

# **Scarlet Ties: Taste**

## **Anisa Damien**

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## Chapter One

The cries of passion vibrating through the lantern-lit hallways of The Scarlet Manor weren't new to Master Cyrus Rayven. A mere human wouldn't be able to hear the hoarse cries of pleasure through the soundproof rooms, but a Deiwalker -- a vampire who could withstand sunlight -- could.

His was a heritage that held no satisfaction for him. Cyrus was well aware of the kinky fetishes and fantasies executed behind the heavy oak doors of the twenty-five suites housed in the old mansion. Many a liaison had occurred between those of the human populace and vampires of a primitive, more lustful clan.

A cynical smile crossed his lips. The passion between a human and a member of the undead was as ancient as the seductive beat of lovemaking, but the latter did not make Cyrus happy. Being a Deiwalker only served as a constant reminder of the ones he'd lost and why he could not afford to be close to anyone again.

The manor made no distinction when it came to how a client chose to get off. They offered their services to an exclusive few and the amenities afforded to those lucky chosen were enough to keep them in business for a long time to come. All clients were required to sign a waiver that forbade them to talk about their encounters with members of the media, and, as an extra precaution, were driven to the facility blindfolded. So far, they had managed to avoid any major lawsuits or televised coverage, not that the press and several magazines hadn't tried every game in the book to gain access to the infamous Rayven brothers. If his brother Coye would be more discreet about his own affairs, their chances of keeping their secrets hidden would be even greater.

The thought of listening to others' screams of pleasure left Cyrus hollow. He continued to walk down the hallway, his jaw clenched and his fists tight. He'd said

goodbye to his own days of lust when his beloved Jordana had been murdered at the hands of her jilted ex-love almost three years ago. Their union had been filled with wonder, an untamed love. When she died, a part of Cyrus had died with her.

He wasn't blind to the fact that many a human and vampiress had tried to finagle him into her bed over the last three years. Coye thought him insane. His twin loved everything about pursuing the sexual nature of life and everything it brought with it. Vampiresses or humans -- it didn't matter as long as a shapely body ended up beneath him.

Cyrus marveled at how different he and his brother were. Coye was the creative twin, while he was the analytical one. Cyrus handled the more "mundane" day-to-day events of the manor, while Coye's job included testing the themes of each of the twenty-five suites and making certain that each was stocked with the latest sex toys.

Just as Cyrus neared the end of the hallway, a door opened. Without looking, he felt his twin's call. The hammering pulse of desire and the intimate heat of a female -- in this case two -- permeated his senses. He sighed.

He paused before turning to the sight of pure decadent debauchery in the room before him. The Sultan's Room was elaborately decorated in vibrant purples, cranberries, creams, reds and blues. Pillows of every size lined the octagon-shaped room. Erotic oils and gels had been placed in decorative vases and feathers were elaborately displayed around the walls. The lanterns were dimmed low. A warm glow silhouetted the figures in the middle of the floor.

*There's enough for two, brother.* Coye grinned as he gripped the silky hair of the buxom brunette as she eagerly reached for his cock. He lay against several cushions, his legs spread out and a turban on his head. The woman wet her lips and sampled his rigid sex with the tip of her tongue. The other mahogany-hued woman smiled at Cyrus wickedly as she bit her fingers, as if waiting for him to join in.

*My name is Tara. Do you like what you see?*

He ignored her.

She stepped directly in front of Coye's face, parting her lean legs on either side of his upper abdomen. Coye spread the woman's legs wider and looked back to his brother.

*Sure you won't have some?*

Cyrus frowned. *You're having enough for both of us.* He watched as his twin traced a finger against the woman's labia. Her gaze held Cyrus' as desire lit up her ravenous black pupils. A cry erupted from her lips as Coye probed her sex deeper with his fingers.

Cyrus folded his arms across his chest, knowing his brother's next move without watching. They could read one another, a power that at times like these made him wonder if it were a good thing. This was not the first time his brother had attempted to test his resolve. Cyrus tried to remain unaffected, even as his cock hardened against his slacks. He gritted his teeth. The need to mate threatened to consume him and would, if he let it. He wasn't that same man as when Jordana was alive. And he refused to live in the days of letting his flesh overpower him, knowing in the end he would be lost.

*Don't slight me because I refuse to live like some damn hermit.* Coye winked, drawing his attention back to the panting woman in front of him. He inhaled. The woman's shaved pussy was close enough to his brother's mouth that all Coye would have to do is reach forward with his tongue and take her.

Cyrus wasn't surprised when he did exactly that, his tongue darting outward and sampling the beauty with one slow and lazy lick.

*There is such a thing as self-control.* Cyrus grunted, watching the woman's head roll back. She lowered her lashes, finally in ecstasy. He was captivated despite himself as he studied the small hands wound in Coye's inky black hair. She pulled his head forward as his hungry assault became more ardent. Urgent. Suddenly her dark eyes focused on Cyrus. Mocking him.

*Come play...*

Cyrus pretended not to hear her beckoning or the hungry pleas she moaned as his brother ravaged her. His gaze drifted to the woman suckling his brother's cock as

she pistoned her mouth up and down his shaft. Her back was to him as she hunched over Coye's lower body.

The long curve of her spine and the lush swell of her ass was enough to make any man lose control. Loud, voluptuous sounds escaped her mouth. His brother's body racked with rapture yet he didn't stop eating the woman's pussy as he groaned his first orgasm out loud.

He felt every ounce of his twin's sexual force heighten and stretch to the brink of no return. He knew he should walk away but he couldn't. He looked on, tormented as the woman cradled tightly in his brother's arms came apart as he licked her from slit to clit and she screamed out her release.

The sound rang loudly in Cyrus' ears. He doubted he'd be able to get it out of his mind for the rest of the night. He couldn't remember when he'd witnessed something so wickedly beautiful. The woman openly glared at him, as if she were searching his soul.

*You're afraid of me, Cyrus?* The vampiress smiled.

*Don't play with me,* he countered swiftly. *I'm not my brother.*

Coye surrendered to his second orgasm. The rapturous brunette suckling his cock groaned as he released his seed deeply into her mouth again. He wiped Tara's essence from his lips and smiled at Cyrus.

*Come on, brother, you know you want it! Stop acting like you don't.*

*I don't want it!* Cyrus lied, forcing his eyes away from his twin. *Not as much as you do apparently.* He abruptly closed the door on his brother and the two vampiresses.

But he did want it.

He wanted a woman to come as he held her in his arms as the African-American beauty had in his brother's. He wanted to have a woman's scent on his lips and to know that he had brought her to the brink of insanity over and over again. That need was strangely becoming stronger than ever before.

Cyrus had never been fool enough to act on his impulses or the whims of the women who hungered to see themselves in his bed.

He sure as hell wouldn't start now!

Cyrus stormed into the bedroom, stripping off his clothes as he gazed out the window at the full moon. The midnight sky beckoned to him. He relaxed, morphing into a creature that owed no explanation to the world for who and what he was. Free, Cyrus soared into the black night. The feel of air brushing over the thick black fur of his delicate wings soothed his disquieted soul.

This was his solace. He climbed higher and higher, over the trees, and glanced at the city below him. Words could not describe the elation he felt. He remembered trying to explain the sense of freedom to Jordana. He missed her and her sweet laughter. Some things could not be changed, just as he could not change his own fate of solitude.

\* \* \*

Ashlyn Douglas leaned her head in the palm of her hand. She liked the prospect of eating! But if she didn't come up with a plan, she was looking at soup and crackers long into the unforeseeable future.

She wanted her current temporary position to become permanent. There was only one way to do that according to the Jolly Roger -- her nickname for her editor -- get a leading story that would drive circulation through the roof. But how? And what?

Ash didn't like being cornered. She was used to maneuvering obstacles around in her favor. She'd always liked the idea of freelancing between publications, but jobs like those were scarce.

By twenty-eight, she'd sworn that her name would be a force to reckon with in the journalism world. It was moments like these that made her feel like she had a long way to go.

She hoped her D cups could hold out that long. Not that she flaunted her looks, but it sure as hell didn't hurt anything to naturally access them. She didn't think herself a supermodel by any means, especially when her hips were way too curvy to fit into a size twelve, but she had curves in all the right places and didn't see any men complaining.

Ash wasn't foolish enough to believe lying on her back would get her the big brass ring. Her writing skills on the high school newspaper had earned her a scholarship to Columbia College. Still, she counted on the gift of a persuasive tongue. Growing up on the tough streets of Chicago, she'd learned the tricks of the trade from her old man, Nathaniel Douglas, former con-artist and thief. Reformed, mind you.

She wasn't sorry. The need to have the inside track as a reporter had only fed her inquisitive nature. She'd grown up the daughter of a con after all. He'd been all she had -- still was. Her mother died shortly after Ash was born. Her father had raised her the best he could. She still found it hard to believe that her father had a heart condition. The man who believed he'd never die. Now she wanted help out any way she could.

Ash ran her hands through her short, cropped curls and wondered when money was going to start growing on trees. Maybe then Prince Charming could drop from a branch while the heavens were being so agreeable.

Ash smirked.

"A look like that can only mean trouble."

She glanced into the rich brown eyes of fellow reporter Peyton Jones. The man was made for sin. Mocha-brown skin and the sexiest smile she'd seen in a good while kept her wondering when he'd show her just what he was made of beneath the sheets.

She grinned slowly. "Hey, Jones."

"Remember, it's Peyton, Miss Douglas," he teased and leaned over her desk, placing his rock hard thigh near her folded hands.

"Of course."

His wicked gaze zeroed in on her. "What trouble are you cooking up now?"

He smelled so good!

She tilted her head, hoping the look on her face betrayed nothing. "Me? I would never cause trouble, especially when this job isn't officially mine."

Peyton wiggled his thick eyebrows. "It could be."

"How's that? You've got something on Jolly Roger that I can use as blackmail? A videotape of, say, a naughty strip tease to Little Red Corvette on his desk perhaps?"



He chuckled. "You're wicked."

"So I've been told."

Peyton leaned close. "No, I have something... better." He looked around to make sure their conversation couldn't be overheard. "Have you heard of the Rayven brothers?"

Ash thought for a moment. Where had she heard that name before? She shook her head. "That name sounds familiar."

"Well, here's the 411 on them." Peyton placed a thick file on her desk labeled "The Scarlet Manor."

Curiosity got the best of her as she reached for the file but his palm clamped over hers. "Uh-uh. First I need your word."

Ash grinned. "What deep dark secrets are you harboring here, Jones?"

"The kind that stays between us for the moment or we could both lose our jobs. If you play your cards right, we could both end up with what we want."

Ash nodded, mildly disappointed when he removed his large hand from hers. "I'll take that gamble."

Peyton smirked. "I'd hold off on making any assumptions until you've read the file and then come talk to me." He stood, righting his shirt and tie. "I'm sure you'll be more than a little intrigued once you have."

Ash felt her body hum with sexual frustration. She was already intrigued -- by Peyton! She watched him walk back to his desk with that slow, sexy strut that made her want to tear his clothes off. It was high time she got laid.

Ash looked at her watch, noting it was lunchtime. She grabbed the file and strolled to the elevator, passing by the rush of reporters, editors, the smell of ink and stale coffee. She knew just the place to unwind for a while. Café and Perks.

Scooting into a corner booth, secluded from the patrons who were deep in conversations, laptops and BlackBerries, she ordered her usual caramel latte. Opening the file, she read the first page. Her mouth almost dropped open after reading several paragraphs.

The Scarlet Manor was damn near a sex resort for members of the elite occult.

Occult? Surely, Peyton didn't believe in it. Did he? He didn't seem the type. A part of her tingled at the idea. She, on the other hand, had always been interested in the oddities of life. After all, her father was a thief and yet, in the grand scheme of things she could rationalize his survival-of-the-fittest mentality.

Ash looked around, hoping no one noticed her blush. A tremor swept through her body.

Had Peyton meant to whisk her away to an erotic hideaway? Her answer would undeniably be "Hell yes!" She could be packed in the next hour. If they left before five, they could beat most of the rush-hour traffic. She'd be sure to pack away that little black number she'd picked up while shopping a couple weeks back.

But what had he meant about her job permanently being hers?

Her gaze scurried back over Peyton's file. She wanted to know everything. The manor was more than two hundred years old and had been renovated twice. Once after a fire and another due to the business endeavor that turned it into a sexually themed getaway.

So engrossed was she in the article that the waitress' reappearance with her latte barely registered. It was as if a mystical force held her hostage. Her heart palpitated erratically underneath her shirt. She felt the most delicious heat envelop her. Inside her. It almost rocked her off the booth.

Again Ash glanced around, wondering if anyone else had felt the earthquake. But no one paid her a bit of attention. She turned back to the file. Her thoughts were entranced by the mystery laid out before her. She blamed her reaction on her nerves. The excitement of being alone with Peyton and playing out all the hedonistic pleasures she'd dreamt about.

She stirred her coffee, shuffling the cup to the side.

The manor was owned by brothers, Cyrus and Coye Rayven. She searched the file for photographs of the men. Evidently they'd done a good job of avoiding the camera.

Coffee forgotten, Ash devoured the articles Peyton had collected. Everything from the erotic tales of every sexual, primal need being serviced at the manor to the captivating stories of the Rayven brothers. She turned the next page. Her mouth dropped open.

Clippings and articles of the speculated ties to the occult, the Rayvens and vampires? Not any vampires but super beings. Deiwalkers, members of an ancient clan who were able to withstand sunlight. Tales of mating between humans and members of the Deiwalkers were elaborately described.

Somehow when she'd thought occult she hadn't thought of things that sucked blood. She'd believe it when she saw it.

Ashlyn exhaled as if she'd been holding her breath for some time. She glanced out the window and did a double take as she swore she saw Peyton across the street, a big smile on his face. She shook her head and he was gone.

She chuckled nervously, thinking she couldn't have seen correctly. "Now you're seeing things. Don't go crazy yet, you have to at least get your groove on." She rummaged for several dollar bills in her purse, grabbed the file and headed out of the café. "But first you need answers."

When she got back to the office she made a beeline to Peyton's desk. He gazed upward as she approached him.

"You've returned," he said, smiling, and leaned back into his chair.

"Yes." Ash leaned forward, watching as Peyton focused on her ample cleavage.

"And?"

"I want in."

His mood seemed suddenly buoyant. "Are you sure about that?"

"Very." Ash went on, "If your intent is to get the goods on the Rayven brothers and of course, sharing a byline with me, then I'm in."

"I was hoping you'd say that. You realize, however, that this means that you and I will have to go in as lovers? Not to mention false names."

"I promise not to bite if you won't. Unless you want me to." She let her gaze travel over him, making her intent known.

"I hope that means that you're willing to embark on the wilder side of life."

She contemplated some of the speculated practices of the manor. Her pussy grew wet at the naughty visions of enjoying erotic adventures with him. "I can if you can."

Peyton chuckled. "Ashlyn Douglas, you've made an offer I can't refuse."

"Good, things go along so well when both parties agree about what they're after."

"I couldn't agree more." He winked. "Now, let's talk strategy."

## Chapter Two

"Is she human?" Coye asked, straightening his tie. He glanced up from his desk into Peyton Jones' face. Coye hated doing business with a Companion, but this time it was necessary. Companions were humans whose blood had been tainted by a vampire's kiss, but not completely drained of their life's line. He found them untrustworthy and subject to the whims of their emotions.

A weaker species if ever Coye had come across one. He wasn't a fool. He knew that Jones sought the affection of Tara, one of the vampiresses he'd had the pleasure of succumbing to the night before last. It amused him that men like Jones and his brother could be ruled by emotions. He simply didn't understand how any one woman could have that effect.

"Yes, as you requested. Full-blooded human and much to your brother's favoring."

"That remains to be seen, Mr. Jones."

Peyton frowned. "A deal is a deal, Rayven. I want Tara and I will not share her with you."

Coye lunged from his seat. "Don't make the mistake of thinking that I won't kill you right where you stand. Many a man or vampire would not take kindly to his mistress fucking around on the side and then her lover in turn asking for total claim, especially by a Companion."

"Tara means nothing to you, Rayven. We both know that. I'm her Companion."

Coye didn't believe in all the laws of the ancient covenant. A Companion was said to be the infinite mate of a Deiwalker. Cyrus thought Jordana had been his mate. Coye was not interested in being linked to anyone indefinitely. He liked his freedom. And as far as he was concerned a human would be the last species he'd choose for a mate.

"I've become very fond of her during the time I've been in her acquaintance." He watched as the other man gritted his teeth. As much as he'd like to toy with this Companion, he had a bigger mission: finding a suitable human female to release the hell-bent restraint Cyrus occupied the manor and every waking moment with. Who would know better what his brother needed than him? He felt every ache, every restrained impulse Cyrus reined in and it was killing them both.

He didn't understand his brother's need for a human when there wasn't a vampiress around who wouldn't want to occupy his bed. But Cyrus was particular and if it meant giving him another Jordana, especially one that looked very similar to his beloved Companion, he would do it. Maybe then they could both have some peace.

Coye looked into Jones' weary gaze. "You have my word that Tara is yours. I will not come after her."

The man nodded his head. "Ashlyn Douglas will be arriving with me tomorrow afternoon."

"Perfect. Cyrus will be away on business until late in the day. I'll arrange for an accidental meeting between them and see that you don't screw anything up."

Peyton nodded and left the room.

\* \* \*

The silky blindfold over her eyes made Ashlyn antsy. Although she understood that it was part of The Scarlet Manor's policy, she felt like she was embarking on some forbidden trek. She couldn't shake the feeling that this trip would definitely change her relationship with Peyton. She wet her lips and wondered what he was thinking. Peyton hadn't said much during their hour and a half ride to parts unknown. And now that she had agreed and was being driven away on their hedonistic voyage, doubts vibrated in her head. She shifted in her seat; the spacious limo had her feeling out of place. Disoriented.

"How much longer?"

"Not much," Peyton replied. "Are you nervous?"

"If you count the goose bumps all over my body, then yes."

He leaned closer, his body heat sending a rush of awareness through her body.  
“Maybe if you’re a good girl, I’ll have a chance to see every last one of them.”

“And if I’m not -- good, that is?”

“Then I’ll have to punish you accordingly.”

“You tease,” she countered, a smile on her lips.

His sultry words made her clench her legs. As much as she enjoyed their verbal sparring, the craving for having Peyton in her bed was greater. She was giving him the benefit of the doubt that he would be much better than any dream she’d had. What the hell would she do if he failed and disappointed her? The low timbre of his voice brought her back to the conversation.

“Careful. Talk like that will land you on your back.”

His hand crept up her denim-covered leg slowly and then retreated. He was testing her. If he’d pick up on her body language he would have known that she was already a bunch of nerves. Ready to explode. She didn’t need to be teased. She wanted to feel the soft leather of the limousine against her bare skin and Peyton’s cock inside of her pussy. Her skin ignited under his playful touch.

Ash turned her head toward him. The scrap of silk against her eyes made her feel brazen and heightened the sexual surge between her legs. She knew the decadent, erotic things she pictured in her mind were just the start of what she imagined doing with him before their weekend at the manor was over. She was going to follow Peyton’s lead and play it cool. She was willing to wait a little longer, even if her body was saying the opposite.

As the limo came to a halt, her heartbeat raced.

This was it.

“Just promise me one thing,” Peyton whispered against her ear.

“What?”

“Be ready for anything.”

She couldn't help but be thrilled by the secretive undertone of his words. She'd be ready all right -- with bells on! The driver opened her door and helped her out of the car.

"Welcome to The Scarlet Manor, Miss Turner. I am Mr. Crane," a male voice announced.

"Thank you," Ashlyn said, feeling strange as the older man called her by her cover name. She felt someone untying the blindfold. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust, but once she did, her mouth went wide open.

The beauty of the rustic mansion outweighed the descriptions she'd read in the articles Peyton had given her. She turned around to talk to him but found he was gone. She eyed the regal looking butler. He looked old enough to be her great-grandfather but moved gracefully. His keen gaze watched her every move. She would have to be on her toes around this man.

"Mr. Lawless will be meeting you later this evening. Shall I show you to your room?" the man asked, using Peyton's cover name.

Ashlyn nodded, trying to hide her frustration. So much for thinking that they could get a jumpstart on some private time. If she couldn't have Peyton, she'd settle for a hot bath with lots and lots of bubbles and some champagne.

\* \* \*

Cyrus closed the door to his room behind him, glad to be back from his tedious meeting with a distributor. He loosened his tie and peeled off his suit jacket. All he wanted to do was relax. He threw his clothes on the back of a chair and sat down on the bed. His room overlooked the garden and beyond that was a path that led to an outdoor bath, swimming pools and several gatehouses.

A dip in the pool would soothe his ragged nerves after a night of erotic visions floating before his eyes. Jordana had been in every one of them as she was every night.

Cyrus was sure if he admitted that little tidbit to Coye, he'd think he was insane. It was enough that his brother couldn't understand why he had been attracted to a human, a Companion. But the truth was he'd never wanted anyone as much as Jordana.



Her beautiful brown skin, long ebony hair and gentle ways had been his undoing. She'd spoiled him for any other. His brother could never understand what he'd never felt.

Cyrus stood, and that's when he heard it. Laughter. Joyous, feminine laughter. Deep and throaty. His senses kicked into alert. The sound was coming from the connecting room. No one was to be in the east quarter. He refused to believe that Mr. Crane would make that mistake, knowing that the connecting room to his suite had been Jordana's. Anger sliced through him as he stalked across the floor. He ignored the impropriety at what he might find and flung open the door.

The sight before him made him harder than Coye's antics.

"What the hell are you doing in here?" Cyrus barked and then battled for words. His gaze widened and traveled over glorious inches of brown skin the color of a penny. Her back was turned to him. His eyes wandered lower. The cascades of bubbles and water rushed down her spine. The wonderfully nude woman stood with her lush ass facing him in the free-standing, bear-clawed tub in the middle of Jordana's room.

"Oh my God!" the woman screeched over her shoulder. "Get out of my room. I'll call security."

"*Your* room?" Cyrus gritted his teeth, his gaze falling to the lone towel by his feet. If he'd been in a gentlemanly mood, he would have picked it up and given it to her, but he wasn't. "I'll ask you again, what are you doing in here?"

Although he had seen every curvy angle of her luscious ass and legs, he wanted to see her face and when she did the most unladylike move and turned, not bothering to cover up her nakedness, Cyrus' mouth watered.

"What are you a pervert? Get out," she yelled, unafraid of the brooding look that sent most of the servants scurrying out of his way. "*Now.*"

The water only illuminated her healthy curves. High breasts with large, dark areolas jutted out unapologetically in his direction. Her nipples were hard and for the life of him, he couldn't remember wanting to taste a woman more.

Cyrus' gaze swept back up to her beautiful face. She looked like... No. It couldn't be.

“Jordana?” Her name was no more than a slight whisper across his lips.

No. Cyrus shook his head, thinking his eyes were playing tricks on him. Surely, he wasn’t seeing his long-ago love. He stared hard. The woman’s features were similar enough for him to see the resemblance, but it was her sass that made him realize that this woman stood on her own. Those large, sienna-brown eyes zeroed in on him, shooting daggers he was sure she’d like to see in his back. Her bee-stung lips made him want to suckle them to see if they were as sweet as they looked. Her short black hair lay in gentle waves against her scalp, making her look like the angel he had a feeling she wasn’t.

Cyrus crossed his arms over his chest. “Go ahead, call security. I won’t be going anywhere.”

No, there was no way she was his Jordana. But his body refused to register the difference. He couldn’t help but stare at her raw beauty. Her waistline wasn’t slim, but curved into generous hips. His cock stirred as his gaze settled at the apex of her legs. The dark curls covering her pussy made him want to lock the door and take her in the tub.

He should be ashamed for having such thoughts, especially being in Jordana’s room, but he felt a strange pull to the mysterious woman before him.

Her body was made for a man’s loving. It turned him on even more to know that she wasn’t one of the pixie-thin vampires awaiting him at every turn. His raging hard-on didn’t answer his question of who she was and what she was doing in Jordana’s room. He’d better keep his priorities straight.

“We’ll just see about that.” She sent him a dark look, and stepped out of the tub. “Don’t even think of trying anything.” She stomped across the floor, leaving a wet trail of footprints until she stood directly in front of him. She reached for the towel, but he was quicker and held it out to her. Her mouth tightened as she grabbed the towel, not letting him out of her sight.

Cyrus tried to hide the grin threatening to appear on his lips. “Yes, this will be very interesting.”

She didn't respond. Instead she snapped the towel around her luscious body and walked quickly to the phone, leaving a wet trail behind her. She almost slipped, but righted herself, tossing him a wary glance. "Yes, this is Miss Ashlyn Turner. I've been assaulted."

Cyrus snorted.

"Yes! That's right. A deranged man entered my room uninvited and I want him removed at once. Thank you. Yes. Please hurry."

He chuckled, clapping his hands. "Bravo. You could definitely win an Academy Award for that little performance, Ashlyn, was it?"

Ashlyn. Cyrus liked the sound of her name.

"Fuck off."

"My, such language for a lady." His gaze skimmed over her, lust loosening his stranglehold on his resolve. He wanted her. He visualized kissing away every smart retort that could possibly come from that sassy little mouth. "From that little display you put on in the bathtub for me, I use that term lightly."

"Screw you. And what kind of gentleman stands in a lady's bedroom uninvited and refuses to leave?"

Cyrus didn't know what had come over him. Possibly the little hell-raiser. He was enjoying their exchange more than he should be. He glanced around as if looking for someone. "I suppose that would be me."

"We'll see how smug you are once security gets here."

He said nothing, enjoying the heat swirling between them. He hadn't felt this alive in years and for a dead man that was saying a lot. He was going to love seeing just what Miss Turner had to say when she discovered her error. He thought of the many ways she could apologize to him.

\* \* \*

The knock on the door caused her to jump. Ashlyn forced her eyes off the roguishly handsome stranger. *We'll just see who'll be sorry.* She pointed her finger. "Last chance to scurry out of here with your tail between your legs..."

Cyrus grinned. "I wouldn't dream of it."

*Damn him for being fine!* she thought marching to the door. And he'd seen more of her than most men did on the third date. She swung open the door and there was the feeble-looking Mr. Crane, the front desk clerk, Ms. Abrams, and a security guard. Ashlyn turned to look at the man standing in her room, gesturing at him. "There he is. Please get him out of here."

"Miss Turner, are you all right?" Mr. Crane said and then looked into the room, his gaze settling on the man she pointed to. "Sir, I apologize, there must have been some misunderstanding."

Ashlyn shook her head. "Excuse me? This man has no right to be here."

"My apologies, Miss Turner. We seem to have booked you to the wrong room. I'm so sorry, Master Rayven," Ms. Abrams said.

"Master? What the hell is going on here?" Ashlyn turned to face Mr. Crane. The man looked like he'd seen a ghost.

"I think I'll take it from here," Cyrus said, stepping to the door. He stood beside her and she swore she felt him looking at her as if she were still naked. "I am Master Cyrus Rayven." His lips quirked upward and her stomach did a belly flop. What the hell was the matter with her? When she saw a sexy dimple appear on his cheek, she was a goner.

Master Cyrus stood several inches over her with a physique made for sin. His shoulders took up most of the doorway. His bronze complexion and simmering dark gaze made her pussy wet. His features made her think he could be of Native American descent. His long black hair was tied against his nape. Her fingers ached to touch the inky strands and feel its texture clutched between her fingers as he drove his cock into her pussy. But it was the go-to-hell smile that made her want to take him to bed.

*So, this is one half of the Rayven brothers,* Ashlyn thought, licking her lips. She couldn't say that the articles had lied. He was a handsome devil.

"Owner of The Scarlet Manor. And you were accidentally booked into my fiancée's room."

She broke out of her sexual fog. She wanted to evaporate, or at the very least knock that smug look off his face, whichever came first. Not quite the reaction she expected when she came across one of the infamous Rayven brothers. And now she was left panting after a taken man.

It figured!

"I'll book Miss Turner to another room right away," Ms. Abrams said hastily.

Cyrus looked down at Ashlyn and she swore he was trying to read her. She'd witnessed the solemn look on his face at the mention of his fiancée. Where was she? And didn't she know to keep a man like Cyrus locked away, not traipsing around in other women's rooms?

"Don't bother. I'd hate to inconvenience her, as I'm sure my surprise appearance did earlier." He grinned and bowed. "Miss Turner." And with that he walked away in a solid stride down the hall.

Mr. Crane exchanged a look with Ms. Abrams. Both seemed surprised at Cyrus' acceptance of the mishap. Ashlyn couldn't look away from him. She narrowed her eyes when he stopped a door down. *He's too damn close! One of us has to move!*

Cyrus angled his head, looking down the hall at her. "Wouldn't want to spoil the fun of being neighbors, now would we?"

Before she could respond, he disappeared into his room, leaving Ashlyn speechless.

A smile tugged on her lips despite herself. It'd been a long time since a man -- any man -- had had the power to do that, which made Cyrus Rayven intriguing indeed. If she didn't watch herself, she could easily forget what her mission was, or worse, blow her cover. She needed to regroup and fast. There wasn't a chance in hell that she would allow her opportunity to be a staff reporter at *Buzz* go up in smoke, not even for Cyrus.

She looked at Ms. Abrams. "Won't Master Rayven's fiancée mind me being in her connecting room?"

The woman looked at her. "I doubt it. She's dead."

## Chapter Three

"He what! But how could he do this to me?"

Mr. Crane retreated from her high shrill. "Mr. Lawless instructed me to send his sincere apologies, Miss Turner, but he was called away on an emergency and hoped you would understand."

She sighed, crumpling up the letter in her fist. "Thanks, Mr. Crane."

The elderly man bowed and crept down the hallway.

Ashlyn stood at her door, contemplating all the reasons Peyton had ducked out on her. She tried not to feel insulted, but knew the truth was she hadn't thought of Peyton since her encounter with Cyrus. The man intrigued her, infuriated her and turned her on like nobody's business.

It didn't help that she had endured a very long dry spell, and now could think of nothing better than bedding Cyrus Rayven. There was something about him that made her want to know more. Starting with that brooding façade he wore like a cloak around his neck. She didn't doubt that he was used to ruling with an iron fist. The thought only increased her wonder of him.

How could a man like that manage a sexually charged manor like this? And how was she to go on with her mission? If Peyton thought she was sharing her byline after he cut and ran, he was crazy.

Ashlyn closed the door. She had to think of a plan of attack. She scurried off to her closet. Thanks to her earlier folly with Cyrus, she had an entrance. All she had to do was make sure he followed. She picked out a black garment bag containing her red dress, the one with the plunging neckline and side split.

She grinned. "Yes, that's the one."

A knock at her side door -- the one connecting to Cyrus' room -- made her heart lurch into her throat. Ashlyn smoothed her hands over her short tresses and walked over to where the object of her every temptation stood on the other side.

Cyrus.

"Hi," he said.

"What are you --"

She wasn't prepared for him or the kiss he planted on her lips. She dropped the dress, recovered from her shock and pulled his muscular frame closer, returning his hungry licks with ones of her own.

When they parted, Ashlyn was breathless. Cyrus leaned his head against hers.

"That's one hell of a greeting, seeing how we started off."

He chuckled. "I would say I'm sorry." His eyes sought hers. "But I'm not."

"Good, that would defeat the purpose."

"I don't usually do this." His voice was a husky rumble.

"You mean you don't make a habit of entering your female guests' rooms and planting kisses that would make them feel naked?" She stepped back as he leaned against the doorjamb, looking sexy in his black suit pants and half-buttoned white dress shirt. His hair was tied back and she clenched her fingers to keep from touching it. What was it about him that made her want him?

"I heard your companion left."

Ashlyn looked away from him. What the hell could she say? And why the hell was she making this so easy for him? There was something about him. "Yes, he did."

"His mistake."

"Yes, it is."

"You know that by our rules, The Scarlet Manor only serves couples." He pulled her against him.

"I also read in the rules that guests are not to fraternize with servants or try to seek out the owners." Okay, so she'd added that last part, but she wanted to see his reaction.

"Is that what we're doing? Fraternizing?"

"I think we're right on the border of indecency." She smiled as his breathing hitched under her touch. She traced her fingers against his hard chest. "Are you going to throw me out, Master Rayven?" She couldn't walk away from him if she wanted to. She had to know, had to feel what it was like to have Cyrus inside her before the night was over.

\* \* \*

*Tell her goodnight and don't look back. Before she finds out you are one of the creatures that go bump in the night!* He could be ruining everything he'd tried to protect if he allowed this distraction with Ashlyn to continue. He'd done everything in his power to protect the Rayven name and their identities. He couldn't let his guard down, even if his cock wanted to rule. There was still much he didn't know about her. But by night's end, he would.

Cyrus did the one thing he'd sworn he wouldn't and ignored the voice of reason.

He knew that he shouldn't attempt any further contact with Ashlyn. She was trouble if ever he'd seen it, like playing with matches. Only the burn he felt refused to let him walk away. He didn't want to confuse the attraction for her with his loss of Jordana. When he looked down into her beautiful eyes, all he wanted was to drown himself in her. That honeyed voice of hers had his cock hard and his need to fuck her consumed every inch of him. He wanted her. There was no denying it. Under normal circumstances he would run -- not walk -- away, but there was something about her that called to him. Maybe it was because she made him forget about his loss. Or maybe, it was that sassy mouth of hers.

Throw her out. He didn't think so. Although, he knew whatever he saw up front about Ashlyn couldn't be the full story, especially when her possible lover had left her. She had allowed herself to be kissed by him. He wanted to know more about her.

"For the time being, no," he answered, watching her.

"Good."

"Uh-huh, under one condition," Cyrus replied.



"And that would be?"

"Why are you really here?" He watched as she bit her lip.

Finally she sighed. "All right, no games. But after dinner, I'm starving."

Cyrus nodded, bent down to pick up the garment bag. "Are you wearing this tonight?"

"Yes."

He handed it to her. "What color is it?"

She shivered as their hands touched. "Crimson."

A sparkle lit in her eyes, a look of pure ravenous hunger. Cyrus growled. She wanted him as much he wanted her. He felt it. "I'll see you at seven." He closed the connecting door and for the second time left with a hard cock. By night's end, he would do something about it.

\* \* \*

Cyrus looked up at the clock. Seven-fifteen. She was late. He'd instructed Mr. Crane to show Ashlyn to his private dining room at seven sharp. He was displeased to see that Coye had decided to join them.

"I heard you had a little run in with one of the guests," his brother commented, lifting his wine glass to his lips.

Cyrus scowled, swirling his own glass of warm blood around the fine crystal. He refused to take human blood, but he knew Coye indulged in whatever his mood dictated. "Does anyone in this house know how to keep their mouth shut?"

Coye laughed. "Why, brother, you seem to be in somewhat of a mood tonight. Does it have anything to do with Miss Turner?"

"Don't start with me."

"I'm not starting anything. Although I do find it interesting that you've invited her to dinner tonight."

Cyrus exhaled. "Is that why you've graced me with your presence?"

Coye went on. "I heard she looks a lot like Jordana. Don't you think so?"

The interest in his brother's voice made Cyrus' ire rise. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, I've seen her and I must say, she is a beauty. I wonder how long you'll be able to resist her."

He gritted his teeth. "That's none of your fucking business."

Coye emptied his glass and stood from the table. "I think I hear one of my lovers calling me."

Cyrus rolled his eyes. "Don't let me stop you."

Just then, Mr. Crane opened the double doors, escorting Ashlyn into the dining room. His mouth felt unbelievably dry as he stood up and let his gaze take in her beauty.

*I think you've just answered my question.* Coye laughed at him and turned to face her. "Miss Turner, I'm Coye Rayven. A pleasure to meet you." He bent down to kiss her hand.

*Get out!* Cyrus roared to his brother. A primitive growl erupted from his lips, protesting any of his games.

Ashlyn smiled. "Nice to meet you, too."

*I'm going. Do try to remember to use protection, brother.* "I'm sorry, I won't be able to join you tonight. I have another engagement." He winked back at Cyrus and closed the double doors behind him.

Cyrus stared at her, unable to move. She was gorgeous. The crimson dress hugged her body like a second skin. The deep swell of her breasts were on display for the world to see and he was thankful he wouldn't have to share her with anyone tonight. He couldn't help the possessive streak that swept over him, even when it came to his brother's charm games. Her short hair was styled into a wild disarray of curls that he doubted another woman could pull off. The long earrings she wore glittered with every move she made.

"Why are you staring at me like that?"

He came around to where she was standing. "How am I looking at you?"

"Like you want to devour me."

Cyrus pulled her into his arms. "Would that be a problem?"

She wrapped her arms around him. "What do you have in mind?"

He nipped the side of her neck, unable to resist tasting her any longer. "I want dessert *before* dinner?"

"I knew you were my type of man."

"Aren't you hungry?"

She shook her head. "Not for food anyway."

Cyrus whipped around her and pushed plates and silverware down the long table, picked her up and deposited her on top. His arms bracketed her. He heard the warning bells in his head and all the reasons he shouldn't give in to this moment of pleasure. He shrugged them off. He was always the careful one. Always the one resisting what his body craved. He wanted to believe that maybe there was one other soul on this miserable planet that might understand him -- wanted to. Tonight, he wanted Ashlyn. Tonight he would not be denied.

\* \* \*

Ash felt the heady rush in her body, making her pussy taut with need. The more she was around Cyrus the more she was drawn to him. She couldn't explain it, but her body seemed to understand more than her head. Gone was the pep talk she'd given herself about accomplishing her goal of writing the article on him. Right now, all she could think of was being with Cyrus, forgetting just for a moment about the pressures and obligations that had led her to the manor in the first place. Tonight, she only wanted to be responsible for herself and the pleasure she wanted to give and receive.

His fingers slowly hiked up the hem of her dress and branded her skin with his delicate touch. He was so gentle, yet commanding as he kneaded the soft flesh of her inner thighs with his thumbs. He leaned in to kiss her lips.

"This is crazy you know that, don't you?" She quivered as his fingers brushed the edge of her panties and then massaged the crease. She was soaked and it was his fault. She planned to get her payback in due time.

"Would you rather we stop before things get out of control?"

Ash could barely think straight, but she knew wild horses couldn't drag her away from him. "Hell no!"

"I was hoping you'd say that." He chuckled. "Hmmn, you're so wet. But I don't think you're ready for me just yet."

She begged to differ as she lifted her hips to feel more of the exquisite torture he performed on her body.

Cyrus pushed her backwards until her back touched the table and the next thing she heard was the sound of her panties being ripped from her body. The sound echoed through the elaborately decorated dining room. He moved between her legs, parting them. Her dress barely covered her midriff. She was bare to him in every sense of the word.

Cyrus leaned forward, inhaling deeply. "I want to know how you taste." He grabbed a chair and sat between her legs. He dragged the palm of his hand flat against her ribcage and down over her bellybutton to her nether lips. His fingers dallied against her clitoris, coaxing her.

"Oh!" Ash bucked. Her back arched off the table. Her breasts jutted out of the v-opening of her dress. Unable to help herself, she pinched her nipples.

"You like that?"

"Yes," she hissed, unapologetic for the fever pitch her voice had been altered to.

"Good, because I'm not done with you yet." Cyrus placed his hands on her full hips and inched her downward directly in front of him. He positioned her legs so that her knees dangled over his broad shoulders. He slowly dipped his tongue against her clitoris and then suckled the hardened nub with his mouth. He didn't stop his passionate assault as he finger fucked her with one finger and then another, stretching her tight cunt to his every whim.

"Cyrus! Oh, please. Please don't stop." She moved forward, shifting her hips upward as he drove her insane licking and gently nipping at her clit. She reached for his hair and worked it loose from the band that held it in place. She pulled the soft strands through her fingers, until she couldn't help but clench his head as he worked her over.

His warm breath served as a powerful aphrodisiac over her raw nerves. He curved his fingers upward, rubbing against her G-spot as he worked her into his frenzied rhythm, every thrust of his fingers timed perfectly with the teasing licks of his tongue. She was so close to the edge that when she felt Cyrus' tongue swirl within her, she gave up the fight and let go. He set the pace and she surrendered to it. Her heels were practically beating his back as he hungrily tasted her again and again, racing her to the edge of satisfaction and back.

Cyrus slowly laved her, drawing her nerves into a tight cocoon. She grunted, twisted and mewed. She didn't know whether he had her going or coming. "What are you doing to me?"

He looked up, meeting her gaze. "Everything you've been fantasizing about with what's-his-name."

Was that jealousy she heard in his voice?

Everything Cyrus had done thus far this evening had outweighed any trivial fantasy she'd had about Peyton and then some.

"Who?" She moaned. "That was mere infatuation."

"Good answer."

Cyrus nipped her clitoris and then suckled her sex into his mouth.

"Ah! Cyrus! My God!" She felt like every nerve in her body was on fire, clenched so tightly that all she could do was scream out his name. Waves of sensation swept her into another orgasm as she came in the reckless abandon he had worked her into.

He continued to lick her gently until her body calmed. Cyrus raised her up to face him. "I don't think I'll get enough of you."

"Good because I haven't had enough of you either. Let's go." Ash tried to stand up from the table, wobbled and landed in his lap. He caught her in his arms and she couldn't shake the feeling of how right it felt. His strength made her forget about all the secrets between them. She doubted he would understand if she tried to explain.

No, it was best to savor the time they had with one another before the game played out.

Cyrus nibbled on her lips. The tingle sweeping up her spine snapped her out of her dark thoughts. "Where did you have in mind?"

Ash stood slowly, grabbing his hands. "Which way to the interview room?"

\* \* \*

"Are you sure about this?" Cyrus said ten minutes later as he turned around, facing Ash dressed in a mock shirt and tie getup and nothing else. His cock hardened. His gaze wandered over the dress shirt that was cut out around her generous breasts, leaving them free and open to his perusal. The pencil thin shirt hugged her thighs and constricted tauntingly as she moved toward him. The black-rimmed glasses made her look sexy as hell. The briefcase in her hand completed her look.

Ash nodded her head. "Let's see how far you can go."

"Me? What about you?" He'd wanted to show her, starting with plucking one of her hard nipples in his mouth, but instead he slipped into the fantasy she'd requested. In a million years he'd never dreamt he would experience one of the pleasure rooms again. But now that he was, Cyrus realized he was looking forward to how far they would go indeed.

She grinned. "Oh, I think you'll be surprised."

"We'll see about that." He sat down slowly behind the desk. The office motif did little for him, but seeing Ash's shapely body sitting across from him made him get into his role.

Cyrus looked away from the smile on her face and stepped into the all-business façade he wore like a second skin. He picked up a paper on his desk. "I see your résumé is quite impressive, Miss Turner." He looked into her brown eyes, that sassy smile on her lips. She quickly recovered.

"Yes, I've been fortunate to work with some top executives."

He laid the paper down, leaning back in his chair. His gaze met hers and gave away nothing but hunger. "No doubt they found your... assets top-notch." His gaze slipped down to her bare breasts, the chocolate tips of her nipples teasing him. He

grabbed a pencil to keep from yanking her out of her seat and fucking her on top of the desk.

"I knew how to earn my money," Ashlyn replied. Her breathing hitched.

"I've always been more of an action kind of man myself. Would you care to demonstrate?"

She leaned forward, placing her briefcase on the floor beside her, and looked back up to him. "My pleasure." With torturously slow movements she stood.

Cyrus' cock twitched. He wanted to taste every inch of her as she stood in front of him, between his wide-spread legs. He grinned as he watched her lick her lips. Her greedy eyes took in his size. "Are you up to the task? I wouldn't want to overwhelm you."

Ashlyn bent down on her knees. "Oh, I'm more than up to it."

## Chapter Four

Ashlyn never gave him the chance to speak before her wet little mouth licked the head of his cock. Her hands caressed him as if familiarizing herself with the texture of his skin and if she kept it up he would undoubtedly come right then and there.

"Fuck!" Cyrus wound his fingers through her short curls, wanting her to suck all of him, but forced himself to be patient. After all, this was her fantasy.

Ashlyn gazed up at him. "Let me show you how I incorporated my skills with my previous employers' needs."

"Please do," he said between clenched teeth.

She laved his cock with her moist tongue from the tip and then took him -- whole -- into her sweet mouth. Her hands massaged his balls, sending shots of pleasure through his system. He was so lost in the white-hot desire that ricocheted through him that he started thrusting his pelvis toward her eager lips. He pumped his hips, loving the feel of her mouth taking his cock. All of him. His balls drew up and he knew he was seconds from coming. The first place he wanted to come would be in her hot, tight pussy.

Cyrus pulled away from Ashlyn, yanked her upward and positioned her chest down on the desk; her ass hitched high, just the right angle to sink deeply into her cunt until she screamed his name.

He took his finger and lightly traced down the seam of her ass. "You might be just what I'm looking for, Miss Turner."

"Does this mean I get the job?" she asked. "Oh!"

"I'll have to perform a little test." He trailed a slow line down the curve of her ass until he felt the moisture between her legs. He gently tickled her clit.

"Mmmn, I think I'll like this test." Ashlyn moaned.



Cyrus grinned as he applied pressure to the swollen nub and then dipped another digit deep inside of her pussy. And another. Her pussy clenched against him.

"More. I want you to go deeper. Oh! Harder!"

"I like an overachiever." He quickened his pace, finger fucking her until he felt her body grow taut with tension.

"Oh! Cyrus, I'm going to come. I'm coming!"

"That's right. Come for me."

He felt her body tense. Her pussy throbbed around his fingers with quick pulses. It was only a matter of time before she gave in and relished the delicious tremors that rocked between their bodies. He wanted her to feel what he felt. Pure pleasure. He tickled her delicate flesh with his thumb.

"Oh, I can't hold it. I can't --"

"Let it go, baby. Give it to me." Cyrus grinned as her whole body rocked and her moisture coated his fingers with her addictive essence. "Yes! That's it." He could feel the rush of her heartbeat. The sound was so beautiful, so alive. He wanted to be one with it as if to transcend into the world he was no longer a part of.

"I'd say I deserve the job, don't you think?" Ashlyn sighed.

Cyrus rushed to his feet, knocking the chair against the wall with a loud crash. He gripped her ass and with one swift thrust, his cock entered heaven. "Oh yes!" He retreated and pushed again, harder, into her wet heat. "And here comes a raise."

"Oh!" Ashlyn moaned, her hands flying outward, sending papers and everything on the desk shuffling to the floor. "I have to say, I like the way you work."

"You're not so bad yourself, sweetheart." Cyrus leaned into her, playfully biting her neck, denying the need to sink his fangs into her tender flesh and bind her as his own. How would he feel about Ashlyn becoming a Companion -- *his* Companion? He shook off the strange thoughts and focused on the woman beneath him.

He couldn't keep his fingers off of her. Her velvety cunt sheathed his cock perfectly. The hard strokes he delivered weren't what he'd previously intended but that

was before he'd sampled her pussy. His control was gone. He wanted nothing more than to claim her, brand her as his, even if it was for just one night.

"Cyrus. Oh, baby. You're... ah, you're driving me crazy." Ashlyn groaned, arching her hips, meeting him thrust for every heart-pounding thrust.

He took the palm of his hand and slapped her cheeks. "Nothing compared to what your wicked tongue was doing to me."

"Ohh!" Ashlyn screamed as he slapped her ass again.

Cyrus loved the sounds rushing off her tongue as her whole body tightened and she climaxed. Her cunt squeezed his cock tightly, pushing him into his own release seconds later. "Ashlyn!"

They both lay limp against each other and the desk. The room smelled of sweat and sex, and the fierce cadence of their hearts fell into a rhythm only lovers knew.

Lovers.

Cyrus pondered what the word implied. For the first time in a long time, he felt whole. He hadn't felt that way since...

He straightened, pulling his weight off of Ashlyn. She turned into his arms as they stood together. He smoothed the wild curls about her head, gazed at her; his fingers traced the full curve of her lips.

"That was one hell of an interview." She grinned.

"And you have one hell of a way with your assets." Cyrus smiled back. He was beginning to like having Ashlyn Turner around but for how long? He'd told himself not to think about it. He shouldn't be concerned about what would come after this. They both had lives to get back to. Lives that could never involve each other.

"Why thank you." She giggled. "However, the next fantasy is yours, Master Rayven."

His cock stirred. Thoughts of what tomorrow would bring evaporated into thin air. The only thing he wanted to do tonight was Ashlyn. He scooped her up in his arms.

"Where are we going?"

Cyrus winked. "I'm in the mood to play in the Wild West."

"Will you wear a cute little outfit?"

"I'll wear whatever you want me to."

Ashlyn chuckled. "Lead on, man. Lead on."

\* \* \*

*Damn, what this man does to a pair of chaps and a holster... filled with sex toys!*

Ashlyn's mouth watered as she watched Cyrus walk into the saloon. The leather chaps fit snugly around his muscled thighs and hips. His cock was gloriously displayed. Her heart fluttered as she looked on. The cowboy hat sat low on his forehead covering his eyes. His dark hair spilled loose over his shoulders.

She'd never wanted to fuck a man more than Master Cyrus Rayven and chose to play the harlot role to the hilt.

He walked slowly to the bar, poured two glasses of whiskey, and then looked over at her. "Well now, don't you look mighty fine."

"Why, thank you, sir." She sashayed her way over to him. "Is there a drink for me?"

He propped up his hat. "I wouldn't want to be responsible for corrupting a lady."

Ashlyn grinned, picking up the glass. "I stopped worrying about corruption long ago, cowboy."

"You don't say."

She downed her whiskey and slapped the glass on the counter without missing a beat. She laughed at Cyrus' disbelief. "I never said I couldn't take it all."

His eyes lit up with fire. "What else can you take?"

"Why don't you come over here and see?" She walked over to the piano. She turned just in time as Cyrus picked her up in his arms and placed her on top of it.

The saloon room was decked out with tables and chairs, chandeliers, a bar stocked full with liquor and interesting looking gels and creams. Little settees and chaises lined one corner of the room by the piano.

She tried to cool her raging hormones with the hand-held fan. She leaned against the piano, feeling feminine in the lacy thigh length dress with the deep bodice. Her nipples protruded through the opaque material.

He sat down at the piano bench. "I want to play something for you."

"A piano-playing cowboy. You do surprise me, sir."

Cyrus gave her a heart-stopping grin. "Good." His hands flew over the keys, playing a sultry melody that made her pulse race.

She leaned back on the piano. Her eyes closed. Her mind drifted until she could hear nothing but the sound of her own ragged breathing. It sounded so wild. Untamed. His sexy voice brought her back. "Spread your legs."

The raspy demand didn't startle her; it turned Ashlyn on. She did as she was told. Her heart gave a little jump as she watched Cyrus inhale sharply. "Wider."

The crotchless panties she had on left her open to him. The knowledge that he was gazing between her legs felt so wicked, she felt her pussy grow wet with arousal. Suddenly, the piano stopped and Cyrus reached into his holster, pulling out a vibrating dildo. "I want you to fuck your sweet pussy while I watch. Can you do that?"

Ashlyn took the toy out of his hands, shaking slightly at the sensual delight of his request. "Yes."

Cyrus went back to playing the piano, his eyes trained on her. "Oh, and you can't come until I say you can."

Her eyebrows rose. "Is that so?"

He challenged her. "Yes."

The dildo felt surprisingly real in her hands, but her body could never be fooled by a toy. Although, she was going to have fun trying. She leaned back on her elbow, turned the toy on and slowly aimed the tri-headed mechanism toward her pussy. She had played with toys before but nothing compared to Cyrus watching her -- it took the experience to another scorching level.

One head of the toy teased her clit in a powerful rhythmic motion causing Ashlyn to moan. Another massaged her labia. "Oh, yes!"

"You like that?"

"Mmmn, yes."

She pressed the button increasing the speed on the vibrations and gasped out loud when the third head pulsed inside her throbbing pussy. "Ah!"

Cyrus' strained voice broke through her sexual haze. "Increase the speed."

She did.

The rotations of the dildo set an exquisite motion through the walls of her cunt. "It feels so good. Oh!"

The piano stopped. "Don't you dare come, my sweet Ashlyn," Cyrus said.

She arched her back, the tension in her body rising to a feverish pitch.

"Increase the speed."

Her fingers trembled as her body racked from restraint. She pressed the button and heavier, blunt waves of desire rocked her pussy. "Oh! I can't -- I have to... I need to --"

"Do you want to come?"

"Y-yes! Please. Oh, now, baby. Now!" Ashlyn pleaded, gritting her teeth. Her body shook with need.

Cyrus gripped his rock-hard cock. "Come for me, Ashlyn. Let go."

"Yes! Oh yes!" Her body released the pent up tension coursing through her in harsh waves, as the orgasm drove her over the edge.

A few moments later, Cyrus disengaged the toy, pushing it aside. "You are so beautiful." He buried his head in between her legs, licking every drop of her juices with his tongue until she thought she'd explode. His tortuously slow licks were enough to send her into oblivion with a second orgasm minutes later.

"Oh-my-God!" Ashlyn placed the palm of her hand on her chest, thinking surely her heart was going to explode. "Are you trying to kill me?"

Cyrus laughed. "Not likely. Pure pleasure, baby." He pulled her down into his lap on the piano bench. His cock pushed up against her pussy.

As if reading his mind, Ashlyn mounted him, taking his cock in her hand and impaling herself on him with one, hard, soul-searing downward thrust. They banged against the piano keys. A distorted sound ensued. "Mmmn!" Ashlyn moaned.

Cyrus groaned, meeting her thrust with upward tilts of his own. "I've never heard such beautiful music. I want to hear it again." He pounded hard into her. "And again."

She gifted him with another loud moan from deep in her throat.

\* \* \*

Ashlyn turned over in Cyrus' bed, a lazy smile on her face. They'd actually made it there after hitting the Hawaiian Waterfall. Heat rushed to her pussy as she thought of how delicious Cyrus had looked in nothing but a lei. He'd fucked her under the misty spray of the crystallized blue waterfall. Dressing in the skimpy straw skirt and starfish shaped nipple rings had made her feel brazen, more than she'd felt with any other man. She had long passed the boundaries she'd made concerning Cyrus Rayven. Now what the hell was she going to do about it? About the tenderness she felt when she looked at him?

She slowly opened her eyes, pressing her hand against the indentation of where Cyrus should have been. His side of the bed was cold. She gazed over her shoulder to find breakfast awaiting her on a sterling silver serving tray beside the bed.

Ashlyn sighed. Did it get any better than this? She picked up the sterling silver lids to find a mouthwatering omelet, scrumptious fruit, bagels, and freshly squeezed orange juice. After skipping dinner last night, she was famished. She broke off a piece of her bagel, wondering where Cyrus had disappeared to. A sickening feeling settled in her stomach. What if he'd thought of their night as a mistake? Suddenly she lost her appetite and tossed aside the bagel. Could she bear that? The last thing she needed was his pity.

She threw back the sheets and groaned as her sore muscles protested against moving. She'd be damned if she was going to be pitied by any man!

Ashlyn had just slipped on a T-shirt when the door opened. She turned to face the sexy man she'd spent the better part of last night with, fulfilling every fantasy she'd ever thought of and then some. He leaned against the doorjamb, his eyes raking over her like she was some tasty morsel.

"Good morning."

"Morning." She tried to keep her cool, but with him staring at her like that it was impossible. "I didn't hear you slip out this morning."

Cyrus continued to stare at her, kicking the door closed behind him. "I didn't want to wake you. You needed your rest." He walked over to her, looking large and predatory.

The sexual heat between them continued to amaze Ashlyn. She couldn't remember reacting to any man as she did with him. He pulled her into his arms. His hands caressed her ass through the T-shirt and soon inched their way underneath, palming her bare cheeks.

"I missed you," he growled, pushing her back to the bed.

So much for being strong!

Ashlyn landed in the four-poster bed with a plop, only to have Cyrus position himself on top of her. Desire flooded her senses. It didn't take much with him. She wanted to feel his cock inside her again, stretching her and showing her what it was to experience passion at its finest.

Cyrus inched off his drawstring pants, pulled her legs around his shoulders and within seconds pushed his large cock into her quivering sex. For a moment they both waited, loving the explosion of intense waves that wrenched through their bodies.

His dark gaze found hers. "You could become an addiction."

Ashlyn pulled him closer, gripping his firm ass. "They are hard to break."

"Is that a challenge? If so --" He ground his pelvis against hers, causing a gasp to escape her lips. "I happily accept."

\* \* \*

Cyrus threw down the papers that required his signature. He couldn't concentrate even if he tried. This morning he'd gone for his usual flight. He'd needed to clear his head. He'd expected to feel some sort of remorse about Ashlyn and the things they did the night before. But the cloak of guilt never did surface. In fact, his thoughts of Jordana were lessening and had been since he'd met Ashlyn.

She was constantly on his mind, almost as much as he wanted her in his bed. This attraction to her was akin to nothing he'd ever felt before and like a greedy man, he wanted more. But did she want the same? They still had much to learn about each other. Could he divulge his dark secrets to her? Would she understand his deception?

A knock at the door diverted him from his torrid thoughts. He rose from his desk, went to the door. "Yes?"

\* \* \*

Peyton looked into Cyrus Rayven's face, having no remorse for what he was about to do. He'd waited for Tara all night, only to find her with Coye. Again. Vampires! He should have never trusted the bastard to keep his side of the deal and now someone would have to pay.

"Mr. Rayven, you don't know me, but I know you."

Cyrus shook his head. "Do we have an appointment?"

"No, but I think you'll want to hear what I have to say."

A moment of hesitation passed between them, before Rayven stepped back and gestured him in. "Come in."

\* \* \*

Hours later, Cyrus still sat immobilized at his desk. He'd listened to every word that Companion Jones had to say, and had later confirmed his wild tale by ranting to his brother. Their argument had ended in a fistfight. He looked down at his hand. The cut and bruises had mended shortly after their scuffle.

It'd all been a damn game to Coye and, evidently, Ashlyn *Douglas*. A reporter. He'd spent the night fucking her and giving her free access to the Rayven secrets.



Everything he'd sacrificed and protected could have gone up in smoke and for what? Mindless sex.

Cyrus gritted his teeth. He'd been such a fool to think that he could open up to her. That there could be something between them. She would pay dearly.

"I wondered where you'd been hiding," she called from the door.

He brought his head up to meet her gaze. His gaze wandered over her. She wore form-fitting blue jeans and a knit shirt that generously displayed her hourglass figure. She was made for seduction. "You've found me."

The gruffness in his voice must have startled her. She tilted her head. "Is everything okay?"

Cyrus watched as she walked toward him. "You tell me?"

\* \* \*

Ashlyn's gut told her something was wrong and with all the whispers going around with the servants, she knew that Cyrus had gotten into a fight with his brother earlier. What she couldn't understand was why he was staring at her as if she were the offspring of the devil.

She sat down. "I came to see if you were all right? I heard about the fight and --"

He stood up. A muscle in his jaw twitched. His fingers clenched into fists atop his desk. "How'd you hear about that? Oh, don't bother answering that. It's in the blood right? I mean, that is what you do for a fucking living isn't it? Seek the truth at all costs."

Everything within her went cold. She was going to be sick.

He knew! Oh God!

"Cyrus, let me explain. I --"

Cyrus rounded the desk, glaring down at her. "No! I don't want your explanations. I want to give you what you came for, sweetheart. You wanted to know about the infamous Rayven brothers, so here goes."

"Don't do this. Please listen to me," Ashlyn pleaded, reading the pain in his eyes. Pain she had caused.

What had she done?

\* \* \*

"You listen to me, Miss Douglas. You came here for your story and now you'll get it." Cyrus turned to the window. "No doubt, what led you here in the first place were the ominous reports of the Rayvens dealing with the occult." He whirled around to face her.

"Well, that would be correct. You see, we are the creatures that you dream about. I feed on those less fortunate." He watched her expression transform into shock and in that instance witnessed the fear, the rejection that he'd known would exist all along.

There was no going back now.

"I'm a vampire, Ashlyn." He smirked. "Now you can go back and write your damn article and be sure to add that you fucked a real vampire." He stepped closer. "Don't believe me? I'll demonstrate."

Cyrus looked away, not waiting for an answer, and slowly slipped from his human form into a bat. His clothes shredded into a heap on the floor. Black fur traced his body; bones reconfigured into those of his animalistic side. His wings flapped rapidly as he flew around her.

Ashlyn screamed. "Why -- why are you doing this?"

He slowly let his body slip back into his human form, watching the horror on her face. He stood before her naked and closed the distance between them within a heartbeat.

His fingers gripped her arms as he shook her. "Isn't this what you fucking wanted?"

"No!" she shrieked. "No, I didn't want this."

She attempted to strike him, but Cyrus grabbed her hand. His fangs protruded out of his mouth and stopped her cold in her tracks.

"You like it rough? I can show you how rough I can be." Cyrus pulled her against him.

"Damn you!" Ashlyn yelled, pushing against his chest. "Let go of me!"

Cyrus tried to control his body's response to her but he couldn't. His cock went rock hard. He ground his hips against her pelvis. He had to have her writhing beneath him now. "Don't deny me this," he whispered.

He retracted his fangs and punished her with a scorching kiss. Ashlyn's lips greedily nipped at his, taking what she wanted. Cyrus pushed her against the wall, unbuttoning her jeans, and she shimmied out of them, kicking off her shoes. He ripped her shirt and bent to suckle her plump nipples into his mouth. Hard.

"Ah!" Ashlyn swayed against him.

Cyrus yanked her panties down, hoisted her into his arms. Her legs wrapped around his waist as he impaled her moist heat with his cock for what he knew would be the last time. He held her gaze as their bodies cocooned against each other.

Cyrus gritted his teeth. He pulled out and thrust into her again. Hard.

A sharp gasp tore from her lips and he slipped his tongue into her mouth. He didn't need words between them right now. He wanted to fuck her, to teach her a damn lesson. It had been nothing but sex between them from the start and it would be nothing but sex now.

He pounded into her pussy, a sexual onslaught of decadent pleasure at its finest. Sweat beaded at Ashlyn's forehead, her lips parted and her fingers wound in his hair as she screamed out. Her heartbeat pounded in the rhythm of his cock moving in and out of her body.

"Cyrus!"

The tight edge of sensation began at the base of his shaft and shot up the head of his cock. His cum exploded into her womb. He thrust once more as his body gave over to the precise culmination of the passion they shared.

He slowly disengaged their bodies, settled her to floor and refused to meet her gaze.

"I'll tell Mr. Crane to have your bags packed within the hour. You can leave out of the side entrance." He turned his back to her, balling his hands into fists at his side.

Everything within him wanted to take her in his arms. But what would it solve? There was nothing more between them.

"Cyrus --"

"You'll have one hell of a story to tell won't you? How many reporters can say that they've had vampire cock?"

"Fuck you!" She grabbed her clothes and raced for the side door.

Cyrus turned to look at her. "You just did, quite well I might add. Good day, Miss Douglas."

Her only response came in the sound of the door slamming shut in his face.

\* \* \*

### **One month later...**

"Yes, this is Ashlyn Douglas." She spoke slowly into the receiver. Her hands shook. She gazed around the floor to make sure that no one was close enough to overhear her conversation. She paused. "Are you sure? Yes. Thank you." She hung the phone on the receiver as the world threatened to spin.

She was pregnant!

Her head began to throb at what this implied. Her baby was... half *vampire*!

Ashlyn shook her head. She barely remembered leaving the manor. She hadn't heard from Cyrus, not that she'd expected to, and when she'd returned to *Buzz*, she learned that Peyton had mysteriously quit and she'd been offered his job.

How had things gotten so fucked up? The bigger question was what was she going to do about it?

Ashlyn sighed, thinking her world couldn't get any worse, and decided to head home. She punched the elevator button and waited. She felt a warm breath on her neck and turned around, only to be greeted with air. She was losing her mind.

The elevator arrived and she punched the button for the garage floor, praying she could get home early enough so she could soak into a nice bubble bath and decide her fate. Her feet hurt. Her days had been longer since she was actually out chasing

stories. Her father had recently been released from the hospital after a new treatment. He had balked long and hard about Ashlyn staying with him, so she'd ended up falling asleep on his couch every night. But tonight was all hers for the taking!

The elevator doors closed. She felt warm breath on her neck again and whirled around. "Cyrus? What are you doing here?"

"Hello, Ashlyn." He stepped closer, his eyes searched hers. "I came to see you." He reached past her, pushing the stop button.

Ashlyn felt the rush, the excitement. Her desire for him hadn't dimmed, as much as she had willed it to after their last encounter. "Why? I don't think we have anything to talk about."

"I'd say we have plenty to discuss." Looking down to her waist, he placed his hand on her abdomen. The warmth that flowed from his touch to her womb made her feel connected to him. "You're carrying my baby."

She tipped her head defensively, trying to remain unaffected by his statement. "So what? Women raise babies solo all the time."

"Is that what you want?"

"It doesn't matter what I want. It's how it is." She looked away from him. "We come from two separate worlds, Cyrus. It could never work."

"You didn't run the article."

"But you expected me to, didn't you? I'm not some monster --"

Cyrus pulled her into his arms, crushing her lips against his in a heated kiss. When they pulled apart they were both breathless. "But I am. A monster that is. I'm sorry, Ashlyn. It's just that when I found out the truth, I lost it."

"You had every right to be angry with me, Cyrus. I lied to you. And in the process, I hurt you. I'm sorry too."

"It took a lot to come here today. I wanted to distance myself from you -- at first because of Jordana."

"Jordana?"

"She was my mate. My Companion. When I lost her, I didn't think I'd ever be able to feel anything again. I didn't want to open myself up to that sort of pain."

"Was she a vampire?"

"No, but her blood was tainted with mine."

"Meaning you bit her? Cyrus -- I..."

"I would never take your blood without your consent. The choice will always be yours."

Ashlyn exhaled. "I see. Now what?"

"Now, I realize that what happened between us means more to me than I could have ever dreamed. I've tried to go on without you. It just didn't work. I need you and I want you. I realize that we come from different worlds but I'm willing to give it a try. It's not just about you and me anymore." He placed the palm of his hand against her stomach.

Tears slid down her face. Vampire or not, she had come to love him. "There's so much we don't know about one another. How old are you anyway?"

"Two hundred and sixty-two."

"Oh, that's all." Ashlyn rolled her eyes.

"We will take it slowly. We have time, baby." Cyrus pressed a kiss to her lips. "Just know that I won't give up until you say you're mine."

Ashlyn grinned, the love in her heart growing with each passing second. "On one condition."

"What?"

"That you'll be mine."

"I was lost from the first moment I tasted you."

She pushed him up against the elevator wall. "Did I ever tell you about my fantasy of having sex in an elevator?"

"No."

"Care for a demonstration?"

"Yes."

Ashlyn crooked her eyebrows. "Are you sure you're up to it?"

Cyrus pressed his cock against her belly. "What do you think?" He grinned. "I thought you liked my assets." He leaned over to nuzzle her neck. "I'll be happy to convince you."

Her eyes closed. "Mmmn, I do love the way you work."

## **Anisa Damien**

Anisa Damien writes African-American and multicultural sensual romance. As a member of Romance Writers of America, Anisa has been immersed in the romance genre and creating characters known for their diversity for several years. Anisa resides just outside of Chicago with her family where she dreams up the mischief she can put her characters through.

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