitated, her hand tightly clenching the banister.

There was a reason she was here, and she wasn't going to let her own fears keep her from going up the stairs. Gathering her courage, Caitlyn started to climb.

Unscathed, she reached the top landing and peered back down at the first floor. The whole house was still eerily quiet, yet she sensed something had changed.

The skin on the back of her neck prickled with the sensation she was being watched.

With a sigh, she faced the dark hall once more. Was something waiting for her? There was only one way to find out. Caitlyn walked softly down the hall, peering into an empty room on her left. The upstairs was as desolate as the downstairs, only it was darker, and she couldn't see as well as she had a few minutes ago.

A light breeze brushed past her right shoulder, as a shadow slithered and danced across the floor. Stifling a scream, Caitlyn pulled her sneaker back, as several of them shimmered on the floor in front of her.

Shadows. They're just shadows. They can't hurt you. Even so, they terrified her. They belonged to something she couldn't see. Something that was moving around over her head.

Shivering, she took a deep breath and forced herself to continue. There was no way she was going to look up, and she wasn't going to risk going down those stairs with something evil behind her. It was probably waiting for her to run so it could push her, make her fall to her death.

With each step, her feet grew heavier, her movements more sluggish and difficult. She drew in shallow breaths. Was it just fear making it hard to breathe, or something more?

The air thickened, tightening around her throat like a vise. A large shadow slithered over her, leaving a chilling coldness in its wake. Fighting the urge to flee, she kept moving, trying to ignore the pounding of her heart, which echoed in her ears.

She didn't recognize the house, but somehow she knew she'd been here before. That same knowledge told her the other rooms were empty. Someone, or something, was waiting for her in last room.

With each step, the pounding of her heart increased. Caitlyn held her breath as she forced her leaden feet to continue the journey. Footsteps echoed in the hall behind her as she reached out her hand to grab the doorknob. Before she could grab it, an icy breeze rushed through her, chilling her to the bone.

Caitlyn sensed something was in the room waiting, so what was trying to keep her out? Did the greater evil lay inside, or out here tormenting her?

"I'm opening this door," Caitlyn shouted.

She reached out, her hand locking on the knob. Electricity shot out of the knob and burned a path up her arm.

Caitlyn gasped with pain, but held tight, pushing on the door. It swung slowly open, creakingly loudly. Rubbing her tingling palm, Caitlyn peered inside.

Faster than she could scream, something rushed out of the room, sweeping her off the floor and carrying her back up the hallway. Caitlyn fought fiercely, swinging her legs and arms, trying to break free from her invisible attacker.

Without warning, whatever held her in its grip released her. Screaming, Caitlyn grabbed for something, anything, to stop her fall, but her hands encountered nothing but thin air.

"Caitlyn?"

The voice sounded as if it came from far away. Moaning, Caitlyn turned toward its source. Strong arms wrapped around her, bringing her a sense of warmth and peace. Whatever had happened earlier, she was safe now.

"Caitlyn, are you okay?" Panic tinged Aidan's voice.

She shuddered, recalling her dream. What had attacked her? And what had she been doing in that house? Was her subconscious trying to tell her something?

"I was dreaming," she mumbled, eyes fluttering as she tried to open them.

"Are you okay? You're ice-cold." Aidan briskly rubbed his hands on her arms.

"Tired. I'm so tired."

"Shall I send for Lucas?"

"No, no. I'm fine." She opened her eyes and squinted up at Aidan. *"Can you turn off the lights?"*

Aidan waved his hand and the lights dimmed.

"Thanks." Rubbing her eyes, she sat up. *"I wish you had let me sleep. My subconscious was trying to tell me something. What it was I don't know, but it was important."*

"Do you want to tell me about your dream?"

"I was in a house," she said, turning to face him. She hesitated when she realized she was in his bed again.

"Go on."

"No, wait. What am I doing in your bed? I went to sleep on your sofa."

"I know. You were so tired, you didn't even stir when I carried you in here."

"Where's Meredith?"

"She went home. You can't expect a woman in her condition to sleep on my recliner, no matter how comfortable it is." Aidan brushed his fingers against her cheek in a gentle caress.

"You had no right to bring me in here."

"Shhh," he said, his voice soft and soothing. "I slept in the living room. I only came in here when I heard you shouting."

Caitlyn glanced toward the door and then looked at him, raising her eyebrows. "You have awfully good hearing."

"All of my senses are sharper than a normal human's. I could smell your fear and hear you calling out. I could sense you, even over a great distance, because we are soulmates. That's why I couldn't let you go. Your brother has very effective shields."

"But --"

"Shhh," he whispered, and pressed his lips against hers before she could protest. Caitlyn turned her head, twisting away, but Aidan continued his assault on her cheek and chin, before placing soft kisses down the length of her neck.

Caitlyn gasped, trembling in awareness, as his tongue flicked out and traced a line across the front of her throat. Her nipples hardened in instant reaction. A low moan escaped from her slightly parted lips.

He smiled, the soft friction of his mouth rubbing against her skin. Caitlyn wanted to purr like a cat, to give in to desire and make Aidan fulfill his unspoken promise. The promise clearly written in his deep green eyes. The one that said, "Come to bed with me and I'll show you how much pleasure I can give you."

Caitlyn ignored the inner voice begging her to save herself from certain destruction. She slid her hand off her lap and ran her palm up his hard thigh. Aidan shuddered, his muscles tightening under her touch. Smiling, she leaned into him, delighting in the power she had over him. She tugged his shirt up, driven by the need to touch his bare skin, caressed his hard abdomen.

With a groan, Aidan buried his face in her hair. "Caitlyn, My beautiful, sweet Caitlyn."

Fisting her free hand in his thick tresses, Caitlyn drew his face up and met his mouth with hers, devouring him with a hunger that drew an answering response from Aidan. Head spinning, she took a few quick panting breaths and then renewed the kiss. Matching his passion and challenging him, she took what he gave and urged him on. One mind-numbing kiss after another.

Aidan tugged her into his arms and she went willingly, pressing her breasts against him eagerly.

"Please," she whispered, unsure what she was asking for, but certain she wanted him with a ferocity that drove away all her fears.

He nipped at her lips and then soothed the small pain away with his tongue. Her stomach clenched, tightening into a hot knot of desire.

When his lips burned a path down her neck and he nuzzled her, she thought she'd come without even having sex. He dragged his tongue across her pulse. Her heart stopped, stuttered, then beat rapidly. Oh God, was he going to bite her? Did she care? She should protest, or at least make an attempt to stop him, but she didn't want to.

"My darling," Aidan murmured, rubbing his lips against her carotid, his teeth grazing against her sensitive skin, sending shock waves through her.

"Wait," she said, pulling back, trying to shake off the sensual haze he'd engulfed her in.

"I've waited long enough. Let me taste you."

"I just can't."

"Caitlyn, listen to me, love. You are my wife. I love you with all my heart. I'll never hurt you."

He leaned close to her, his warm breath tickling her cheek. She knew it was a mistake even as she looked into his eyes. His brilliant green gaze ensnared her every time, and now was no exception. He reached out, cupping her cheek. Caitlyn leaned into his soft caress, and his thumb brushed against her cheek. With a sigh, she closed her eyes and smiled.

"I love you, Caitlyn."

When his mouth met hers, she kissed him eagerly, her hands moving of their own accord to clutch his shoulders. His lips brushed against her ear, then moved down her neck to her carotid. His tongue flicked once against her skin, sending a tremor racing through her.

With a low moan, Caitlyn tilted her head to give him better access. He stroked her with his warm, wet tongue, and then pulled back, blowing lightly on her neck, sending another shiver up her spine.

An odd sensation swept through Caitlyn. Her jaw tingled, and so did her fingers. What the hell?

"Stop!" She gasped and tasted blood as she bit her tongue.

"Stop?" Aidan pulled back breathlessly and stared at her. "Are you serious?"

"Yes." Caitlyn pushed him away and felt around her mouth with her tongue. How odd. Was she turning into a vampire?

"I can't take much more of your games, Caitlyn. I'm a man with needs. Large needs." Aidan walked over his dresser and pulled out clothes at random.

Well, damn, she'd done it now. Managed to push him away. Why did his withdrawal bother her so much? Wasn't it what she wanted?

"I'm going to shower." He walked out and slammed the door with enough force to rattle the mirror above the dresser.

Caitlyn glanced at the now crooked mirror. She leaned forward to straighten it, gazing at her reflection. Dark circles rimmed puffy eyes, and her cheekbones protruded, but otherwise she looked normal enough. Curious, Caitlyn smiled revealing a straight row of white teeth.

"See, you're fine."

She started to turn away, when she had another vision, this time with her eyes open. Mesmerized, she stared at her reflection, watching as her teeth grew longer, forming fangs. Another figure appeared beside her in the mirror. Aidan. The image in the mirror smiled gleefully before sinking its teeth into his neck.

Shuddering, Caitlyn looked away, losing the vision. What did this mean? She needed somewhere quiet so she could think. She glanced around the room, spotting her purse on Aidan's nightstand. Quickly, she crossed the room and picked it up.

"Going somewhere?" Aidan asked from the doorway.

Caitlyn gasped and spun around, clutching her purse to her chest. He must have set a new world record for the quickest shower ever.

"I just wanted something out of my purse and you startled me," Caitlyn lied.

"You looked as if you were sneaking around."

"Sneaking? Me? You're the one who is sneaky," she said, hoping to distract him.

Slowly, she stood up and walked toward the bedroom door. Caitlyn hoped he would let her pass.

"Where are you going?" Aidan demanded harshly, his gaze lowering to her purse.

"I want to put on some make-up. The lights in your bathroom are better than the ones in here."

"The bathroom's the other way," he reminded her. "I'll be in the living room. We need to talk."

Caitlyn nodded, forcing a smile. Aidan answered her with a frown, shook his head, then turned and left. With a sigh, Caitlyn retreated to the bathroom to put on her make-up. Apparently, he wasn't going to make it easy for her to slip out.

Chapter Eighteen

Caitlyn tiptoed down the carpeted hallway. She glanced into the bedroom, noticed it was empty, and continued forward. When she reached the living room, she peered in, relieved to find that room empty as well. With a sigh, she stepped into the kitchen.

“What are you doing?” Aidan whispered from behind her.

Caitlyn let out an earsplitting scream and turned around swinging her purse into Aidan’s chest.

“My God, woman. It’s just me.” Aidan winced, holding his hands over his ears.

“I see,” Caitlyn said. She put a hand over her thundering heart as she tried to catch her breath.

“What are you doing sneaking around again?”

“I was looking for food. You neglected to feed me yesterday.” Her stomach chose that moment to growl. Caitlyn smiled and crossed her arms. “See? I’m hungry.”

Immediately, Aidan looked concerned. “I sent Adam out for some food so there should be plenty of stuff in the fridge. Why don’t you dig around while I go down and check on the club?”

“Okay.” Caitlyn smiled. Good, let him leave. She could grab some food before she split. She rifled through the fridge and cupboards, looking for something she could eat quickly and that would fill her up.

A package of doughnuts sat on the table next to a bowl of fruit. Caitlyn grabbed a doughnut, trying not to be pleased that Aidan remembered her fondness for them. She finished off the first one and reached for another to take with her. She hesitated, then exchanged the doughnut for an apple.

She left the kitchen, intentionally not shutting off the lights. Should Aidan return soon, perhaps he'd be fooled into thinking she was still eating.

She crept down the hall, listening for the elevator, praying Aidan would run into a distraction downstairs. She needed a head start to get away, but more than that, she needed some quiet time to absorb everything.

Caitlyn bit into the apple and bypassed the elevator. It would be too loud, and she couldn't take a chance on someone hearing her come down. She opened the door to the stairwell and hurried down the steps, grateful her shoes didn't squeak on the tiles.

When she reached the bottom door, Caitlyn put her ear against it, listening for any sound that might indicate someone was nearby. Hearing nothing, she pushed on the bar and opened it an inch, holding her breath, listening again.

Hearing nothing but silence, she peeked around the door. Mercifully, the hall was empty. Even so, she pushed the door open slowly and double-checked before leaving the safety of the stairwell.

Satisfied the way was clear, Caitlyn closed the door quietly and then made a beeline for the back door only a few feet away.

"Time to make a break for it," she whispered, opening the door and slipping outside.

The door shut behind her with a quiet click. Caitlyn started down the alley, but made it no more than a few steps when she realized she wasn't alone.

Before she could turn, someone grabbed her from behind. Digging large hands into her shoulders, her attacker slammed her against the cold brick wall.

Grunting, Caitlyn tried to fight back, kicking her feet and twisting in his arms. She dropped her apple, and clenched her hands into fists, trying to break free. He cursed and rammed his full weight into her, banging her head hard, face forward, against the bricks.

With her vision spinning and her head throbbing, Caitlyn tried to catch her breath, but her attacker pressed into her, pinning her so she couldn't turn her head to look at him.

"Finally," he whispered harshly in her ear.

She recognized his whisper and panicked, bits and pieces of ugly memories rushing back at her. The sound of his evil laughter, how his hands felt, wrapped around her throat.

Aidan's hands. Lucas had been right all along.

I'm going to die. Oh, God, I've been so stupid. She'd let her desire overrule her common sense.

"Finally, I have you all to myself."

Caitlyn struggled to turn around as his laughter echoed in the alley all around her.

"You had me alone in your apartment. Why didn't you just kill me then? Why'd you wait?"

"If I killed you in my apartment, then they would know it was me."

Caitlyn shook her head. "They will still know it's you. They already suspect you."

She took a deep breath to cry out, but he closed his hands around her throat and squeezed. Prying at his fingers, Caitlyn struggled for a breath. Her vision blurred, black spots swimming in front of her.

"Don't yell, my sweet." He loosened the fingers on one hand and he caressed her throat slowly. Caitlyn took advantage of the reprieve and drew in several deep breaths. She would have fallen to her knees if he hadn't wedged her between him and the wall.

"You ..." She coughed, her throat was too sore and bruised to speak.

"Shhh, I don't want any interruptions this time."

His hand tightened again, cutting off the little breath she'd been able to draw into her tortured lungs.

Oh God, oh God. She closed her eyes, trying to think. His hot breath fanned the back of her neck. He released his tight grip and cupped a hand over her mouth and nose, tilting her head and exposing her neck. She tried to plead for him to stop, but one hand was wrapped around her throat like a vise and the other over her mouth, preventing her from making a sound.

"I already killed your parents. Now you. Guess who's next?"

Meredith and Lucas! Caitlyn renewed her struggle. There was no way in hell he was going to kill her and then go after the only family she had. Not now. Not when she'd finally found them again.

"Meredith or Lucas. Either one." Aidan chuckled. "Do you want to pick which one I kill next?"

She whimpered as he lowered his mouth to her neck, grazing her flesh with his fangs.

"Thank you for making this so easy for me."

No! Caitlyn tried to shake her head. Aidan loved her. Why would he attack her? She arched her back in pain as he fed greedily.

Caitlyn stopped struggling, trying to conserve her energy while she looked for his weakness. She had to get free and warn her family.

"No!" Caitlyn cried out, twisting to the side, concern for her family giving her strength. "Not again."

She must have caught him off guard, because she easily slipped out of his grasp. She raced for the street, hoping to get out of the alley and into a crowded public place before he could catch her.

A loud thump against the back door to the club startled her. Had he gone back inside? Was he giving up so easily?

She glanced back. The alley was empty. Her sneakers slid on loose gravel, and she crashed into a shadowy figure.

Strong arms wrapped around her. Making her body go limp, Caitlyn twisted and rammed her elbow into her captor's stomach. She pulled, twisting free.

"Caitlyn!"

She froze and looked up into Jake's dark gaze. "Oh, thank God." She sobbed, grabbing onto him in relief. "Meredith -- where is she? You need to protect her."

"Are you okay?" Jake asked, pulling her closer. "And what about Meredith?"

"Is she all right? Where is she?"

"She's at the café. Caitlyn, are you okay?" Jake repeated.

"The café? Thank God. You can't let her leave there alone."

"Caitlyn?" He shook her. "Look at me. Are you okay?"

"Am I okay?" She shook her head. Why did he keep asking her that? She glanced down at herself, and his concern over her condition became clear. She looked as if she'd just left a battlefield. Her clothes were torn and covered in blood. No wonder Jake kept asking her if she was okay.

"You're bleeding." Jake dabbed at her neck, his hand coming away covered in blood.

"Well, he bit me." Caitlyn swiped at the wound, her stomach rolling when she touched something warm, wet, and sticky. She swayed and would have fallen if Jake hadn't tightened his hold on her arms.

"We need to get you cleaned up. I can't believe Aidan let this happen."

Puzzled, she looked up into Jake's eyes. Hadn't he seen Aidan, as well? Or had he entered the alley too late?

"Want me to take you inside?"

"No!" she screamed. "I'm fine now. Please get me out of here before he comes back."

"Who? Caitlyn, who did this to you?" Jake leaned down and looked at her closely. She knew the second he figured out what happened because his eyes narrowed and he looked at the back door.

"Aidan. I knew he'd try again. I told Meredith to warn you."

"Please, Jake, just get me out of here before he comes back."

"I can't just take you and leave. He'll just follow us. Let me go after him and finish this now, once and for all."

"Jake," Caitlyn sobbed. "I can't. We have to go make sure Meredith is safe. What if he's already on his way to the café?"

"Okay," Jake said. "I'll take you to Meredith and make sure you're both safe. Then I'm going after Aidan."

Caitlyn half ran and half let Jake drag her down the alley to his car. Jake helped her into the car, then went around to the driver side and climbed in.

“Caitlyn!” Aidan shouted.

Jake started the car. Caitlyn tried not to look, but something made her turn toward the window.

“Where are you going?” Aidan banged on the glass with his fists.

Screaming, Caitlyn flinched away. “Get me out of here, Jake. Please get me out of here now!”

With a screech of tires, Jake pulled out into traffic and shot down the street, ignoring blasts from car horns. He took the next turn tightly, and Caitlyn grabbed onto the armrest, praying they’d make it to the café in one piece.

“Think we can get to Meredith before he does?” Caitlyn gasped out between prayers. Right now she’d be thankful to be in even Muhammad’s cab.

“We should. She should be there for a good hour, and he can’t hurt her in front of witnesses. I still think you should have let me take care of him. I could have defeated him.”

“Jake.” Caitlyn ducked as he whizzed through a red light. “You’re going to kill us!”

“Nah, even if I wrecked, we’d still survive. Takes more than a little car crash to kill a vampire. You’re funny when you’re hysterical.”

“I’m not hysterical,” she said, in between gasping for air.

“Good, because there’s something you should know about Aidan.”

“I already know everything I need to. I’m his wife, only I can’t remember him. Perhaps he wants to kill me before I can remember? And one moment he claims to love me, and the next he tries to kill me.”

Jake’s glanced in her direction. “You really don’t remember anything, do you?”

“No, I can’t remember anything. I’m supposed to know you, Meredith, Aidan, Lucas, and Adam. I can’t remember who I am, let alone who my husband and family are.”

Caitlyn raised a hand to her neck, touching the spot where Aidan had bit her. She rubbed the wound, brushing away the dried, crusty blood until her fingers and neck began to tingle.

“Let me tell you more about Aidan before we get to the café.”

Caitlyn turned toward Jake. He stared ahead at the road, hands gripped tightly onto the steering wheel. His jaw clenched and his nostrils flared in anger she could feel vibrating in the air between them.

“Jake?”

“I think Aidan tried to kill you so he could assume leadership. We do things a little differently than humans. Your mother was our leader, and upon her death, the leadership passed to her eldest daughter. If anything happened to that daughter -- you - then it would pass to the next eldest daughter, Meredith.”

“Wait.” Caitlyn rubbed her neck again. “What are you talking about?”

"Your mother was the leader of the vampires of the northeastern part of the United States."

"But then how is Aidan ruling? And what was he talking about when he told me about this young female in whom he had great hopes?"

"He was probably referring to Isabel. She rules the southwestern coast of the United States. Aidan is ruling temporarily because our ancestors set thing up that way to protect our females. When the leader dies, her husband takes over until things settle down. Then, the eldest female of the family relieves him of his duty. If there is no female, then a substitute female is chosen. She rules until another female is born into the original family."

"This is so confusing." Caitlyn felt as if she was drowning in all the information.

"With your mother dead, your father would have ruled until the mourning period was over and you could take control. Since he was dead, it went straight to you. Because we thought you died, Aidan became the temporary leader until Meredith was ready to take over. During her pregnancy though, Meredith cannot rule, so Aidan still holds the power. In fact, he's been in charge since you disappeared."

Jake took another turn at breakneck speed, leaving Caitlyn breathless with fear. She wondered if she'd live long enough for Aidan to find her and kill her.

"I think he planned to kill you, and then Meredith. He would blame me and get me out of his way. Then, only Lucas would stand in his way.

"Aidan's been enjoying himself. When you disappeared, he not only assumed leadership, but he refused to hand it over to Meredith. Right now, with Meredith pregnant, I should have been ruling. With your reappearance, leadership reverts back to you, though. He can no longer rule. But with you dead, again, he can. At least until Meredith has her baby."

"Why can't she rule if she's pregnant?" Caitlyn asked, focusing on Jake's words.

"Our women have a higher rate of miscarriages than humans. Very high. In fact, we have a higher stillborn rate, as well. We frequently lose not only the baby, but the mother, too. Consequently, we cherish our pregnant women and they are not allowed to endanger themselves in any way. As a leader, a woman would be the prime target for any violence."

"I thought you weren't violent."

"We're not, as a rule, but look at what has happened to Aidan. The power has gone to his head and no one is safe until he is dead."

"But Meredith is safe as long as I'm still alive. Right?"

"I don't know if he's thinking logically anymore, Caitlyn. How many women has he killed since you vanished? What purpose did their deaths serve?" Jake snorted in disgust.

"But yes, as far as Meredith is concerned. He has no reason to kill her. Yet."

"What the hell?" Aidan cursed, glaring after the sleek black car. What the hell was Jake doing here? And why had Caitlyn gone off with him, acting as if she were afraid of her own shadow? He could still picture the look on her face, and the way she'd flinched away from him, when he'd banged on the window.

"Aidan?" Adam put his hand on Aidan's shoulder. "What are you doing out here?"

"That bastard just drove off with Caitlyn. Why would she leave the apartment and go with him? She knows the Slasher is after her."

"What's going on?" Lucas asked. Aidan turned his head toward the alley with a frown.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"She cried out for help. What did you do to her?"

Aidan's hands fisted at his sides. What the hell was Lucas saying? "I didn't do anything to her! In fact, she's not here. Jake drove off with her not even a minute ago."

"Why'd you let her leave? She hasn't gotten her memory back yet, has she?"

"I didn't *let* her leave, and I don't even know *why* she left. One minute she was looking for food in the kitchen, the next she's driving off God knows where with *him*."

"What did you do to her? You must have done something," Lucas said.

"I didn't do anything!" Aidan turned away. "I'm going after her."

Adam grabbed him before he could move. With a growl, Aidan shook him off.

"Aidan, where did all that blood come from?" Lucas asked, taking a few steps closer.

Aidan froze, eyes narrowing. "What blood?"

Lucas nodded. "On your clothes, and behind you, on the wall near the door."

Aidan turned, his heart pounding. Had Jake forced Caitlyn into the car with him?

Aidan paused to sniff the air. There wasn't much blood on the ground, but there was plenty smeared on the wall. He didn't need to examine it more closely to know it was Caitlyn's.

"Jake must be the Slasher!" Aidan turned around, baring his fangs. "He attacked her in the alley, heard me coming and took off with her to finish the job."

"Why are *you* covered in blood, then?" Lucas crossed his arms and stared at him.

"Because *I* was fighting a termuvin that managed to find its way inside the club. This is my blood."

"You expect me to believe that?" Lucas snorted.

"Yes, look at my arm. Dammit, you're a vampire. Take a whiff. Can't you smell it's not your sister's blood? And we wouldn't even be in this situation if it weren't for you. You're the one who decided it was in his sister's best interests to wipe the memories of her husband away!"

"*You* promised she would be safe here. *You* said this place was impenetrable. How could a termuvin get inside?" Lucas's voice rose in an angry wave.

"I don't know, dammit!"

"Why did you let her go with him?" Adam asked.

Aidan turned on Adam. "I didn't *let* her go anywhere. Jake was driving away when I reached to the car."

"Aidan, listen to me," Lucas said, stepping closer. "Something happened, and I don't know what. But you are covered in blood and so is this alley. Why would Caitlyn leave with someone instead of running to you for help? Tell me the truth. Tell me why I shouldn't turn you over to the protectors now."

"I was inside fighting the termuvin. I called for help. Adam came and helped me fight it until it fled through the back door. When I heard Caitlyn's voice, I ran toward the street in time to see her getting in a car with Jake."

"Did he force her into the car?"

Aidan paused, frowning. He replayed the scene in his mind. "No, she was leaning on him, and he helped her into the passenger side, then he hurried around to the other side, and got in."

"So she was attacked in the alley and left with Jake. Maybe he responded to her call like I did, Aidan."

"But how? He shouldn't be linked with her."

"Meredith is," Adam said quietly.

"The question, Aidan, is if she was attacked, why were you the only one who didn't hear her cry for help? Why would she block you?"

"What are you getting at? Aidan would never hurt Caitlyn." Adam growled. "Let's just go get Jake and kill him."

"No," Lucas said harshly, grabbing Adam's arm. "We'll find them and ask Caitlyn what happened."

"You believe me?" Aidan stared at Lucas.

"Yes, I do. The blood on you isn't hers. You're right. If you'd attacked her, some of that blood would be hers."

"So much for your faith in me."

"At least he believes you," Adam said. "Others might not."

Aidan turned away. He shifted into an owl and flew off into the sky, not bothering to see if Adam and Lucas followed him. He didn't care how weak the sun would make him. He had to find Caitlyn. Even if Jake had saved her from the Slasher, Aidan planned on getting her back immediately. Her place was at his side.

A short flight later, Aidan landed in a copse of trees behind Jake and Meredith's home. After a few moments, Adam and Lucas joined him. Aidan shook his head, glancing around the vacant driveway. "She's not here."

"No one is here," Lucas said.

Adam scouted around the perimeters of the old Victorian house.

"Well, where the hell are they?" Aidan fought the urge to storm in the house and tear it apart. The only thing holding him back was the knowledge that Caitlyn wasn't here. Aidan couldn't smell her.

Damn him. Aidan growled again. Adam's steady hand on his arm was the only thing that kept him from losing control. Taking several deep breaths, Aidan tried to calm himself.

As he was debating the merits of calling the protectors, he heard a car in the distance. Finally. They were returning.

"If she's even scratched, Jake is dead. Hell, he's dead anyway, once this is over."

Adam nodded and closed his mouth. As the trio walked over to the porch, both men flanked Aidan, giving him a show of support for which he was grateful. Maybe Lucas would redeem himself yet.

The car squealed to a stop a few feet from the house. Aidan could see Jake, Meredith, and Caitlyn arguing inside the car. After a moment Jake got out, slammed his door, and walked over to meet them.

"Get off my property," he snarled.

"Not without my wife," Aidan snarled back, baring his fangs for good measure.

"Damn, I was hoping you'd say 'Over my dead body.' But I'm going to kill you anyway."

"Guys." Lucas stepped forward. "Knock it off. Jake, we came for my sister."

"You guys don't know yet, do you?" Jake smiled, revealing his fangs. "Aidan didn't tell you everything that happened earlier, did he?"

"What are you talking about?" Lucas frowned and looked at Aidan.

"I told them everything. What are you doing with my wife? I want her. Now." Aidan tried to push past Jake to get to Caitlyn.

"She's fine." Jake refused to budge. "But I can't say the same for you after the protectors get here."

"You've called a meeting?" Aidan roared. "You have no authority to call any meetings!"

"Caitlyn does."

"What happened to her?" Aidan asked. "Is she okay?"

"I'm fine now," Caitlyn answered, climbing out of the car with Meredith.

"What happened to you? I told you to stay in the apartment. Why did you leave?"

"You tried to kill me." Caitlyn frowned. She rubbed her throat gently. "But then, you already know this."

"Tried to kill you? *I* tried to kill you?"

"Is there an echo out here?" Jake laughed harshly. "Now can I kill him, Caitlyn?"

"Wait! Why would you think I tried to kill you?" Aidan reached for her. Caitlyn shrieked and jerked back. Meredith stepped between them, standing in front of her protectively.

"Caitlyn!" Aidan tried to move around Meredith.

Without warning, Jake pounced on him, his claws digging into Aidan's stomach. Aidan grunted and retaliated, ramming his fist into Jake's chin. Lucas grabbed onto Jake, pulling him away from Aidan as Adam grabbed onto Aidan. He roared, flexing his back and throwing Adam off. Then he charged at Jake.

"Stop it! Please, just stop now!" Caitlyn screamed.

Aidan paused, looking at her in frustration. "Caitlyn, what is going on?"

"Lucas, leave Jake alone. He's only trying to protect me. When I was in the alley earlier I was attacked by the Slasher. Aidan *is* the Slasher. He tried to kill me last year, and he tried again today."

"Me?" Aidan took a step forward, shrugging off Adam's restraining hand. "I would never have tried to kill you. Not once, not twice. I was fighting with a termuvin that got into my club somehow. I've never had anything breach my club before."

He reached for Caitlyn, frowning as she backed away. Shaking her head, she took several more steps back, away from all of them.

My God. Did she really believe he'd tried to kill her?

"He's lying." Her voice shook as she spoke.

What had happened to make her think he was the Slasher?

"Caitlyn, I helped Aidan get rid of the termuvin. I fought him. He couldn't have been outside attacking you and inside with me," Adam said.

"What?" She shook her head, frowning. "You're just trying to confuse me. I know what I saw and heard. Aidan tried to kill me. There's no mistake about it -- he is the Slasher."

"No," Lucas said. "He can't be. We've already discussed this thoroughly. You helped convince me of his innocence."

"I was wrong."

"Why do you continue to deny it, Aidan?" Jake stepped closer to him. "Even the humans knew it was you. But like us, no one could prove it. Until now, that is."

"It wasn't me." Aidan ran a hand through his hair. How could the Slasher have assumed his physical image?

“Adam, Lucas, since you’re protectors I expect you two to take him into custody. Come on, do your duty.”

“Jake.” Adam shook his head. “I’m sorry, but I was with Aidan. He couldn’t have attacked her.”

“You’re just lying to protect your brother.”

Lucas frowned and lifted his hands in the air. “I think calling the protectors in to deal with this is wise. I also think we should probe Caitlyn’s memories. Unless you have something to hide,” he added, turning to look at her.

Caitlyn hesitated. She looked at Aidan. He could see the pain etched in her cloudy green eyes, and in her wary stance. She was truly terrified.

“Go ahead and pick my head. I know what I saw and heard. Let them see it, too.” She gestured toward the others.

Chapter Nineteen

"This is ridiculous. We shouldn't have left Caitlyn with Jake," Adam said. "There aren't any clues here anymore, anyway."

Aidan glanced around the alley before looking up at the sky. "I think Caitlyn is safe for the moment. Whoever the Slasher is, he wants Caitlyn to think it's me."

"So her memories are genuine then, not implanted."

Aidan turned, frowning at Adam. "Of course they aren't implanted. The Slasher wouldn't have had enough time to implant anything."

"But why does the Slasher want her to think *you* are trying to kill her?"

"That's the million-dollar question. Why would someone want Caitlyn to think I'm trying to kill her?"

"Because he wants her to run away from you, so he can get her alone."

"Exactly." Aidan grinned, flashing his fangs.

"So, is it Jake?"

"I don't know," Lucas answered slowly.

"We have to find out how many vampires know this kind of magic and have the power to use it this well." Aidan looked down the alley. "We don't know who the Slasher is, or who he will impersonate next."

"Why'd you leave her with Jake, then?" Adam asked.

"Because she was terrified of me, and he did save her from the Slasher. I'm sure he'll do everything in his power to keep her safe. He knows I'd kill him if anything happened to her. Besides, it would have been nearly impossible to get her here and keep her safe. Do you propose I keep her here like a prisoner?"

"Until the Slasher is found? Yes."

"I can't do that. She feels safe with Jake right now. I'm calling a meeting of those we trust, and then we're going to stake out Jake's home. Let's go." Aidan turned and headed for the back door.

"I still don't understand why she didn't know it wasn't you." Adam followed Aidan inside.

"If someone has the power to make her hear my voice, and can assume my appearance, I wonder what else they are capable of." Aidan glanced at Lucas quickly.

"Remember, whoever killed my parents gained entrance to the house and caught them off guard. It's obvious the Slasher is more powerful and intelligent than we gave him credit for. If he hadn't been interrupted today, Caitlyn would have died, and you would have been found guilty of her murder."

"How could that be?" Adam asked. "We know Aidan didn't try to kill her."

"But no one else does." Lucas frowned. "Once we figure out why my parents died, and why someone is targeting the rest of the family, we'll know who the killer is."

"How do we do that?" Adam asked.

Aidan sighed. "Call a meeting. The Black Room. One hour."

Aidan stood in the shadows of his club watching as people partied around him. The band was a new one, but very popular with this crowd. There were a lot of punks, but it pleased Aidan to see how well the humans and vampires got along.

He shifted his gaze to the front door as two young men entered. They looked around the club before approaching the bar. They spoke to Gregory, then headed toward the stage. Aidan watched them knock on a side door to gain admittance in back. Aidan looked at Gregory, and the bartender nodded once, then spoke to Micah and Joshua, his co-workers.

Aidan pushed off the wall and walked through the crowd to the stage door. He waited for Gregory to join him then knocked twice.

Adam opened the door and let them in. "Everyone is here," he said.

Aidan and Gregory followed him down a dark hallway and into the Black Room. Aidan likened the meeting place to a black hole. Whatever the protectors did in there stayed in there. The room was protected against both human and magical surveillance and eavesdropping. No one would learn what happened behind these closed doors unless someone betrayed them, breaking the blood oath.

"I've filled everyone in," Adam said as Aidan and Gregory entered the room.

"Good." Aidan closed the door and watched as Gregory took up his usual place in front of it. No one and nothing could get past Gregory -- neither in, nor out. Satisfied their meeting would be secure, he greeted his trusted protectors.

“Gentlemen and Veronica.” He nodded toward the first woman to make the high honor of protector. Wasting no time, Aidan began to talk, filling them in on Caitlyn’s return, Lucas’s reappearance, and the attacks.

As he spoke, Aidan watched them all for their reactions. They all exhibited signs of shock at the resurgence of the termuvins, and the continued attacks on Caitlyn. Everyone congratulated him on finding his wife, and they vowed to help him keep her safe and find the killer.

“Why isn’t Caitlyn here now?” Veronica spoke up. “As the head of the Northeast Legion, she should be here.”

Aidan frowned. “Didn’t you listen to me? She has amnesia. She can’t remember who or what she is. Didn’t she explain that at the meeting she called?”

“Caitlyn didn’t call a meeting.”

He looked at Adam. “Jake told us that she did. After this last attack, she no longer trusts me.”

“Why should we trust you?”

“You shouldn’t. Feel free to keep a close eye on me, as well. But I love my wife, and I want her back and unharmed. I don’t trust Jake to keep her and Meredith safe. I want his house watched. I want all three of them watched. If something happens to Caitlyn, Meredith is next. Or Lucas.”

Lucas stood up in the back of the room. “You can trust Aidan. He was head protector longer than most of you have even been protectors. Despite my earlier misgivings, I trust him implicitly. Besides, there has been a new development in the case. We’ve discovered that the Slasher has been using magic. He’s impersonating Aidan in order to frame him for the murders.”

Several protectors started talking at once. Aidan raised his hand, calling for silence.

“You know what this means, right? Someone is taking on my physical appearance and voice.” Aidan watched the various faces. All but one registered surprise. “You don’t look surprised, Sebastian. Why is that?”

Aidan crossed his arms as the other vampire met his gaze and held it.

“It’s common knowledge how the Foxxes died. Someone they knew, or *thought* they knew, entered their home and slaughtered them in their bedroom. Therefore, it’s not a big surprise to hear someone is impersonating you in order to commit more crimes. In fact, it makes sense, when you think about it. Someone who could alter his or her appearance could easily fool the Foxxes into letting their guard down.”

“Her?” Aidan lifted a brow and frowned. “Why would you suggest a female capable of doing this?”

“Our women are strong. They have abilities that are unique to them. I wouldn’t be surprised if a female vampire learned to master the kind of magic you describe.”

"That type of skill would take years to learn," Lucas said.

"What do you want us to do?" Veronica crossed her arms, mimicking Aidan's stance, and leaned back in her chair. Her gaze focused on Lucas and held, unblinking. "And if he's impersonating Aidan, how will we know if it's the real Aidan giving us our orders? Heck, how do we know it's Aidan, now?"

Aidan held back a grin. Did Lucas realize the feisty vamp had her eyes set on him, literally *and* figuratively? Molly probably wouldn't like that, though. Coughing to hide a chuckle, Aidan turned and looked at Gregory. He nodded once and then cleared his throat.

"I think we need to split up and hunt tonight. Search for the Slasher. Since Caitlyn survived another attack, he's probably upset and ready to make a mistake." Murmurs of agreement filled the room. "I leave you safely in Gregory's hands. There's no reason for the Slasher to know of Gregory's position and to assume his form. He's already been instructed what to tell you. Any questions?"

No one said anything, and several members shook their heads. Thank goodness they were willing to help. Aidan smiled and turned to leave.

"Where are you going?" Adam asked, grabbing his arm.

"To protect what's mine," Aidan growled. "Unless anyone objects?"

He glanced around the room once more. Not a soul spoke. Again several vampires shook their heads. Veronica just smiled.

"Can I go with you?"

Aidan looked at his brother with a frown. There were other, much better jobs he could assign the younger vamp. But maybe this time Aidan would be better served by having his brother close by.

"Fine." Aidan nodded and swept out of the room, Adam hot on his heels.

Aidan was confident the others would carry out his orders. He'd trained most of them himself. Between Lucas, Gregory, Sebastian, Veronica, and the others, the Slasher would be caught tonight. If he came out of hiding.

Aidan reached out with his mind and touched Caitlyn. Sighing with relief, he gently nudged into her mind, past the weak barriers she'd erected upon learning he could read minds. She'd make an easy target for the Slasher. Weak from the blood loss and his imagined betrayal, she wasn't keeping up her defenses.

Quickly, he turned to Adam. "Jake left them alone."

"He probably knew the protectors would come watch over her."

Aidan snorted. "He shouldn't have left. What could be more important than guarding his pregnant wife and his sister-in-law?"

Adam opened his mouth, then closed it. "I don't know," he answered finally.

Aidan turned on Adam. "This is ridiculous! Is Jake hoping the Slasher will show up to kill her?"

"You're going to walk into a trap and get yourself killed. If you go there you'll scare the life out of her. She thinks you want to kill her. Remember?"

"Remember! How can I forget?"

Aidan ran his fingers through his hair. What was he going to do? If he couldn't see her, how was he going to prove his innocence?

Without waiting for Adam, Aidan left the club and shifted into an owl. He flew on swift wings to Meredith's house. Aidan heaved a sigh of relief as Adam caught up to him. They landed outside near some bushes and shifted back.

"Shhh, I can hear them. Meredith and Caitlyn are on the porch," Adam whispered.

"Meredith, would you mind going to Lucas's and getting some of my things? I'm tired of wearing the same clothes." Caitlyn sighed and added, "I also need a few minutes alone."

"What if the Slasher comes back? What if he attacks you again?"

"I'll be fine. I'm sure Aidan won't attack here, where he'd be certain to be caught. If anything happens to me tonight, everyone will know it was him. Please, go. But hurry. I'm sure he won't attack you. Not until I'm dead, anyway."

"I wasn't talking about Aidan. I know he's not the Slasher. I don't want to leave you here alone."

"Don't you have safeguards and stuff? Besides, none of your clothes will fit me."

After a minute Meredith answered. "Fine. But if you need anything call me. The cordless phone is on the table in the living room. My cell phone is on speed dial. If I fly, I can be there and back in a few minutes."

"Thanks. You don't know how much this means to me." Caitlyn turned and walked back into the house.

"I can't believe I'm going to get her clothes. Someone tried to kill her and I'm leaving her alone." Meredith continued to mutter as she left.

She paused when she was a few feet into the yard and looked right at the bush where they were hiding. "I'm only going because I know you'll keep her safe."

Aidan sighed in relief. Meredith believed him, at least.

They watched Meredith fly off into the night.

"Now's your chance," Adam whispered. "Call the house. See if she will let you in."

Aidan frowned. "You know she won't."

"Call." Adam urged him.

Sighing, Aidan nodded. "Fine. I'll call."

He pulled out his cell phone and selected Meredith's home number. After several rings, the answering machine picked up. He listened to Meredith's warm greeting, then waited for the beep.

"Caitlyn, I know you are there. Please, pick up the phone." Aidan's voice echoed in the room. Caitlyn sat up suddenly, her body shaking with reaction.

"Damn it." She leapt up. Even though she'd prepared herself, the sudden sound of Aidan's voice made her heart pound and her palms grow sweaty. With Jake gone, Caitlyn had known Aidan would come for her, so she'd sent Meredith off to get her out of harm's way.

Caitlyn walked over to a lace-covered window and peeked outside. Why was he calling, anyway? Did he know she was alone? Or was he just hoping she was?

"I'm going to keep calling until you pick up the phone."

Caitlyn glared at the machine. Was he outside watching? She backed away from the window, knocking into the small table that held Meredith's answering machine. As she watched the table rock, an idea hit her. With a grin, she yanked the cord out of the wall.

"Go ahead, keep calling." She smiled and tossed the cord aside. Maybe now she could get some peace and quiet.

But instead, she paced, wondering where he was and if he was going to come after her. Now that she'd unplugged the machine, he would know she was there. Hell, with his vampire senses, he'd know where she was no matter where she went.

Caitlyn froze as footsteps sounded on the porch. "Oh, shit. That was fast."

What was she going to do? She headed for the kitchen, hoping Meredith kept a lot of sharp knives. She was sure that even Aidan would die if she cut off his head.

Grabbing a butcher knife, she inched her way back to the door and listened with one ear pressed to the wood.

"Caitlyn!" Meredith called out, rapping on the door, the sudden sound drawing a scream from Caitlyn.

"Oh, thank God." Caitlyn peered through the peephole, double-checking to make sure it was her sister standing there, and not some imposter mimicking her voice. Reassured, Caitlyn opened the door. She grabbed Meredith's arm, yanked her inside, then slammed the door shut, securing the deadbolt.

"What's wrong?" Meredith asked, eyeing the knife as she placed a small suitcase at her feet.

"Aidan's been calling. When I heard you on the porch, I was afraid you were him."

"I won't let him hurt you," Meredith promised, baring her fangs. "No one will hurt you again. I promise."

Caitlyn shivered at the ferocious gleam in Meredith's eyes. Thank God the woman was on her side. She followed Meredith over to the sofa and sat down. Maybe now was a good time to ask a few questions.

"Meredith?" Caitlyn asked.

"Yes?"

"Even without my memory, I know I am your sister, and Aidan's wife. I'm a vampire, right? Even without my memory I should still be exhibiting vampire symptoms. I'm not. I'm not even craving blood."

Meredith opened her mouth, then paused, shutting it quickly. After a minute, she shook her head. "Lucas said he gave you drugs when he did your blood transfusions. Maybe, with them in your system, you don't need to feed as often."

"But why?" Caitlyn frowned. Frustration brought her to her feet, and she walked over to the window again. She ran her tongue over her smooth teeth. Where were her fangs? Lifting the curtain, Caitlyn peered out at the sunset. "None of this makes sense. Why wouldn't Lucas want me to know I was a vampire? I can see why he hid me from Aidan, but why hide something as important as feeding on blood?"

Caitlyn sat down on the sofa and pulled her feet up under her. "This is all so confusing. Why can't you guys act like the vampires in movies? At least then, I'd have something to go on."

"Because we aren't like them at all." Meredith smiled. "Why don't you go upstairs and get cleaned up? I brought you some of your things."

Caitlyn sighed and nodded. Sooner or later, she'd learn the truth. For now, she'd have to settle for a shower and clean clothes.

Grabbing the suitcase, Caitlyn headed for the steps. With one foot on the bottom riser, she paused and glanced back at her sister.

"Was I a good vampire?"

"Yes, you were a great vampire."

"Oddly enough, that isn't reassuring." Caitlyn re-adjusted her grip on the handle and walked up the stairs.

"The bathroom is the second room on the right. You can sleep in the bedroom one door down," Meredith shouted up after her.

"Thanks!" Caitlyn walked down the hall, shivering as parts of her dream hit her full force. Would every dark hallway frighten her from now on? She glanced toward a closed door at the end of the hall.

"Did you find it?" Meredith yelled.

“Yes!” Caitlyn answered, ignoring the fear settling uneasily in her stomach. She pushed the door open and flicked on the light. Smaller than she’d imagined, but perhaps all bathrooms in older houses were tiny. While small, it looked and smelled like heaven.

Plants filled every nook of the room, and even hung from the ceiling. A large ivy plant nearly covered the window, and Caitlyn lifted her gaze, staring into the evening sky. No wonder the plants flourished in here. A large skylight covered the ceiling, revealing the stars twinkling above.

The soft scent of lavender caught her attention, and Caitlyn glanced around the room, looking for its source. She hoped there were some bath salts, or a nice, foaming bubble bath bottle sitting somewhere. A long, pampered soak in hot, fragrant water, and she’d feel like a new woman.

On the far wall a black, claw-foot tub sat, beckoning her nearer. With a smile, she trailed her fingers across the lip of the tub. She dropped her suitcase on the lid of the toilet and reached for the taps. She turned on the hot water, and very soon steam began to fill the small space.

Humming a tune she’d heard on the radio earlier, Caitlyn spied a basket of scented bath products on the counter, next to the sink. She added a liberal amount of bubble bath and turned on the cold water, watching as bubbles formed.

As the tub filled, Caitlyn tugged her shirt over her head and reached for the clasp on her bra. She kicked off her sneakers and gasped when she heard a grunt.

She whirled around. *Aidan*. Caitlyn stepped back until the back of her knees hit the tub. She stared, mesmerized, into Aidan’s hungry eyes. He looked as if he wanted to devour her whole.

Caitlyn opened her mouth to scream, then quickly changed her mind. Meredith was alone downstairs. Caitlyn didn’t want her sister to come running to protect her. Aidan would just kill both of them.

“How ... did ... why ... you ...” Giving up, Caitlyn snapped her mouth closed, only to yelp when Aidan grabbed her shoulders and tugged her up against his hard chest.

“Mine,” he growled, silencing her protests with his mouth.

If he meant to scare her, he failed miserably. Her fear melted under the heat of his desire.

He tangled one hand her hair, and grabbed her ass with the other, his touch scorching her through her jeans as he pressed his very aroused body against hers.

Mind clouded by his heady, erotic onslaught, Caitlyn forgot to struggle as he softened the kiss.

Aidan trailed kisses across her face, along her cheeks, forehead, and even her eyelids when she closed them in sweet agony.

He cupped her chin, and lifted her face. Breathlessly, Caitlyn opened her eyes. What kind of magic was he using on her?

Aidan's breath fanned her face, warm and quick, exciting her. She put her hands on his chest, trying to place some space between them. His heart, beating beneath her palms, pounded to the same rhythm as her own.

When Aidan leaned close to kiss her again, she tried to push him away, but he didn't budge. His scent, mixed with the lavender from her bathwater, clouded her mind, ensnaring her securely in his trap.

"Caitlyn." Aidan groaned and pressed his lips against hers.

"No." She couldn't believe that low, breathless voice really belonged to her. She sounded so ... sexy. More importantly, she sounded weak. The words *easy prey* echoed in her mind.

Opening her mouth to protest, Caitlyn gasped when Aidan deepened the kiss. His hot tongue swept between her lips, and Caitlyn drowned in the sensations he created. An ache started at the apex of her thighs. She squeezed her legs together, trying to deny the yearnings his embrace stirred to life.

"Caitlyn."

"No." Caitlyn tried to resist him. Her protest ended in a pleasurable moan as he nibbled on her sensitive earlobes before trailing hot, wet kisses down her neck.

She grabbed onto his shoulders as her knees gave out beneath her. Wrapping an arm tightly around her waist, Aidan tugged her closer, grinding his hips against hers.

If she were going to be killed, this was definitely the way to go. But if Aidan wanted her dead, why was he playing with her first? Maybe he had multiple personalities?

She sighed as his arousal pressed into her. When he ran his tongue along her neck, she shivered in anticipation, groaned as his teeth sank into her neck. Wrapping her arms around him, she surrendered, submitting to his skillful mouth.

"Yes." Caitlyn sighed in pleasure. A delicious tingling started where his mouth met her neck, and spread to her thighs as he fed.

She softened against him, as the outside world ceased to exist. A strange lethargy crept over her as he stopped feeding. He licked her neck.

"I love you," he whispered.

Opening her eyes, she watched as his gaze roamed over her face and neck. Why hadn't he killed her?

"My sweet, sweet Caitlyn."

He moaned and then covered her lips with his. She could taste her blood, warm and sweet, on his lips. A new hunger started within her. A strange excitement picked up her

heartbeat. An urge to taste him filled her mind. What would it be like to give him the same pleasure?

Caitlyn ran her fingers up his neck and through his hair, rubbing the silky-soft strands between her fingers. Aidan ran his hands down her back and cupped her ass, lifting her and pressing his erection against her.

Caitlyn wrapped her legs around his waist, burying her face in his neck. He carried her to the sink, settling her on the counter. Keeping him trapped between her legs, she pressed light kisses on his lips, along the line of his jaw, and then drew his earlobe between her teeth, nibbling gently.

"Aidan," she moaned, tightening her legs around him. She wanted to bite him. Instead she whispered in his ear. "Make love to me."

A delightful shiver ran through his body, vibrating against her.

"Yes." His low, husky moan teased her cheek as she again suckled on his earlobe. A growl escaped his lips. Caitlyn smiled, brushing her mouth against his neck. Her tongue darted out, tasting, teasing his soft skin.

"I want you." Caitlyn groaned. She licked her lips, meeting his heated gaze. Something strange was happening. She suddenly felt odd. As if something was controlling her body, making her do things she wouldn't normally do.

"You aren't afraid?"

"Not anymore." Her whispered answer drew a delighted growl from him. Without thinking, Caitlyn licked his neck, directly over his pounding pulse.

Blood pumped quickly through his veins, thick and rich, calling to her. She wanted to feed, knew he would taste like heaven. She needed to taste him, to give him the same pleasure he'd given her. Caitlyn opened her mouth, felt her teeth changing, enlarging, lengthening.

Aidan's fingers dug into her shoulders as she pulled him toward her, sinking her fangs into his neck. Caitlyn choked as the first few drops flowed into her mouth. She swallowed, then as if her mouth remembered the act, she purred, licking at his neck, tasting him, and taunting him with her mouth.

"Caitlyn," he said, panting. His hands tightened on her shoulders.

He tasted sweet and rich, like a fine dessert wine. Aidan clung to her while she fed as if she were starving. He made a noise bordering between pleasure and pain, but still she drank, until his hands fisted in her hair, dragging her head, presenting her face for a soul-searing kiss.

Caitlyn stared helplessly at him. She didn't remember ever feeling this alive. When he lifted her in his arms, she didn't protest. She wanted him with a ferocity that frightened her. Aidan turned toward the bedroom. Caitlyn dropped her head on his shoulder, glancing past him, toward the tub. Water flowed over the rim and onto the floor.

"Oh, shit!" she cried out, banging her fist on his shoulder. "Put me down! Quick, put me down!"

Aidan released her so fast she stumbled, her feet splashing in water. She rushed over to the tub and pulled the plug. She grabbed a handful of towels and started soaking up the mess.

"Caitlyn?" Aidan's voice was filled with amusement.

"What?" she asked, cursing fluently as she wrung the towel over the tub then sopped up more water.

"Leave it, we can clean it later."

"No." She sighed heavily, dropping the towel on the floor. She kicked it for good measure. "This isn't my house."

"Meredith has a maid who comes during the day. You don't need to stress yourself."

Caitlyn turned around slowly. She looked at his soggy sneakers, the tight black jeans encasing his legs, and the black T-shirt that molded to his muscles. She paused in her perusal at his neck, where a drop of blood still lingered.

"Caitlyn?" Aidan reached for her, pulling her close, enfolding her in his arms. "It's okay."

"No it's not. It's not. It's not. It's not!" Caitlyn repeated, shaking her head before resting her forehead against his chest. She dug her fingers into his shirt as she sobbed.

He'd tried to kill her earlier, but now he stood here acting like an understanding husband and lover. Why hadn't he killed her?

"Don't you see?" Aidan tilted her face up and placed a gentle kiss on the tip of her nose. "Your memory is returning. This is a good thing."

"No." Caitlyn hastily denied his words, pulling away.

"Caitlyn. Everything will be okay."

Her remaining control snapped at his calm, reassuring tone. "No! This isn't me. It's as if someone else was controlling me, making me bite you and drink your blood. You must have hypnotized me and made me do it."

Aidan growled, low and deep, startling her. His fingers bit into her arms too tightly. "I did not hypnotize you."

He must have seen the fear in her eyes because he abruptly released her. She bit her lower lip to stop its trembling. "Are you going to kill me now?" she whispered.

Aidan threw his hands up. "I can't do this anymore."

"Me, neither." Caitlyn sighed. "Why don't you just kill me and get it over with?"

"I don't want to kill you. I know what you saw and heard in the alley, but it wasn't me. I was inside the club with Adam, fighting a termuvin."

"I did see you! I did hear you! You spoke to me. How can you stand there and lie? Is this some kind of sick, twisted, head game to you?"

“It’s a trick, Caitlyn. The Slasher used magic to make you think it was me. I can’t take much more of this. I don’t know how to prove my innocence. Hell, I shouldn’t have to. You’re killing me every time you look at me with fear in your eyes. Every time you deny your heritage it angers me. And you continue to deny me.” He paused, closing his eyes and drawing in deep breaths.

Caitlyn touched her neck, remembering the whispered threats in the alley. The man in front of her now, was he the evil Aidan who had tried to kill her? Or the gentle one who made her feel so loved?

Aidan’s eyes flew open and he pinned her with his steady gaze. “You’re like a damn yo-yo, woman. Either you accept this, *me*, or you don’t. I didn’t try to kill you. If I wanted you dead, you *would* be dead. I wouldn’t waste time playing with you like you were some damn toy.”

He walked over to the counter and grabbed hold of the edge, leaning against it. Anger emanated from him in palpable waves, and he looked as if he was about to break something, or *someone*. God help her, she was equal parts terrified and excited.

“I can’t take this.” He turned his head away from her. “It’s as if you’re still gone. Where is the woman I loved? Where is my wife?”

Caitlyn swallowed, then whispered, “I don’t know.”

“Well, when you find her, please be sure to let me know.”

She nodded, blinking away tears. When her vision cleared, she was alone.

Chapter Twenty

A long hallway loomed in front of her. Thick black shadows slithered down the walls and across the floor. Every inch of the narrow space was covered with them. They moved in a rhythm, keeping time to the beating of her heart; as her heart sped up in fear, so did the pulsing of the shadows.

An icy chill ran up her spine, leaving Caitlyn shivering in the sudden cold. She ran her hands briskly over her arms, warming them, only to have more frigid air pass through her as yet another shadow moved over her head.

Taking a deep breath, Caitlyn started down the hall. With each step, her heart pounded faster, the rhythm echoing in the hallway.

As Caitlyn drew closer to the door, the walls began to move in and out, matching the escalating tempo of her breathing. With each step she took, the air grew thicker.

Footsteps sounded in the hall behind her, but before she could turn around, another icy breeze rushed through her. More shudders racked her body. She'd freeze to death, if the walls didn't close in on her first.

The steady pounding in her ears increased in volume as she stopped at the end of the hall. Someone was waiting for her behind the door.

Caitlyn reached out, her hand locking on the doorknob. Electricity raced up her arm, sending waves of agony crashing through her.

Ignoring the sharp, biting pain, she gritted her teeth.

This time, she would find out what was in the room. It was now or never.

She turned the knob and pushed on the door. As it started to swing inward, the shrill sound of a bell rang through the air.

Ignoring the incessant ringing, she pushed again, opening the door further. The room was pitch black, preventing her from seeing anything. She reached in, feeling for a light switch on the wall.

"Caitlyn."

Not now, she wanted to shout. But when she opened her mouth, no sound came out. Her fingers encountered the hard, plastic switch and she pressed it upward.

Caitlyn sat up with a gasp. She looked around the room and realized she was in Meredith's house still. It was just a dream.

Scrubbing the bathroom floor wasn't going to help her understand what had happened, but it was getting the tiles clean.

Her thoughts returned to Aidan as they often did. Only Jake remained adamant that Aidan was the killer. Even Lucas believed his claim of innocence. Why did she have so much trouble deciding what to believe?

So she was a vampire. What about it? She could handle the blood part. Since she hadn't burst into flames, or melted like wax the past six months when she'd gone outside, apparently she could handle the daylight. What else was there?

Aidan.

Could she handle *him*? Did she want him to go away and leave her alone? Just the thought of never seeing him again made her heart twist in agony.

She missed the way his gaze settled on her tenderly. She missed his touch, the way he could make everything else fade away until there was nothing else there but the two of them.

But he'd tried to kill her, hadn't he?

"Oh God," she moaned. She was a fool, such a fool. He'd had plenty of opportunities to kill her. He'd had more than enough chances to do any number of things to her. What had he done? He'd fed her, offered her clothes, gotten her blood and a doctor. He'd almost died trying to save her from the termuvins.

He was all she thought about. The way he looked at her, the way he touched her. She'd dreamt of him every night, even when she didn't remember who he was or what he looked like. Her body remembered him. And loved him.

"Love," Caitlyn whispered. Who was she kidding? She'd been so caught up in fighting her attraction for him that she hadn't been listening to her own heart. She wasn't just lusting after Aidan. She loved him.

Oh, man, was it too late? Had she waited too long to come to her senses? When he'd left yesterday, her heart had started to ache, and hadn't stopped yet. Was she feeling him? If he could sense her thoughts, and she his, feelings probably worked that way, as well.

"Aidan?" She reached for him across their mental link. She bit back a sob when he didn't answer. It was no more than she deserved.

She wanted to go to him, but the fear that she wouldn't be able to tell the true Aidan from the one who attacked her in the alley held her back.

The protectors' search had turned up empty, and there were at least two of them guarding Meredith's house right now. They would follow her to Aidan's, and protect her from him if they had to. Meredith explained that their first duty was to her.

Now what could she do to show him she wasn't going to hide from him or herself anymore? She was ready to remember, and she wanted him with her when she did.

"All right, this is where I split." Adam set Caitlyn's suitcase down next to the door. "I'll take care of any problems that may arise in the club tonight."

"Thanks, Adam. I owe you one."

"You make my brother happy and we'll call it even."

"Thanks." Caitlyn leaned forward and kissed his cheek.

"By the way." Adam smiled. "Aidan knows you're here."

He closed the door before she could respond. *Damn.* She wasn't ready yet. Taking a deep breath, she turned around, but the hall was empty. Was he hiding?

Caitlyn picked up her suitcase and started down the hall. She peered into each room, finding them all empty.

Nervously, she continued down the hall to a room she'd not explored yet.

Before she took more than a few steps, the door opened and Aidan stepped out. He frowned at her, crossed his arms, and leaned against the doorjamb, blocking her way.

Caitlyn smiled, while inside she quaked with fear. He didn't smile back. She cleared her throat and tried to not to sound nervous as she greeted him. "Hi?"

"What are you doing here?" Aidan's expression didn't change.

"I c-came here to s-see you."

One eyebrow quirked at her explanation. He waited a beat, then asked, "Why? Aren't you afraid I'll kill you? And then the rest of your family?"

Let's not make this easy.

"Caitlyn?"

She jumped when he spoke. *Calm down, girl. He doesn't need to see you're terrified of him.* "I want to remember you."

Aidan stared at her unblinkingly. She ached to go to him, to beg him to take her in his arms, to make him promise to keep her safe and make the nightmares go away.

"What are you saying?"

She didn't blame him for questioning her. She hadn't exactly been trusting of him, either. She cleared her throat again.

"Are you getting a cold?" he asked frowning.

"I don't know." She mimicked his frown. "Can a vampire catch a cold?"

"No," Aidan growled, clearly not amused.

"I'm sorry. I mean, I'm *sorry*. Sorry for not trusting you, for not believing you, for not listening, for ... everything."

"Okay." He nodded. "Apology accepted. You can go now."

Caitlyn turned around so Aidan wouldn't see how much this cold side of him hurt. She thought he wanted her to come back to him. She worried her bottom lip. What the hell game he was playing?

Fine, if that was how he wanted to be, then so be it. She had enough to deal with; she didn't need his injured ego in between them. She'd either go back to Meredith's, or she'd go to Lucas's. Turning, she started back to his bedroom to get her bag.

"Wait."

She almost didn't hear his whisper. When she turned around and met his frigid stare she wondered if she'd imagined it.

Closing her eyes, Caitlyn doused the flame of hope. She then met his gaze. "Okay, have a nice life then."

Turning again, she walked the rest of the way to his room, grabbed her suitcase and headed for the door almost at a run. Now wasn't fast enough to get out of this place.

"Caitlyn?"

She reached for the knob, but his hand latched onto her shoulder. He spun her around, pinning her against the door. That little flame she thought she'd doused flared back to life as excitement raced through her veins.

"Yes?" she answered breathlessly, not sure of the question.

"Why are you here? Why'd you come back?"

His gaze caught hers and held. Now she understood. He wanted her to spell it out for him. He was tired of guessing, tired of pursuing her and getting rejected. Her turn to make the next move.

"I was hoping you'd have room here," she said, then paused, licking her lips, "for your wife."

Aidan froze. He didn't blink, he didn't even breathe. "Say that again?"

"Um." She fidgeted nervously. Was he going to tell her to leave?

Slowly, he lifted a hand to her cheek. She leaned into the caress, closing her eyes, drawing courage from his kindness.

"May I stay here with you?" she asked.

"You want to stay here with me?" Aidan spoke slowly, as if making sure she heard him clearly.

"Yes."

"You don't sound certain. In fact, you sound frightened. I'm not going to jump you or make you have sex with me, you know? I love you. Of course I want you to stay. As long as you aren't afraid of me anymore."

"I'm not," she said, offering him a smile.

Aidan grabbed her bag and turned, leading her down the hall. Caitlyn followed him into a smaller room at the back of the apartment. Caitlyn paused just inside the doorway. Why had he brought her here?

"You can sleep in here. It's usually reserved for guests."

"Okay, thanks." She forced a smile. This was a good thing, wasn't it? He'd accepted her back. He wasn't acting like he was in love with her, but Meredith had said she'd hurt him badly.

"Sleep well," he said, a tiny catch in his voice.

"Aidan?"

"We will have to share a bathroom, but you can go first." Aidan opened the door, keeping his back to her. "I'll just go in my office and do some paperwork."

"Aidan?" She reached out and grabbed his arm. "Talk to me here. Is this another game?"

"Game? I'm not playing any games with you."

"I came back here to be with you, but you put me here in the guest room. What happened?"

Aidan sighed and met her gaze steadily. "I want you to be sure. I don't want to rush you or confuse you. The way you flinched from me in Jake's car plays over and over in my mind. Someone wants to kill you, and they are making sure it looks like it's me. I don't want you to have any doubts."

"I don't have any doubts. Not anymore."

"Then there's no rush, is there?" He lifted her hand off his arm and leaned down, kissing it. "Sweet dreams, Caitlyn."

She watched him walk out before she sighed and tossed her suitcase onto the bed. This wasn't going how she envisioned at all. Suddenly, she smiled, the beginnings of a plan formulating in her mind. Perhaps she could share his bed tonight after all.

Chapter Twenty-One

She'd just have to seduce him. That should make him reveal some emotion on his stupid poker face.

Dressed in a red silk nightgown, Caitlyn glanced in the mirror. She'd lost weight since she bought the flimsy garment, but the light material still made her look sexy and enhanced her curves. She was glad she'd given in to impulse and bought it.

After running her fingers through her hair, she reached for the matching robe, smiling as the nightgown parted, revealing tantalizing glimpses of her right leg. Surely, no male could resist a willing woman, especially not one dressed for seduction.

After adding a dab of perfume, Caitlyn walked out of the bathroom. She paused, listening for Aidan. She heard someone tapping on a keyboard. She didn't even question her enhanced hearing. Since waking from the coma, all her senses were stronger than normal. Now that she knew she was a vampire, everything made sense.

Taking time to slow her racing heart, Caitlyn drew a few deep breaths. She walked around the apartment, looking at different things, absently picking up knick-knacks, trying to jumpstart a memory. Any memory, good or bad, as long as she remembered *something*.

Finally, she wandered down the hall toward Aidan's office. The door was slightly ajar, so she pushed it open and watched as he typed away. A towering stack of paperwork sat in front of him. After a few clicks of his mouse and some more typing, he removed the top paper and placed it on a pile on the opposite side of the desk.

Finding her and dealing with the attacks must have put him days behind on his work. The enormous stack of papers made her wonder how many days he'd lost because of her.

Shifting her gaze, she took in his appearance. Aidan's thick hair stood on end, as if he'd been running his hands through it. His shirt lay discarded on the floor next to the table. Aidan reached for yet another piece of paper, his head tilting to the side.

He looked tired. He also looked like he had more work than he could possibly handle. Why wasn't Adam here helping him?

Consumed by guilt, she stepped forward. She'd gotten him into this mess; she could help get him out.

Aidan lifted his head, a faint smile crossing his mouth when he gaze landed on her.

"Hi," she whispered. Why was she suddenly so nervous? This was Aidan, her husband! She must have seduced him before.

"Hi." His smile faltered and then slipped away, and his eyes lost their warmth, causing a knot of panic to press against Caitlyn's throat.

With a deep breath, she shoved her guilt deep down inside and pushed away her fears. She walked up behind Aidan, letting her hands drop onto his shoulders. The warm scent of cinnamon and vanilla filled the air as Aidan lifted his hands. They hovered over hers, almost as if he was afraid to touch her.

"Something smells delicious," Caitlyn said, massaging his tense muscles.

"I have one of those plug in things," he answered, his voice a bit rough. Aidan sighed, leaning into her hands. "That feels good."

"You look like you have a lot of work to do."

"Yes." He shrugged, muscles tensing under her fingers again as he leaned forward, reaching for a new sheet.

"Aidan?" Caitlyn dug her hands into his muscles, trying to force him to relax. "Let me help you. It's my fault you are so far behind."

"You want to help me?"

She stopped the massage. "Yes, I'd like to." She cocked a hip against the edge of his desk.

Aidan glanced up, his gaze following the glimpse of smooth creamy skin exposed by the slit in her robe. She hoped he appreciated the view.

"Are you ..." he croaked. He cleared his throat and tried again. "Are you naked under that robe?"

"Would it bother you if I were?"

He shifted some papers around. She held her breath, waiting for his answer.

"No." Aidan cleared his throat again before continuing, "You can start by filing those."

He pointed to a stack of folders on the corner of his desk, then at a filing cabinet.

"I can do that." She smiled. "And anything else you want me to do." Caitlyn stifled a giggle when Aidan just sat there blinking at her. She picked up the folders and walked over to the cabinet with an exaggerated sway of her hips.

Aidan watched his wife bend over to reach a folder in the very bottom drawer of the cabinet, giving him an altogether too enticing view of her long, *long* legs. His gut clenched with hunger. What the hell had gotten into her tonight? Since he'd found her in his office that first night over a week ago, she'd done nothing but run from him every time. Now, not only was she playful, but she'd touched him without any provocation.

Caitlyn rose, opening a drawer higher up on the filing cabinet. She cast a glance over her shoulder, caught him watching, and smiled. Sweet, soft, and sexy. If he didn't know any better, he'd think she was trying to seduce him.

Was she ready to accept the truth, to believe him, and to remember? Her mere presence gave him a spark of hope. One he beat down before it could grow into a flame. He'd scared her the last time his desire burned out of control. This time he would make sure she was ready.

Caitlyn worked quietly with him. Quiet as the proverbial mouse. Occasionally, she'd walk past and he'd get a whiff of her intoxicating perfume.

Each expanding minute in her presence pushed the limits of his sanity. His fingers itched to run through her hair. His arms ached to hold her close once more. She was his wife, damn it. Never in his wildest dreams had he thought Caitlyn would call herself off-limits. It had cut him to the quick.

This new version of Caitlyn was impulsive, jumped to conclusions, and didn't trust him. His heart couldn't handle her rejection again. If he scared her away now, it would probably be the last time. His heart thumped a dull beat in his chest at the thought.

"I'm done filing."

Her hushed voice penetrated his thoughts. Aidan looked down at his empty desk. Now that his work was done, what could he do to keep from thinking about taking her to bed and making love to her until dawn?

"Anything else you need done?" She practically purred.

He swallowed the erotic retort hanging on the tip of his tongue. When he glanced up at her face, his hunger was under control.

Caitlyn smiled, brushing at her hair with her hand. A brief image of those nimble fingers on *him* flickered through his mind and he grew hard.

Seeing the amusement in her eyes, Aidan decided he'd tolerated as much temptation as he could handle in one night. He loved her, but a man could only be pushed so far before he snapped.

"I think it's time for bed," he growled, pushing back his chair and standing quickly.

"Why?" Her voice quivered as she stepped back. He reached forward, pulled by the hint of fear in her voice, then stopped.

"I'm tired, Caitlyn." He folded his hands before himself trying to hide his discomfort, as she stood there staring up at him.

"But ... I thought ... I mean ..."

He watched as she chewed on her lower lip. It made him want to take her in his arms and nibble on her. Damn it all, what did she want from him? He was her husband, not some play toy.

"I thought maybe you would want ..." Her voice trailed off, and she glanced away.

Damn, but she looked beautiful standing there barefoot in his office. He wanted her to the point where he didn't trust himself to stay in control. He'd probably lose his mind and drain her again.

Aidan's hands clenched at his sides. An ice bath in Alaska wouldn't cool his burning desire. Yet he had to be strong. He knew what lay beneath those thin garments, knew it intimately. And his hands itched desperately to touch her again.

"Thank you for the help, Caitlyn."

"Anytime."

The faint tremble of her shoulders nearly did him in. "Look, why don't you go to bed? I need to go downstairs and check on the club."

"Why?"

"Why?" Eyes narrowing, he stared at her back. She picked at her robe, removing lint too small for him to see. "Why does it matter, Caitlyn?"

"You just look so exhausted," she said, glancing over her shoulder, up at his face. "If you're tired, have Adam check the club."

"I've put enough on his shoulders this week." Aidan tried to smile, but he was sure it came out as a grimace. Closing his eyes, he took several deep breaths. He couldn't stay in the same room with her much longer and maintain his control. He opened his eyes. "Go lie down, Caitlyn. You'll be safe enough from me. You can even use the lock. Just in case."

"Just in case?" she echoed.

"In case you're afraid you will have an unwanted, *un-trusted* intruder."

She winced and he felt a moment of shame. He didn't take any pleasure in hurting her, but he couldn't help it. If he didn't keep her at arms' length he'd end up hurting her again.

"I ... I trust you, Aidan."

He swallowed back a snort of disbelief. Her statement, so softly spoken, so tremulous, smacked of a lie. Aidan sighed and took a deep breath. She stood there waiting for him to do something to make her run. He could see it in her eyes. She still feared him.

"No," he answered, his tone flat with finality. "No, you don't."

"I do," she insisted. "It's just ... what if I don't ever remember you?" She frowned, her face whitening. "Maybe Lucas gave me too much of that drug, and wiped my memories away permanently."

"Then you build new memories," Aidan said. Seeing the sadness in her eyes tugged at his soul. "In time, you'll relearn what you need to know."

"I know you want me," she said as he jerked open the door. "I can feel your desire from over here. It radiates off you in waves."

Yes, just like radiation from an atomic bomb. Powerful and deadly. He wanted her with a savage hunger he could barely control. He ached to hold her against him, to be inside her, to make love to her all night long, stopping only from exhaustion.

"Don't worry. I can control myself."

But could he?

"You sure?" she asked.

"Positive."

"What if I asked you for a divorce?"

The doorknob crushed in his fist as angry denial surged through his veins. He couldn't turn and look at her. A divorce? She had every right to ask for one, but the word ripped his heart out all the same.

"Aidan."

Hell would freeze over before he let her go. "Never," he bit out, leaving the room and slamming the door behind him.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Why'd she do that? Her goal had been to seduce him, not push him away. What a mess she'd made. This time she would be more direct, not leave any room for misinterpretation.

With a toss of her hair, Caitlyn wrenched open the office door. She stalked to his room. He might have given her a separate bed, but she intended to share his. Tonight. All night. Hell, *every* night.

"Aidan!"

Caitlyn pushed open his door, hard. The wood smacked the wall with a loud thud. He spun around, ceasing his back and forth pace. His heated gaze swept over her.

"Go away," he ground out desperately. "Please, Caitlyn. Just go."

"No." Caitlyn stepped in the room, closing the door behind her. "You can't just shove me aside, Aidan. Not now!"

"You denied me!" he cried, face flushed, nostrils flared, teeth bared. "I can't ... I can't take this anymore." Aidan closed his eyes and drew in one deep breath after another.

He looked so forlorn she found herself moving forward, placing her hands on his chest, before a single thought even formed in her mind.

Aidan hissed as her palms met his heated flesh. His heart pumped frantically under her touch. Caitlyn leaned against him, sliding her hands up, cradling his face.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm trying to seduce you," Caitlyn purred, leaning up to kiss his jaw.

"What?" He blinked a few times as if she'd spoken in a foreign tongue.

"I'm trying to seduce you," she repeated. "Now cooperate."

His throat worked as he swallowed. "One last hurrah before you serve me with divorce papers?"

"No." She shook her head.

"You just have this sudden urge to sleep with me?"

"No." She shook her head again, this time with a wicked smile.

"Then why torture me?"

"I want to make love to you."

He opened his mouth, but she placed a finger to his lips and murmured, "Shhh."

"I want you, Aidan. I don't remember our past, but I do know how I feel. My body remembers you even if my mind doesn't. My heart remembers you, even if I can't remember our vows. Make love to me, Aidan. Let's make some new memories, now."

He growled deep in his throat. Aidan wrapped his arms around her tightly, as if he would never let her go. He lifted her face and stared into her eyes.

His heated gaze made her shiver as desire coursed through her. Even from a look he could make her melt into a puddle of lust.

"Tell me this isn't a dream. Tell me you really want this. Say you're mine," he said. He threaded his fingers through her hair as his mouth assaulted her jaw. "Make me believe."

"I'm yours," she responded, breathlessly. "Always. Forever."

He held her with one hand while caressing her chin and cheek with the other. His seeking fingers wandered down her side, brushing against her breast. Her nipples tightened in response.

Everywhere he touched her, her skin tingled, the sensation spreading until she felt as if every single part of her was alive.

She rubbed the back of his neck. Aidan moaned, grinding his lower body against hers. He murmured her name over and over as he abandoned her mouth to place kisses across her neck and collarbone.

"Aidan," she whispered, tugging his face back up to hers.

"I love you," he answered, pressing kisses along the length of her jaw and cheek. His tongue tickled the skin beneath her ear before he bit on her lobe.

Caitlyn arched against him, her hands gripping the waistband of his jeans. She wanted him with an intensity that surprised her. Each time they'd made love she'd been left with a desire that was stronger than before. Would she ever get enough of him?

"No," Aidan bit out harshly, pulling away from her so suddenly she grabbed onto him as she stumbled.

"No?" She choked, blinking at him in surprise. "What do you mean *no*?"

"Not like this. Not up against the door like an animal in heat."

Aidan scooped her up in his arms and carried her over to the bed. He set her down gently, loosening the belt on her robe. When the folds fell open, he ran his hands over the smooth fabric of her nightgown.

Caitlyn watched his face, the unleashed desire in his eyes, as his hands skimmed over her. She tried to remain patient as he pushed the robe over her shoulders, worked it down her arms, and finally pulled it out from underneath her.

Patience is for the birds, she thought, as his thumb brushed against her nipple. He sucked her nipple into his mouth, fabric and all, and she cried out. She wished he'd just tear the fabric and ravish her.

Finally, he stopped his delicious torture and reached down for the hem of the nightgown.

"I need you so badly," he whispered, pushing the gown up her legs to her knees.

"Then take me," she answered, boldly meeting his gaze.

He answered her with a growl. "Slow, I need to go slow."

Caitlyn sat up, brushing his hands away from her. She grabbed the gown and quickly wiggled out of it. "Not slow. Now. I need you."

She grabbed his hands and placed them on her breasts.

He lowered his head, pressing kisses on first one breast, then the other, before pulling back to stare at her. His gaze roamed over her body, his eyes darkening. She could feel his desire; hell, she could *smell* it, but she was still nervous. Would he find her lacking? She held her breath while praying for him to get on with the lovemaking.

"You're so beautiful," he whispered.

When his voice broke, his pain swept over her. All those weeks without her, thinking he'd never see her again, feeling her, but not being able to find her. It must have been harder than she could imagine.

"I love you," he said softly. His hands trembled as he reached for her again.

"What's wrong?"

"I want you so much I'm afraid I'll hurt you."

"The only way you could hurt me is to refuse me." Caitlyn reached for him, wrapping her arms around him and holding him tightly. "I've dreamed of you, too, even though I couldn't remember you."

"Every night?" he asked, looking up at her with surprise and hope clearly visible in his gaze.

"I admit I thought you tried to kill me. But, I heard your voice. I saw you with my own eyes. It broke me inside, because I'd already fallen in love with you." She cupped his face in her hands. "You could have killed me at Meredith's and you didn't, even after I refused you. I *know* you aren't the Slasher. I believe you, I trust you. Please, Aidan. I'm asking -- no, I'm *begging* you. Please make love to me."

He crushed her against him, his mouth hungrily seeking hers. He leaned over her on the bed, pressing her into the soft mattress, the rough fabric of his jeans rubbing against her bare skin.

"Aidan," she gasped in between kisses. "You're overdressed."

He grinned wolfishly as he rose and stripped faster than she could blink. "Not anymore, I'm not."

Caitlyn stared at him as he stood there, gloriously naked and grinning, as she ran her gaze over his muscular body. He had no hair covering his chest or tight washboard abs. As he stood there, his cock thickened and hardened, growing larger the longer she kept her eyes on him. Her mouth watered as she remembered how delicious he tasted, and how glorious he felt buried to the hilt inside her.

Her stomach tightened, and Caitlyn wondered if she could get any wetter. If he didn't take her right here, right now, she might do something desperate, like jump him.

"What are you waiting for?" she asked with a smile. "Want me to take a picture?"

"Nah," he answered, kneeling on the bed. "I plan on giving you something better than a picture."

"Promises, promises," she teased him, before he lowered his mouth to hers once more.

She rolled him over and straddled him, placing kisses on his jaw, and along his neck. Aidan's hands dug into her waist as she moved her mouth lower, across his chest and abdomen. When she took him into her hands, he moaned, his hips lifting off the bed.

"Caitlyn," he rasped, drawing in quick, panting breaths.

Exulting in her power, she drew him into her mouth, teasing the tip of his cock with her tongue.

With a roar, he grabbed her shoulders, pulling her up and rolling her over onto her back. He stared into her eyes, panting, obviously on the edge of losing control. Control Caitlyn hoped he would quickly lose. She wanted him now.

He ran his hands down her arms, pinning them against her sides as he lowered his mouth to trail his tongue between her breasts and down her stomach.

"Aidan," she pleaded, wriggling in an attempt to free herself.

"I wanted this to be so perfect. I had your seduction all planned, but instead, you worked your magic on me."

"Good." She grinned. "Now be a good boy and bite me."

With a growl, he playfully nipped at her stomach. She giggled, then sighed when he released her and began to stroke her inner thighs.

Slowly, he lowered his face to her navel, teasing her with his tongue as he gradually worked his way down. Her soft sighs filled the room as his mouth moved over her.

She was wet with desire, her sweet scent filling the air. Aidan's inner beast struggled to break out. The urge to take her, to claim her and make sure she remembered him this time, burned within him. This time wouldn't be about desire, about staking his claim. This time would be about love. He'd show her exactly how he felt with actions instead of words.

Fighting to maintain control, he focused on her pleasure, and the breathy moans that escaped from her mouth. The way she arched her back when he sucked her clit into his mouth. The way her breathing deepened when he slid first one finger, then added another, into her warmth.

She rubbed against his hand, her inner muscles tightening. He moved his fingers and she cried out, her sounds of pleasure nearly his undoing. Driven by a ferocious need, he moved his mouth down her thigh, to her femoral artery.

The sound of her blood called to him and he surrendered to it, sinking his fangs into her flesh. She cried out, once, but the sounds that followed he could only interpret as pleasure. Her body trembled in his arms, shaking with reaction, and he didn't bother to hide his grin as he looked up at her flushed face.

He lifted himself up and whispered for her to forgive him as he slid into her quickly. "I can't go slow," he said, thrusting against her hard and fast.

"Then don't," she murmured, lifting her hips up to meet him.

When she wrapped her legs around him and dug her nails into his back, he shook with the effort to hold on, to wait just a little longer. She arched her back, her breast grazing across his mouth.

He bit her again, sinking his fangs into her breast. She cried out his name, nearly arched off the bed. When her muscles tightened around him this time, the pleasure built in intensity until Aidan felt as if he'd explode. Every nerve ending in his body erupted as he shouted her name.

Aidan barely remembered to close the marks on her neck before he collapsed on top of her. When he was able to focus on her face, he kissed her softly on the lips. "Are you okay?"

She gave him a satisfied smile, and nodded.

He pulled her close and hugged her. Finally, his wife had come home.

* * * * *

Lying in bed beside Caitlyn, Aidan brushed some hair back off her forehead and thanked God for bringing her back to him. He didn't know what would have happened to him if she hadn't ever returned.

Caitlyn woke slowly and stretched. She glanced around the room and smiled before turning to meet his gaze.

"Sleep well?" he asked softly.

She nodded hesitantly. Was something bothering her? Why was she suddenly shy?

"Are you okay?"

"I feel kind of weird," she admitted.

"Tired? Weak and lethargic?"

She nodded again.

"You need to feed." He grinned and leaned over her. "I fed from you several times, but you didn't feed off me. I'm more than willing to help you out."

"You are, are you?" She grinned and wrapped her arms around his neck. She whispered, "Then come closer, my dear."

Caitlyn brushed her mouth across his neck, once, then twice, making him shiver in anticipation. He wanted to hold her head still and tell her to just bite him, but he knew she was enjoying tormenting him. He wasn't about to let her see how much she was driving him crazy, though. Until she slid her hands down his sides, and dragged her fingernails back up them, that is.

Aidan grabbed her shoulders tightly as her tongue tickled his neck.

"Woman," he growled. She was going to test him to the limits, maybe even further.

Caitlyn looked at him with devilment in her eyes as she moved her hands under the sheet to his boxers. He hissed as she slid her hand inside, caressing him.

"I might as well make it enjoyable for you, right?"

She was tossing his words back at him. He choked on a chuckle when her hand wrapped around him. The tease! She must have remembered the night she'd offered her blood to him. He remembered his whispered promise, and both their pleasure.

Until he'd taken too much.

"Caitlyn, I know I don't deserve your forgiveness, but I'm so sorry about the other night. I never meant to put you in jeopardy. I lost control of myself. I've never done that before. It must be --"

"Aidan." She nipped at his lips. "It's okay. I understand what happened. I forgive you."

She was willing to forgive him for almost killing her?

"It's in our nature. I understand that better now than I probably ever did."

Aidan stared at her in wonder. She lifted her lips to his, and kissed him deeply. Driving away all his thoughts until there was only one left. Loving her again.

Her mouth left his lips, and trailed down his chest and stomach. He groaned; the pleasure of her mouth on him was almost unbearable. And she'd only just begun.

Slowly, Caitlyn tugged off his boxers and tossed them on the floor. "Now you are naked and at my mercy." She purred, rubbing her cheek against his stomach.

Aidan fisted his hands in the sheets, trying not to push her head lower, trying not to lose control. Her turn. She needed to feed, and he wanted to let her do it her way.

Her hunger, coming after the long period of absence and then her refusal of him made him all the more eager. The thought of her doing what she wanted to him set a fire that he didn't know if she could ever put out.

He wanted her hands, mouth, hell, anything on him and now, before he exploded with need.

"Where to bite you ..." Her voice trailed off as she leaned over him, tracing a circle on his neck, then his chest, and then drawing a line down to his thigh where she traced another circle. "Those are all the places you've bitten me."

"Please, Caitlyn." He groaned, clenching his fists harder around the sheets.

"Please what?"

Her mouth mimicked the circles while she stroked him. He tried to focus on her, but she had him so dizzy with desire he couldn't even think straight anymore.

"What do you want, Aidan? This?" she asked, then took him into her mouth.

Aidan groaned an inarticulate response through clenched teeth, hips lifting up from the mattress as she teased the tip of his cock with her tongue. God, she'd never been so bold before the amnesia. *She* -- His thoughts scattered. She drew him deeper into her mouth. Licking. Sucking. Teasing. Taunting.

Aidan hissed a curse. His claws came out, digging into the mattress. Caitlyn dragged her teeth along the length of him before running her tongue across the same path.

He had to have her. Now. With a hungry growl, Aidan grabbed her shoulders, rolling her under him in one swift motion. His ragged breaths echoed in his ears, competing with the pounding rush of his pulse. Caitlyn lifted her knees over his shoulders as he slid up her body, more than ready to take her. Fast and deep.

"Oh, no, you don't." Caitlyn grinned, licking at his bottom lip. "This was my meal ..."

Caitlyn forced him over onto his back, straddling his hips with her soft thighs.

"My turn." She smirked, pushing on his chest.

When he growled deep in his throat, she hissed at him, bearing her fangs. "I said it's *my turn*."

Then she slid down, taking his full length inside her. Aidan grabbed onto her waist, holding her still, reveling in the feel of her muscles clenched around him.

She started to move in slow, circular patterns, stretching his patience to the limits. He drew in a breath and released it in a painful hiss. She was killing him slowly. Inch by agonizing inch.

Aidan realized his claws were digging into her hips when she choked out a small gasp of pain. He rubbed his hands over her soothingly, but she brushed them aside.

Aidan caught her fingers in his and tugged until she relented, giving him the top once more. Using his hips, he pinned her to the bed and whispered, "I love you."

"Come closer," she mouthed.

"What?" He frowned, leaning down.

Caitlyn moved her mouth next to his ear and whispered, "Good."

Then she bit him.

He saw stars. He closed his eyes and leaned into her while she sucked on the side of his neck. The feel of her lips and teeth moving against his flesh, combined with the rhythmic clenching of her vaginal muscles, was enough to send him toppling over the edge of pure pleasure.

But not yet.

Caitlyn whimpered against his neck, her fingers digging into his shoulders. A second later she pulled back, crying out his name.

The sound sent his own climax loose in a blinding rush. He shouted his love for her once again, then dropped his forehead against her chest.

"I can't move," he whispered, finally.

"Then stay there," she whispered back, nipping at his collarbone.

* * * * *

This time, when she woke and looked around the room, Caitlyn knew exactly where she was. In fact, she remembered when Aidan had taken her to a really nice antique shop in Bucks County for this bedroom set.

Theirs had been a whirlwind courtship. Aidan had literally swept her off her feet, and carried her away with him. At times he overwhelmed her with his aggressiveness, but she knew without a doubt that he loved her. All the rest would work out with time. After all, they had forever to solve their little problems.

Aidan was just as passionate and energetic now as when they first started dating. Fond memories flooded back and she wrapped her arms around her waist, hugging herself to keep from waking him.

She remembered. Aidan and Meredith and Lucas and Adam and ... Jake. A shiver ran up her spine. Jake she remembered all too well. He was a perfect gentleman when they dated, but Caitlyn had always sensed something ugly deep in his heart. A flash of the time she ran from him rose unbidden to her mind.

"Caitlyn." Jake grinned at her. His smile wasn't kind or comforting. More lecherous and hungry. Something dark glinted in his eyes, and in that moment she knew that he wanted her, regardless of her persistent refusal.

"Jake." She forced a nervous smile. She could easily enter his mind and read his thoughts, but she didn't want to do that. She didn't like doing that. And besides, she feared what she would learn in there.

Instead she stepped back and glanced up to the full moon. "Why aren't you out hunting right now?"

"Because I'd rather be here with you." Jake stepped closer to her.

"You're making me nervous, Jake," Caitlyn said as she instinctively took another step back.

"What's the matter, Caitlyn? You know how I feel about you."

"Jake, I told you I wasn't looking for a permanent relationship."

"But I love you, Caitlyn. I want to marry you and make you my wife." Jake reached for her hand.

"No." Caitlyn shook her head, pulling her hand away. "I'm sorry, but I told you I'm not interested in a commitment right now."

Jake frowned and reached for her. "I'm not going to take no for an answer."

"Let me go, Jake. Find someone else. Someone who will feel the same way you do."

"You will learn to love me," he argued, reaching for her again. "I love you and I will have you."

She flinched at the look in his eyes. Her first thought was to flee, as far and as fast as she could go. Listening to her instincts, Caitlyn turned and raced away from Jake, trying to escape from the predatory gleam in his eyes.

She dashed through the park and ducked between some bushes, crashing into a large, hard object. All reason vanished and pure, stark terror took a hold of her as someone grabbed onto her shoulders. She screamed and turned to look at her attacker.

The man released her and stood there with his hands in the air, in a gesture of surrender. Not Jake, but the new vampire in town. Aidan Devlin.

The first time she'd seen him, in the café, Caitlyn knew she'd have to break things off with Jake. The instant attraction to Aidan stunned her with its intensity, and for a while she tried to keep her feelings hidden.

"Are you okay? I didn't mean to startle you," he said. "When you rammed into me, I was afraid you'd fall, so I grabbed you."

Drawing in deep breaths, she looked at him trying to think of something to say. He stared back at her, with his bright green eyes, waiting for an answer.

A noise behind her cut off any response. Caitlyn turned, backing up against Aidan's broad chest. A very angry Jake stepped out of the bushes, growling her name.

She recalled the pressing need to run, and would have, too, but Aidan wrapped his arm around her shoulder, preventing her escape. Even then his touch was reassuring.

"Aidan!" Jake frowned, his gaze flickering over the new vampire. "What are you doing sneaking up on people late at night?"

"Hunting, just like you, Jake." Aidan's deep voice rumbled behind her. "Only it looks like you're losing your touch."

"I am losing nothing," Jake hissed, reaching for Caitlyn. "It was just a lover's spat, nothing more. I'll thank you to unhand my fiancée so I can walk her home."

"Fiancée?" Aidan's eyebrows rose as he met her stunned expression. Silently she shook her head. "Looks like the lady disagrees."

"Nonsense. Stop playing around, Caitlyn. Let me take you home."

"No." Caitlyn shook her head again, leaning into Aidan and hoping Jake would leave. "Aidan is taking me home. Aren't you?"

"It would be my pleasure, Caitlyn."

Jake snarled and looked at Aidan.

"Sorry, Jake," Aidan said, with a hint of steel in his voice. He squeezed his hand on Caitlyn's shoulder. "Seems you're out of luck tonight."

Jake stood there angrily, fists opening and closing at his sides. The look on his face left no doubt in Caitlyn's mind that she had just made an enemy.

And now he was married to her sister. Shivering, Caitlyn allowed herself to remember how quickly her relationship with Aidan had grown. Before she knew it, they were married and living over the club, anticipating starting their own family once the club became profitable.

Caitlyn glanced over at Aidan's slumbering form. It seemed like just yesterday, but she knew it was over a year ago. If anything happened to Aidan she didn't know what she would do. She couldn't imagine life without him.

A tear escaped and trickled down her cheek as she remembered their reunion in the office downstairs. Her frightened reaction to him must have hit him hard. No wonder he'd been acting so hot and cold.

Groaning, she looked up at the ceiling. Now ... if only she could remember the true identity of the Slasher.

* * * * *

Smoothing her hands over the silk material, Caitlyn reflected on the past two hours. She studied her reflection in front of the full-length mirror, which hung on the inside of her closet door.

When Aidan woke, and she told him what she remembered, he'd been so happy they'd made love again. Twice.

Then he'd gone off to call Meredith and Lucas to tell them the news, while she showered and dressed for a night out. Or rather, a night in. He wanted to celebrate, but still

feared the Slasher would come after her. In a compromise, he'd ordered a small feast from a nearby restaurant, and told her to take her time making herself beautiful.

Taking him at his word, Caitlyn had enjoyed a nice, leisurely bath. Then she'd given herself a pedicure and a manicure, painting all her nails a dark red to match the gown she'd found in the back of her closet.

Now that she was dressed, it was time to go celebrate. She added some simple gold jewelry, along with her wedding band and engagement ring that Lucas had returned to Aidan earlier.

Then, with a smile, and an extra bounce in her step, Caitlyn hurried down the hall toward the living room. Her steps slowed as she heard Aidan whispering on the phone to someone.

"She doesn't remember, Meredith," Aidan spoke softly.

Caitlyn walked over to the doorway and frowned.

"Tell her? Hell no, it would destroy her. I hope she doesn't ever remember."

There was a pause as he listened. Then he shook his head.

"You, me, and Lucas are the only ones who know. Unless you told Jake."

Told Jake what?

"Okay, good. I gotta go. I think I heard Caitlyn finish her shower a while ago. She'll be out here any minute."

"I love you, too."

His back was to her so she couldn't see his face as he whispered his love to Meredith. But it didn't matter. She remembered another phone conversation she'd overheard involving Meredith and Aidan. That one had been just as suspicious.

Caitlyn couldn't decide whether to confront him, or to run and cry. No, she wouldn't jump to conclusions. Many people often said "I love you" to each other.

But try as she might, she didn't remember hearing either one say it to each other. Not once since she'd come back had she heard either one say it. Not once before when they were dating had she heard him say it.

"Aidan?" she whispered hoarsely, staring at him.

"Caitlyn!" He turned around with a guilty look. He looked everywhere but at her.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing." He cleared his throat and walked over to the window. "I was checking the weather."

"I heard you and Meredith on the phone," she said, eyes narrowing.

"Oh." He cleared his throat again. "How much did you hear?"

What was wrong with him? Did he keep clearing his throat to buy time to think up answers? "Enough. When were you going to tell me?"

"I didn't want to upset you. Lucas said it would."

"Hell yeah, it upsets me. Who wouldn't get upset!" she yelled.

"I'm sorry," Aidan said, taking a few steps toward her, reaching for her. "I would rather you didn't have to go through this a second time."

He grabbed her arm, but she swung away, breaking his grip. "Well, don't worry; this is the last time I have to go through it."

Spinning on her heel, Caitlyn stormed to the door and walked out, slamming it behind her.

Where had she gone the last time she'd overheard him and Meredith whispering on the phone? She froze halfway to the elevator as she remembered she'd fled to her parents. Once there she'd discovered her parents' bodies, and came running back here.

Then in the alleyway, she'd been attacked by Aidan. Or the Slasher, who was pretending to be Aidan.

Where did that leave her now? The Slasher had told her when she remembered to come find him. That he would be waiting. She knew that he would watch and wait until she was alone and try to kill her again. Why not take control and try and find him? Perhaps if she caught him off guard she'd take the upper hand this time.

Caitlyn knew she'd spend every day in fear, waiting for the killer to find her alone. It was inevitable that he would come after her. She needed to figure out his identity so the protectors could stop him.

She'd go back to the beginning. Her parents' house.

Once outside she shifted into an owl, and flew through the graying sky, toward the house she'd once called home. She knew Meredith would have kept the house, but it would be empty because no one would live in it now.

Landing as gracefully as she could, Caitlyn shifted back and looked up at the dark, empty house.

Gathering her courage, she walked up to the front door and turned the knob. With a small push, the door swung open soundlessly. Remembered pain and terror clouded her mind, and she gasped, trying to breathe through the stench of evil that still permeated the very air.

The whisper of a past terror echoed in the empty hallway as she stepped inside, closing the door behind her. Slowly, she walked a few steps to the doorway of the living room, and peeked inside.

Although they were now empty, she could still see the rooms as they'd once been. Full of gorgeous antiques and flowers. Her mother often said she'd live in a greenhouse if it were possible. Then her father would complain that she cared more for plants than him, and her mother would simply shake her head with a smile.

Theirs was the kind of love Caitlyn thought she'd found with Aidan. But the strong physical attraction must have blinded her to his faults. Like infidelity.

Blinking back tears, Caitlyn paused. Perhaps once again, she reacted without thinking. Why would Aidan have only been on the phone with Meredith? It had taken her over an hour to soak in the tub, and then she had done her nails and dressed. He'd had plenty of time to make his calls, and still go get the food. Why had he been at home on the phone?

Doubt rose in her mind as she left the living room and headed for the stairs. Aidan loved her. He wouldn't have betrayed her. He couldn't have made love with her the way he had if he loved someone else.

Meredith and Adam told her he'd refused to believe she was dead. He hadn't seen another woman since her supposed death. If he wanted Meredith, he'd had his chance when she'd disappeared, and before Jake had married her. She sighed, realizing she'd yet again jumped to conclusions.

Pausing at the bottom of the stairs, she glanced up to the second floor. Would the Slasher reveal himself to her here? Or would he hide behind Aidan's form once again? This time, surprise would be on her side. She was prepared for him to take on any appearance.

Caitlyn slid her hand on the smooth wood of the banister and wasn't surprised when her hand came away clean.

He was already here, and waiting.

Bracing herself for the battle to come, Caitlyn walked up the stairs slowly, avoiding the creaky steps by habit.

When she reached the top, she paused again, listening. The hallway was identical to the one she dreamed of repeatedly, only this time, Caitlyn knew what lay behind the door at the end of the hall. She knew what was waiting for her in her parents' bedroom, just not who.

Panic held her tight in its grasp as she remembered the last time she'd walk down this hall. When she reached the end, what would she see?

Swallowing, Caitlyn moved slowly and quietly down the long planks of wood. Of course the blood-stained white carpet would have been torn out. Even if they'd removed the stain, it would still be there, haunting them.

Before she was ready, Caitlyn reached the door. Slowly, she reached out and grabbed the doorknob, turning it softly. When she pushed the door open, she froze in horror.

The bedroom looked exactly the way it had that night. Only instead of her parents' bodies, there were two large, red stains on the once white comforter.

Faux Aidan sat there, leaning against the headboard, watching her with amusement. "Good evening, Caitlyn."

She shivered as the imposter's voice echoed in the room.

"I was wondering when you would come. I've been disappointed it took this long, but then your meddling brother ensured I wouldn't find you easily, didn't he?"

Caitlyn frowned, looking around the room for a clue to his true identity.

"I guess you can't change the way you are, Caitlyn. You know how they say curiosity killed the cat?"

She nodded slowly, watching him for flaws in the image he projected at her.

"It's true. And it's time for you to die." He rose and stood next to the bed, a silver knife glistening in his hand. He smiled when he noticed her looking at it in confusion. "Do you like it? I have a whole bunch of them. All identical."

"Why do you hide behind Aidan? If you are going to kill me, why can't I see the real you?"

Caitlyn hoped that by keeping him talking she could figure out a way to kill him with the least harm done to herself. At least, it usually worked in the movies. Keep the villain talking and either the cavalry arrived or the good guy saved the day.

"At first it was fun. Your poor, pathetic parents were so surprised they hardly put up a fight. Unfortunately my magic slipped and they saw who I was just before I tore out their still-beating hearts."

She couldn't hide the tremor that ran up her spine at his harsh words. "You disgust me."

"It's all right, dear, I've had plenty of practice the last few months. I know exactly how much I can bleed you and still keep you alive until I tear out your nice, juicy heart. I bet it will taste as good as your mother's."

Caitlyn changed, her fangs and claws lengthening. "I'm going to kill you."

"That's what they all say." He laughed, twirling the knife in his hand. "Want to know what I'm going to do to the rest of your family?"

"Nothing," she hissed.

She flew across the room, knocking the knife out of his hand as she swiped her claws across his forearm and chest.

"Wrong," he said, as he grabbed her and slammed her into the wall, then threw her across the room. "I'm going to bury them next to your mother, father, and baby."

"Baby?" Caitlyn gasped, looking up at him through a haze of pain. She crouched on the floor, waiting for her vision to clear so she could attack him again.

"You don't remember everything, princess?"

"I'm not a princess."

"That's right." He laughed again. "You're the queen. Until I kill you, anyway."

"Why are you doing this?"

"For the power, why else?"

When he reached down for his knife, Caitlyn saw her chance and took it. Launching herself across the room, she leapt for his throat, wrapping her hands around him and squeezing as hard as she could.

She stared into Aidan's green eyes and gasped as they flickered. Then his face changed and she caught a glimpse of Jake before he used her surprise to break free.

"Is that all you've got, sweetheart?" he asked, driving the knife deep into her stomach.

Caitlyn doubled over, closing her eyes in agony. He'd stabbed her repeatedly that night in the alley, too. And she'd been pregnant.

She lifted stunned eyes to meet his triumphant gaze.

"Ahh, I see now you are starting to remember."

"But why, Jake?" she asked, scrambling backwards, away from him.

"Because with you gone, Meredith will rule. She's nothing but a puppet who enjoys letting me control her. She's weak and pathetic."

Caitlyn cried out in rage and flew at him, trying to do as much damage as she could with her claws. He let out a roar when she sliced across his stomach.

Jake, looking like Aidan again, backhanded her, knocking her onto the floor. Why was he so strong? He was stronger than any other vampire she'd ever encountered. Too weak to do anything, she waited as he walked over to her and grabbed her, yanking her close again.

"Your family's blood runs thick in my veins," he said, holding the knife ready in his hand. "You are too weak to destroy me."

"But I'm not," Aidan said from the doorway.

"We'll see about that! Come and get her!" Faux Aidan called out. Still holding on tightly to Caitlyn, he shifted into a large owl and flew through the window, his sharp talons digging into her back.

Caitlyn heard Aidan flying through the night after them. She wasn't sure where Jake was taking her, or if anyone could defeat him. All the wounds she'd inflicted on him hadn't done more than make him angry. Hell, her stomach still stung like hell, and she was fighting hard not to cry over the death of her unborn child.

Your life is at stake, she scolded herself. Don't worry about what you can't change. You need to defeat Jake and keep him from hurting Meredith.

Aidan, she reached out with her mind.

A harsh laughter echoed in her head. I've had enough of your blood that I can confuse your mind and keep you from communicating with your precious Aidan.

Caitlyn struggled even harder, ignoring the pain from the talons slashing into her skin.

The harder you thrash around, the faster your blood spills on the ground. Then what kind of a fight will you give me? His evil laughter echoed in her mind.

“Stop it!” she screamed, and doing the only thing she could think to do, Caitlyn began to chant.

She repeated one of the spells her mother had taught her long ago. A spell that sent power racing through her veins and spreading out of her body, enveloping her in a white light.

Jake cried out in a pain-filled howl as the power burned his talons. The smell of burning bird reached her nose a few seconds before he dropped her.

“No!” Aidan’s scream filled the night as he flew toward her. Caitlyn stopped chanting, and tried to shift into an owl.

Jake was right, though; she’d lost a lot of blood fighting him, then used up most of her energy with that chant. If Aidan didn’t catch her, she was in for a great deal more pain.

She looked up into Aidan’s eyes and watched as Jake rammed into him, both of them tumbling to the ground. She hit the ground with a painful crash, every bone in her body feeling as if it shattered. Her breath left her in a whoosh, leaving her gasping for air. She knew she’d broken some ribs, probably her legs and arms too.

Helpless, she looked up and watched both Aidans engaged in battle in their human forms.

“My God, Caitlyn!” Meredith cried out, dropping to her knees next to her.

Caitlyn tried to tell her to shush, but she still couldn’t breathe, and it was making her very lightheaded. Meredith’s hands moved over her quickly and efficiently, checking for damage, and sending healing into her. As Meredith mended her broken ribs, Caitlyn winced, but managed to draw in a deep breath.

“Why did you leave the apartment?” Meredith muttered before she closed her eyes and concentrated on the wound to her stomach. “Why aren’t you helping me heal you? We can all do this, Caitlyn. You, Lucas, me. We can all heal. You’ve got to focus and help me.”

“Is she okay?” Lucas asked, dropping on all fours next to them.

“I hope so,” Meredith snapped. “She needs to heal so I can kill her for being stupid.”

“Termuvins!” Adam cried out, arriving in time to keep them from both Aidans. She knew he couldn’t tell which was the real one.

Caitlyn turned her head and watched as several creatures dropped out of a cloud near the still-struggling Aidans. She wondered which one would win, and hoped it was her Aidan, not Jake.

“Lucas, you go help Aidan and I’ll keep Caitlyn safe.”

“No,” Caitlyn protested. “You’re going to hurt yourself. I’m too badly injured.”

“Nonsense.” Meredith clucked at her.

“Which Aidan is the real one?” Lucas shouted over the sound of the rising wind.

Great. Was Jake stirring up the elements now? Just how much magic did he possess?

"I'm sorry," Caitlyn said, grabbing onto Meredith's hand. Meredith looked at her in confusion. "One of the Aidans is Jake."

"Jake?" Meredith paled. "My Jake?"

"I'm sorry," Caitlyn whispered.

"My husband is the Slasher?" she asked weakly.

One of the Aidans went down, and the other rushed over to Caitlyn. Lucas kicked him in the stomach and completed the maneuver by grabbing the back of his neck when he doubled over. Caitlyn watched in amazement as Lucas's fangs and claws erupted and he lifted Aidan, by the throat, into the air.

"Which one are you, dammit?" Lucas growled, shaking him. "Aidan or Jake?"

"Jake?" The Aidan gasped. "The bastard! Put me down, Lucas."

"Don't play with me," Lucas growled again. "I'm ready to kill both of you and be done with it."

"The eyes," Caitlyn said, tugging on Meredith's arm. "You can tell by the eyes. Jake's flicker when he struggles to maintain the image."

The Aidan laughed and pushed Lucas away as if he were swatting at a fly. Lucas flew back until he smacked into a tree. Caitlyn watched as he changed into Jake, and moved toward them with an evil grin.

Meredith planted herself between them.

"Move, Meredith."

"No, Jake. You'll have to kill me, first."

"Awww," he said, tilting his head to one side. "Now why do you have to be that way?"

Meredith was tossed to the side with a wave of Jake's hand. Then Jake reached down and grabbed Caitlyn, lifting her up by the throat.

"It's time to die, sweetheart," he said, thrusting the silver knife into her heart.

Caitlyn's scream stuck in her throat as pain engulfed her body. Then Jake's scream echoed in her ears. Looking into his eyes, she saw them widen in disbelief. She glanced down and saw a tree branch sticking out of his chest. His knees buckled and he dropped her to the ground. He started to rise, but Meredith slashed her claws across his throat, severing his head.

Caitlyn turned to watch his head rolling across the ground.

"Caitlyn?" Aidan's voice came from next to her, but everything was growing more distant.

"Get the knife out of her," Meredith said.

Caitlyn closed her eyes and felt herself drift away. It was over. Jake was dead; Aidan and her family were safe. A warm peace enveloped her, cradling her, making her feel safe at last.

“Caitlyn, sweetheart, don’t leave me,” Aidan pleaded.

She frowned. His voice came from far off, but she knew she couldn’t ignore it. She belonged with him. She needed to stay.

Epilogue

“Hurry!” Caitlyn called from the doorway.

Aidan glanced up with a smile. She grew more beautiful each day. Pregnancy really suited her. And this time he wasn’t letting anything happen to her. She was going to remain at his side if he had to tie her there.

“Meredith will be here soon. I want you to be there when I tell her!”

“I’m coming!” Aidan grinned and turned back to his computer.

He heard the doorbell ring and moved his mouse around, closing out the windows. He exited out of his email program and was about to turn off the computer when he noticed the headline in the lower right corner of his home page.

Death count totals three in Devil’s Hills, North Carolina.

With a frown he closed the window and shut down the computer. He’d been following the reports closely because it appeared as if someone was copycatting Jake’s crimes.

Caitlyn’s laughter rang out and he brushed the news from his thoughts. Quickly he rose from the desk and headed for the living room.

Jake was dead, and Caitlyn was very much alive. She was all he needed to concentrate on right now.

If it weren’t for the spell her mother had taught her so long ago, she wouldn’t be here today. Sending a heartfelt thanks to his mother-in-law, Aidan walked into the living room to greet his friends and family. It saddened him to see Meredith so depressed, but he knew the news of Caitlyn’s baby would help make up for the terror of the past few months.

If only things could have been different.

Caitlyn beamed at him over Meredith's shoulder. Lucas stood at the door with Molly. The whole family was together once again. Aidan couldn't have imagined this scene a few months ago.

And now ... Well, now he was going to make sure Meredith and her baby were taken care of. He'd found a great little house just outside the city where Meredith wouldn't have to be reminded of Jake constantly.

"Congratulations!" Meredith squealed when she turned around and saw him. She wrapped her arms around him and squeezed tightly.

"Thanks." He grinned, hugging her back.

Caitlyn smiled at him and mouthed the words, *I love you*. Aidan felt his heart swell with the amount of love he felt for her. He had all he needed, he thought, drawing her into his embrace. The baby was just the icing on the cake.

"Congrats, Daddy," Lucas said, slapping Aidan on the back.

Aidan knew a goofy grin covered his face, but since he learned about the baby they lost, he wanted to be a father. There was nothing like lost opportunities to make someone realize what was most important in life.

"Thanks, Lucas."

"How are you going to handle two of them?" Lucas teased. "Caitlyn gives you more than enough trouble."

"Not anymore, she doesn't." Aidan reached for his wife and pulled her close, his arm wrapping around her waist. "She's learned from the past, haven't you darling?"

Caitlyn nodded, but elbowed him in the stomach. "I've learned to think before I act, to ask questions rather than run and hide."

"Aidan?" Meredith asked, her face sobering. "Do you have news for me?"

"I'm sorry." Aidan reached for her and hugged her. "All we were able to discover was that Jake made a deal with some termuvins overseas. He guaranteed them protection if they assisted him in his quest for power."

"Jake had grand delusions of a superior race of vampires," Lucas added with a smirk. "We knew his family had strong magic in their bloodline, but we hadn't realized that Jake sought to merge his magic with ours and use it to his own benefit. When Caitlyn spurned him, he turned to you."

"I'm such a fool," Meredith said.

Aidan knew she was fighting tears, and wished he could take away her pain. "You aren't a fool. You single-handedly saved your sister from a madman, and saved yourself in the process. None of us knew about his schemes. You aren't the only one he fooled."

"Had he succeeded, he'd have ruled the Northeast through me."

“But he didn’t succeed.” Caitlyn wrapped her arm around Meredith. “You stopped him. You are my heroine.”

Aidan smiled as she kissed Meredith’s cheek. The door rang and Aidan released Caitlyn to answer it.

“See, sis. Everything will work out. Everything happens for a reason.” Caitlyn grabbed Meredith’s hand. Meredith snorted and pulled her hand away.

Caitlyn fingered her cross. Aidan had found it in the alley and kept it a secret until he could get it cleaned and repaired for her. She hoped it was as lucky for her now as it had been in the past.

“So you are moving in with us, right?” Caitlyn refused to let Meredith continue to alienate herself. “We’ll raise our babies together?”

Meredith smiled at her last comment, and met her eyes. “Yes, I’d love that.”

Caitlyn wrapped her in a tight hug. She knew things weren’t perfect, but they were together again, and with the two new babies on the way the future seemed brighter. Meredith was a fighter. She’d survive. Caitlyn would see to it.

 THE END 

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Michelle Hasker has been writing for two years. She is a member of Romance Writers of America and the Fantasy, Futuristic and Paranormal chapter of RWA.

She loves vampires and things that go bump in the night, so it's no wonder her creations are truly paranormal. While most people only dream of finding love, Michelle's characters find it, but in the most unexpected places.

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