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Beginnings: Night Music

Charlene Teglia

Dedication

Special thanks go to Crissy and Angie for bringing The Sirens out of my file cabinet and into the world! Thanks are also due to my real-life hero who makes so much of what I do possible.

Prologue

"Is there something you want to tell me?"

Meghan Davies didn't have to turn around to know who was talking to her. Or to verify that the question was aimed at her.

"Don't think the rest of the band won't notice," the voice behind her went on. "You've always had a little bit of an edge, but lately we could use you to cut glass."

Meghan closed her eyes and let out the breath she realized she'd been holding since Lorelei started to speak. *She knows. Of course she knows*. Stupid to think she wouldn't know.

Lorelei wasn't just the lead singer of The Sirens, the band that was their business, their livelihood and their life. She was the leader and she was psychic. *Don't try to keep secrets from a psychic, dummy.*

"You know already," Meghan answered without turning around. She didn't want to look into Lorelei's eyes. Didn't want to see the sympathy that would be there. Dammit, nobody was going to feel sorry for her. She was young, rich, famous, a musician in a top rock band. She was living a dream come true and if a nightmare had come for her, well, that was life. Sometimes life was a bitch.

And then you die, the thought finished unbidden.

She drew a deep breath and let it out slowly, forcing herself to speak clearly and carefully. "I don't want the band to know. I want to keep working for as long as I can and I don't want anybody treating me any differently."

Lorelei was silent behind her for a minute, thinking it over. "I won't tell them. But you'd better improve your acting or they'll guess. Or start asking questions."

Meghan knew Lorelei was right. They were all too close. They'd known each other too long, worked together, traveled together on tour, lived together when they were home in Seattle and now that Lorelei had gotten married, they spent about half their time on the island retreat Lorelei shared with her husband, recording in the studio built for them there.

If she didn't act like her usual self, Paige and Lisa would know something was up. Lisa hadn't been with them as long as Paige, she'd come in to replace their original drummer when Sara quit the band. But still, she was bright and tenacious and while Paige might be too ladylike to pin her to the wall with questions, Lisa wouldn't hesitate. And she would be relentless.

Meghan didn't want to deal with Lisa's questions.

"I'll do better," she promised.

"Okay. We haven't booked any tour dates for the rest of the year and nobody would expect us to until I've had the baby," Lorelei was saying now. "There's just the studio sessions and you can come in whenever you want to do your tracks."

Meghan nodded. That was good. She'd need some flexibility.

"So that just leaves the Seattle concert dates, two more nights. Are you up for those?"

"Yes." She was. She could do the local performances, no problem. She'd make sure to rest first and she'd take care of herself after.

"All right then." Lorelei came up behind her and touched her on the shoulder. "If you need anything or want anything, you can talk to me. Or ask Erik. You can come and stay with us if you want."

Erik, Lorelei's husband, had assumed a sort of elder brother/clan leader role in their lives. It was nice knowing that he'd be there for her, but on the other hand, he'd try to help whether she wanted him to or not. He would want more specialists. More tests.

Meghan held herself still at the thought but it was an effort not to shudder. No more tests, no more false hope.

No. She wouldn't be having a little chat with Erik if she could help it. And she'd spend as little time at their place as possible because the man was damn perceptive.

"I'm fine," Meghan said. "I don't need anything." Nothing but a miracle, and she was fresh out.

Chapter One

Rom felt the first stirrings of the night with some imperceptible circadian measure. A hint of darkness on the breeze. A smoky flavor of yearning that woke in his blood, sharpening his senses, rousing him.

Night. It moved over and around him, whispering, inciting. He lay quietly and savored it.

The early night hours had a song all their own. A song that drew restless crowds, searching for some nameless fulfillment of an unknown desire, to prowl through night streets and clubs, losing themselves in the urgent rhythms of night music.

Rom knew the crowds, knew their boredom and the glitter of their seeking eyes.

They were all the same. They inhabited the night worlds of a thousand cities and centuries, mimicked each other unknowingly in carefully executed exhibits of individuality, moved to the same restless rhythm. They searched in vain for the nameless desire that called them into the night and sometimes settled for the heat and promise in the eyes of a stranger, only to wake to the cold light of day that held no mysteries.

In the day, there were only gritty eyes, aching temples and mouths dry with the taste of stale cigarettes and vanished wraiths of night promises.

Rom preferred the night. He always had.

He came fully awake and sat up on the hard sofa, smoothing back the once-again fashionable length of dark hair that was not much disturbed by his quiet, motionless sleep.

His heart throbbed with the beat of city traffic and the far-off pulsing of a bass guitar. Night. He smiled, feeling it around him like a living cloak of mystery, shining with the soft fires of distant stars.

Valentine was awake, too. Rom knew it, and thought he could sense the disturbance in the air currents signaling his approach long before he heard the soft sound of feet on carpet, then the rustle and muttered curse as body and unexpected object collided.

"Careful," Rom murmured, too late to be any help. "You'll step in the pizza."

Val responded with a low growl and a sharp curse. When he spoke, his tone made the words sound like more curses. "Pizza. You got garlic."

"It amused me."

"It's disgusting. Get it out of here."

"It's part of our cover," Rom said in a mild tone that nevertheless held a thread of something that hinted at granite. "Nobody raises a brow over two wealthy young men who only work at night if they're software designers. Youth is the byword of the industry. So is eccentricity. So is pizza."

"I'm not eating this," Val muttered, not calmed by the speech.

"Of course not. We donate it to the homeless behind the building," Rom said. "Ignore the garlic. It's a standard ingredient."

"You ignore it."

"I have been."

This was the undeniable truth and it silenced Val's grumblings. He continued to brood, however, as he prowled the office. Passing the desk chair, he hooked one leg around it to draw it up, sat in one fluid motion

and tapped at the computer keyboard, disturbing the fractal pattern laboriously arranged by the screen saver.

"Get any further with this?" Val asked. It was the closest he came to apology.

Rom accepted it. "Not really."

Val tapped some more, symbols dancing across the screen at his command. "Huh. I'll work on it awhile." He continued, the silence broken by the swift, steady tap of keystrokes.

"Do that," Rom agreed as he stood and stretched to his full height.
"I'll take this down." He reached for the cardboard pizza box, delivered hours earlier. "Hungry?"

Val shook his head. "Not yet. You?"

Night sang, hummed, buzzed in his senses. Sharp. Urgent. Dark. "Yes."

"You're going to go watch her again. You're obsessed with that woman." Val came straight to the point, laying open the real source of the tension that had been growing steadily between them.

"I like her music," Rom answered in neutral tones.

"You liked Mozart's music, too, but you didn't follow him around."

"I went to his performances."

"You didn't want to convert him. You want her, though." Val tapped furiously at the keyboard. "I know what's coming. Girl stuff everywhere. Girl things hanging in the bathroom. Waiting for you to get on with it is worse than living with it will be. I wish you'd just do it."

Rom paused, wondering how much he should say in answer to that. Women were something of a sore point with Valentine. Over two hundred years of grief and celibacy would do that. "She's sick," he said finally. "You wouldn't know it to look at her, but I can smell it on her skin. I didn't want to take any of the time she had left, but now her time is running out."

Rom had been watching her for years. He'd waited, giving her the chance to find a mortal love, a family, all the things he couldn't offer her, things he couldn't bear to deny her. Now he would offer her the only ever after possible for her, before the hidden killer that ate away at her took even that option away.

"Get on with it, then. Don't let her die. It's a real bitch waiting centuries for the woman you love to be reincarnated."

Val was a mass of tension. Inevitable, given that he'd spent centuries waiting for his lost love to be returned to him and had decided after the early decades of grief-imposed celibacy to just keep on waiting. He had so much tension bottled up that the others had taken to avoiding him and his hair-trigger temper at all costs about a hundred and fifty years ago.

"Has it crossed your mind that the gypsy might have been wrong?" Rom asked, not unkindly. Since the topic was open, it was a good time to discuss it without fear of it leading to mortal combat.

"It crossed my mind about a thousand times in the first year. Everybody needs something to believe in. I believe in gypsy prophecy."

"Has it occurred to you that if she does come back, she won't remember you, she won't recognize you, and you'll have centuries of pent-up sexual frustration driving you that no human woman could withstand?"

Val stopped dead. He whipped around to look at Rom, and the motion tossed his long blond hair streaked with white, gold and amber around his shoulders. The expression on his face was frightening.

Finally he said, "If she remained human, it might be a problem. But I will teach her to love me again, she will accept my kiss, she will transform, and she will survive being the recipient of my pent-up sexual frustration, thank you very much. Now go do something about yours."

Val resumed his furious typing, leaning in towards the computer and shutting out everything else but the programming problem to be solved.

Work didn't entirely drown out the pain, but it helped. For Val's sake, Rom hoped the gypsy's long-ago prediction proved true, that love would return to him in the Emerald City, and his decades of waiting weren't in vain.

Rom's waiting, at least, was at an end.

The distant, driving bass deepened. "I will," he answered.

Anticipation. Promise. The night pulsed with it. Out in the city, the night was alive with the restless hungers of thousands, following the beacons of brightly lit neon stars to the clubs and corners and coffeehouses. Rom could feel them, calling him to come and feed.

Now the night was warm and clear. Later, a sylvan fog would rise only to clear again with a five minute rain. It rained a great deal in Seattle. Rom wasn't entirely certain he liked it. He did, however, like the glitter of reflected starlight on scattered water droplets that clung to each vein of leaf and petal on the abundant flora. Seattle was a gardener's paradise with the mild climate and frequent rains.

He remembered nights in barren deserts, nights on cool, high mountains with stunted trees. Dry nights. Rain and mist made for variety. So did the lush growth, deep and verdant, soft and inviting like the night.

Mysterious, like a woman's embrace. Like the one he hoped to know this night, before dawn came and the world was lost to him for another day. It was All Hallow's Eve and tomorrow marked Samhain, the night when the world turned a corner, a time of endings and beginnings.

His hunger rose.

Maybe this night, all hungers would be satisfied at last.

Chapter Two

Rom prowled through the crowds of night revelers, merging but not blending unless he chose, moving among them but remaining apart. Yet wasn't he one of them? Didn't the same dark, nameless craving drive him into the same crowded clubs? Didn't his eyes sweep the same faces, searching for the same unrealized fulfillment?

Maybe he wasn't so different. Maybe he wasn't so very changed, after all.

But something tangible called him to this place and to this woman, and his craving had a name. Meghan Davies, Siren. Rom found the band's name appropriate. She didn't lure him to shipwreck and disaster, but the pull was undeniable. Maybe spending more than two hundred years in the company of a man for whom there was only one woman had given him romantic ideas.

The bass coaxed, urged, sang out a challenge in a wickedly sharp and deep, throbbing cant. Rom followed it into the concert and felt hunger sharpen and grow as he made his way through the crowd and came nearer to the stage.

Val was right. He was obsessed with the woman.

She played the bass with eyes closed, fingers gripping and chording, stroking, surging over the strings. She held the solid body of the wooden electric bass in the cradle of her hips and arms, her body moving with soft urgency, keeping time. Auburn hair burned a path to her waist and stood out like a signal fire against the black silk of her short tunic-style

dress that left arms and legs and feet bare. The flame color was echoed in her fingernails and the soft, warm curve of her lips. Red, like fire. Like blood.

Heat quickened and deepened in him as he watched her.

Her eyes opened and fixed on his. They were the soft color of smoke. They widened in surprise and recognition, but didn't look away for a long time. When at last they blinked and lowered, they returned quickly.

Rom caught and held her look. She smiled, red lips curving in an inviting shape. She closed her eyes again, losing herself in the dream she created with the other musicians, but now she played to him, a fellow traveler of nightscapes and seeker of dark dreams.

He stayed, listening to the music she summoned up and poured forth. He waited, listening to the building excitement and promise of the night. He watched, the sight of this rock priestess feeding a separate hunger with color and curves and warm-blooded life. If he was successful, he would never see her like this again. It was a sight worth remembering.

He watched, and waited, and he wanted.

When the song was finished she put her bass onto a stand for the band's crew to pack away, and left the stage with the other women who formed the band. Rom watched her go with a surge of anticipation, hunting instincts fully alert and focused on his quarry. It wasn't the first time he'd come to see her perform, or the first time he'd let her see him in the crowd. But tonight he was going to use the backstage pass he'd acquired.

Meghan wasn't surprised to see the orchids waiting for her when the band finished for the night. They were signed with nothing more than the initials R.K., but she knew they came from her mysterious Mr. Tall, Dark and Handsome. He never spoke to her, although she often saw him at their concerts, no matter where in the world they performed.

This was their last live performance of the year, so she would have been amazed if he hadn't sent her flowers, even if she hadn't seen him in the audience.

She was going to miss the flowers. Meghan wondered briefly if he'd send them to her funeral, then dismissed the thought as ghoulish. It might be Halloween tonight, but that was no reason to dwell on the dark future. The present mattered, and in the present she could enjoy the shape and scent of orchids and be happy that somebody had thought of her.

In spite of the increasing incidence of violence from stalkers, Meghan's mystery man didn't worry her. Not just because she was a dead woman anyway, but because Lorelei wasn't worried. And because he fascinated Meghan. She was always a little disappointed when he vanished after a performance.

"He sent you flowers again," Lorelei said, appearing beside her as if conjured by the thought of her name.

"You didn't think he'd forget tonight, did you?" Meghan asked.

"No." Lorelei touched one blossom with a fingertip. "Invite him home with you."

"I'd have to talk to him to do that," Meghan pointed out.

Lorelei smiled at her. "He has a backstage pass."

"And you know this because you're psychic?"

"I know this because I gave it to him. I checked him out. Erik checked him out. Erik says he can afford you, by the way."

Erik had high standards when it came to finances. Mystery Man had serious net worth. That might be nice to know if she was contemplating anything long-term, but long-term was not an option.

"I'm not exactly in the market for a relationship," Meghan said. "And you know why." It was unfair and it pissed her off, and anger gave her voice a serrated edge.

Lorelei shrugged. "So don't have a relationship. Have sex. He looks like he'd make it worth your while."

Meghan felt her mouth twitch. "Go out with a bang."

"Well, you can limit yourself to hands if you want to, but I think you'll be missing out." Lorelei gave her a wicked look, then went to join her husband across the room, as if the conversation had given her ideas. Or maybe she just wanted to work off the charge built up from performing. The Sirens played sexually charged music rumored to have a very enjoyable impact on the audience's libido.

It affected Meghan's libido, enough to make her seriously consider taking Mr. Tall, Dark and Handsome home with her.

Go out with a bang. That would be some trick or treat. Well, why not? She wasn't too tired. She'd rested all day and the performance hadn't drained her. At least, if it had she wasn't feeling it yet. This was likely to be her last opportunity, and Lorelei was right, he did look like he'd make it worth her while. He looked predatory and dangerous and not at all gentle.

That suited her mood. Meghan didn't want gentle. She wanted release from the unbearable tension inside her, the anger and want and need abrading her nerves. Angry because she wasn't finished, wasn't ready. She wanted more, needed more, and couldn't find it in herself to accept her fate.

Fate could kiss her ass.

She was going to miss out on plenty. She didn't have to miss out on tonight. If he came backstage. If he gave her an opportunity, Meghan was going to take it.

And then he was there, in front of her. He seemed even more dangerous up close. *Good*.

Meghan gave him a long look. "You didn't disappear this time."

Rom smiled at her, liking her attitude, her straightforward manner. She didn't flirt. She simply stood there and looked at him, an attitude of sexual challenge in the line of her body and her posture and her eyes that said *come and get me if you dare*.

He dared.

"No. I didn't disappear this time."

She smiled then, her red-lipsticked mouth curving in that shape that made him want to take a bite. "I should ask you your name. I should ask you what you do."

"My name is Romney Kearns. I do software."

"Oh." Her soft smoky gaze moved over him in unhurried, lingering exploration. The way her eyes turned darker told him she liked what she saw. "You don't look like a geek. Not skinny enough."

"Too much pizza," Rom explained.

She nodded. "The staple of software wizards. I guess you're safe to leave with, then."

"Not safe," he corrected softly. He smiled into her eyes and gave in to the desire to taste her. One taste, in a room full of people. He could take that much and be certain it wouldn't go too far. His hands spread over her shoulders, drew her close. His head lowered to hers.

Her mouth was soft, sweet, filled with dark mystery and living heat. Hunger grew and licked at them both with fiery tongues. The kiss deepened, turned savage. Rom tasted the bright copper flavor of blood and gentled, kissing it away, savoring each drop and the essence of her.

Hunger thrummed in his veins, and it was an effort not to scrape his teeth over her lower lip and spill more. He wanted to sink his teeth deep into her flesh and drink until his thirst was quenched.

Rom knew his eyes burned when he loosened his hold and set her from him. "I'm not safe at all. You should run away."

She touched the tip of her tongue to the graze in her lower lip. "I'm not much for aerobics. Not much for playing it safe, either."

"No," Rom agreed, still tasting the sweet, reckless flavor of her. She tasted wild, hot, as if the life that was slipping away wanted to use itself up.

He didn't want to take her home with him, to the suite of offices and living space he shared with Val. He didn't want to share her or this night with Val, and not because he wanted to spare the man's feelings. Rom wanted to mark her, to possess her, claim her, and instinct told him to take her far from any potential rivals. He had never wanted another woman the way he wanted this one. He wanted her alone and aware of only him.

"We'll go to your place. Invite me."

Her brows arched at his wording. "You're invited."

"I accept." Rom picked up a blossom in one hand and placed the other on the warm curve of her waist. He tucked the flower behind her ear, in the long fall of her hair.

The flower's exotic perfume mingled with the scent of aroused woman. The change heightened all senses, allowing him to note minute differences in respiration, the rush of blood beneath the skin heralding a blush—the thousand tiny physical signs of human reaction were his to read. Fear, deception, lust, they all marked the body in various ways.

Meghan wasn't hiding anything from him and she didn't fear him. She wanted him. That might change, but for now the pulse beating at her throat meant desire. The musky scent of her heat made the hunger sharpen. He pictured her naked, limbs open and sprawled in invitation, allowing him to taste her everywhere.

The thought alone strained his control. It may have been a mistake to go to her without feeding elsewhere first, but he hadn't wanted to wait. He'd waited long enough already.

"Thank you for the flowers," Meghan said.

"I enjoy sending them."

She touched the blossom in her hair and leaned slightly towards him. Rom tightened his hold on her waist, drawing her into his side. A possessive gesture. One that marked her as his and proclaimed his intention.

She didn't resist or move away.

"You don't seem much like a hearts and flowers kind of guy."

"What kind do I seem?"

"Not like any other kind." She slid her leg against his, a subtle shift that would go unnoticed unless somebody was watching them closely, but a clear signal of her sexual interest in him. "And not safe."

"You don't want safe tonight."

"No."

"Then live dangerously," he suggested. His fingers bit into her flesh, then stroked down her hip, giving her a taste of the way he wanted to touch her.

"I intend to."

They walked out into the night together.

Chapter Three

Meghan leaned into her mystery man and let him lead her to a waiting limo. "You travel in style."

"I appreciate creature comforts." He slanted a look at her, his lips not quite smiling. He had the darkest eyes she'd ever seen, set in sharp features and framed by raven black hair worn long. It suited him. Some men looked too young or just untidy with long hair. Romney looked like a throwback to another century.

It was the cheekbones, Meghan thought. You had to have the right bone structure to carry that look off and have it underscore masculinity instead of seeming effeminate. Then there were the muscles. Romney felt as if he'd been carved from marble. And his attitude, king of the concrete jungle.

Although any man who could kiss the way he did deserved to walk like he owned the city, in Meghan's opinion. Her lips still throbbed and the sting from the graze on her lower lip that had bled from the force of his kiss had an answering throb building between her legs. If he could kiss like that, she might not be able to walk after the full performance.

With a slight shake of her head, she set that thought aside and leaned forward to give the driver directions to the house on Queen Anne Hill. The limo drove off and Romney pressed a button to raise the glass, making the backseat a private enclosure.

"Why tonight?" Meghan asked, settling back into the soft leather cushion.

"It was time."

He didn't pretend not to know what she was talking about, and Meghan appreciated that, even if his answer was cryptic. He'd had countless opportunities to get an introduction before tonight if he'd wanted to meet her. And though he couldn't possibly have known tonight would be her last live performance, the timing made for one hell of a coincidence.

Well, coincidence happened. Some called it synchronicity. Whatever the reason, it meant she wouldn't die without knowing what her mystery man's name was. Already she knew his name, his occupation, the sound of his voice and the taste of his mouth.

Meghan found herself staring at his mouth and blinked, wondering how long she'd been doing that. "Sorry," she said.

"No need." He touched her lower lip with one finger, pressing into the soft flesh. "You looked into my eyes and I took a little of your blood. You are not quite hypnotized but something close to it."

Hypnotized. That was funny, but she didn't feel like laughing. She felt like biting into his finger, not hard, just enough to make him feel it a little, using the sharp edge of her teeth.

"What does your hypnotic spell do?" Meghan asked. "Make me want to take you home and do it until the box springs break?"

"Is that how you feel?"

His finger slid inside her mouth, just the tip, and Meghan closed her lips around it, sucking lightly, then letting her tongue dart over his skin before he withdrew.

"No," Meghan said once her mouth was free to answer. "After the box springs break, we can move to the floor or find another bed."

He laughed and lifted her onto his lap, and that was when Meghan noticed neither of them had fastened their seatbelts. "We're violating the seatbelt law," she pointed out.

"I intend to violate more than that before the sun rises." Romney slid a hand up her leg, under the fabric of her dress until it rested on her thigh.

"You have an accent I can't quite place." She curled into him and rested her head on his shoulder, letting her eyes drift shut as he traced patterns over the sensitive skin of her inner thighs. "Almost Irish but it doesn't sound right."

"Welsh."

"Oh."

His hand moved up higher, his fingers exploring her mound until she spread her legs and gave him better access. He cupped his hand over her sex and let his fingers press into her labia, the layers of pantyhose and a thong providing very little separation between his hand and the flesh growing swollen and slick for him.

"The driver," Meghan said, although she didn't try to close her legs or move away as Romney pulled her skirt up higher.

"I'll make him forget anything he might see."

That made no sense at all, but for some reason she accepted the explanation as adequate and lifted her hips to make it easy for him to peel her out of her hose and underwear, leaving her bare under the black silk dress bunched around her waist.

His hand returned to her sex, now fully exposed, stroking, exploring, circling the swollen nub of her clit and then flicking it hard enough to make her gasp.

"Romney," she said, her voice throaty with desire.

"Rom."

"Rom," Meghan repeated, liking the sound of his nickname and the intimacy of it. Then she laughed. "You must hear a lot of bad jokes about that, given your business."

"Most humans don't find me funny." Rom drew his finger over her clit slowly, then plunged it into her with no warning. The abrupt penetration made her gasp and her hips thrust towards his hand in reflex.

"I'm not laughing at you." There was nothing funny about the way she was sprawling on his lap, half naked, legs open, feeling the heat spread over her skin and the graze on her lower lip burn as he took her with his hand. "Kiss me again, Rom."

"If I kiss you now, it's likely to go too far." He thrust a second finger into her and twisted them both, moving them in and out of her. Meghan groaned.

"You're banging me in the back of a limo, and you're worried about getting too carried away in public?"

"Yes." His voice was hard with a hint of music to it, the accent softening his tone. "I won't take you here, Meghan, but I will make you come for me."

One arm tightened around her, holding her so close against his chest that she couldn't draw a deep breath. He took her with his fingers, flicking them over her clit, driving them into her sex, making her pant and then moan and then finally scream as he drew it out and kept her on the verge of orgasm, almost but not quite able to reach it. Then he plunged three fingers into her and rubbed his thumb over her clit and she felt herself come apart, shattering into a thousand shards and fragments.

When her lips and voice were able to work in unison again, Meghan managed to say, "You're very good at that."

"I've had a great deal of time to practice." He kissed her forehead, a light brush of his mouth, his fingers still buried inside her. For some reason it hurt to think of other women lying naked and open for him to take and the hurt twisted like a knife in her gut. It shouldn't matter. She didn't know this man, and it was unlikely she'd see him again. So what if he knew his way around the female sex organs as if he'd made a science of the study, it was just sex and what would she prefer, to have a last fling with an expert or a man who didn't believe the G-spot existed?

The hurt coming on the heels of orgasm brought her down more effectively than an ice bath. Suddenly, Meghan was very aware of her position, her state of undress, and the fact that the limo driver was staring at her pussy in the rearview mirror.

"Oh, hell." She tried to move, to dislodge Romney's hand and pull her dress back down, even if the damage was already done and a stranger had gotten a front-row seat to the show. Rom didn't let her.

"Stay where you are." He looked down at her, his eyes burning into hers. "I can't take you yet, but I'm damned if I'll let you hide yourself from me." Then his lips twisted in an almost-smile. "Actually, I'm damned anyway, according to some. But your body is going to belong to me and I am not finished looking at or touching what is mine."

"Yeah, well, you and the city of Seattle," Meghan snapped, waving at the mirror.

"He won't remember a thing."

"Because you'll hypnotize him into forgetting that a world-famous musician lost her panties in his backseat. He's probably taken pictures by now." Meghan glared at Romney but she still reacted with treacherous heat and need that was far from sated when his fingers moved inside her.

"Yes, I will hypnotize him into forgetting. And there is no camera."

"You are the strangest man." Meghan closed her eyes and gasped as his fingers moved in and out of her—slow, sure, making her want more no matter how many people watched.

"What if I told you I'm not a man?"

"What are the alternatives?" Meghan asked. "You have long hair but nobody would mistake you for Bigfoot. I'm not saying aliens don't exist, but if they do they're probably not into sex and hypnosis. Whatever you are, you're definitely male."

She could feel the distinctive proof of that jutting into her hip, the heat of him burning through the layers of clothing.

"And you are definitely female." He slid his fingers out of her and rested his hand on her sex, cupping her as if staking his claim. Possessive. "And so very human. So fragile that I bruised you with a kiss."

"Made my lip bleed, too," Meghan pointed out.

"Yes, I do remember." One finger glided lightly over her labia. "I know the taste of your mouth and your blood and soon I'll know how you taste everywhere."

"You could find out now," Meghan suggested, forgetting their audience of one. She wanted to feel Rom's mouth on her sex, his tongue thrusting into her.

"Not yet." Rom gave her pussy a last petting, then pulled her more upright on his lap, tugging her skirt down at the same time. Meghan didn't know where her underwear had ended up and she didn't care. No point wasting time putting it back on when it'd be coming right off again.

"Why?"

"Why not yet?" Rom gave her an unreadable look. "Because I want you too badly. Because I haven't satisfied my hungers elsewhere. I don't trust my control and I won't take all of you and risk making a choice for you that you might regret afterwards."

"I don't really have time for regrets," Meghan said. Although right now she did regret the fact that his mouth wasn't between her legs. The topic did, unfortunately, remind her just how short time was, how little of it she had to waste. "Things change." Rom ran a hand along the curve of her thigh, her hip, up until it closed over her breast. The pressure of his hand on her made her arch into him, wanting more.

"Some things can't."

He laughed, a low sound. "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy."

"Shakespeare," Meghan said. She sighed in pleasure when his fingers closed over her nipple and tugged. "I'd be willing to believe the alien theory, on second thought. You quote the bard, and you really know what to do with your mouth and hands. Although I'd argue that an alien man is still a man."

"I'm not an alien, but I am *other*." Rom traced the outline of her breasts and then slid under the fabric to cup her bare skin, rubbing his thumb over her nipple under the silk. "In the ways that matter right now, I am very much a man, however."

"One of my best friends married a Viking." Meghan made a soft sound of delight when he lowered the straps of her dress down to make it easier to run his hands over her breasts, stroking, cupping and squeezing the sensitive flesh that ached for his touch. "Other can work out pretty well in the sexual compatibility department."

"We do have sexual compatibility."

"Any more compatible and the upholstery back here would catch fire."

Meghan's skin already had, her nerve endings were burning, flames licking under the surface, all of her ready to combust.

"Are you ready to burn for me?" His hands moved over her and Meghan couldn't track the question, let alone answer it.

Chapter Four

Meghan didn't realize they'd reached their destination until it finally registered that Rom had stopped and why. The car was no longer moving.

"This is embarrassing," she said. "The driver is looking at my breasts, which is probably not worse than him watching me spread my legs for you, but still, I'm thinking he really doesn't need to see my nipples."

"How could he? My hands are covering them." Rom squeezed the soft curves resting in the palms of his hands and then let her go, restoring her dress and her to some semblance of order.

"You're really going to hypnotize him so he doesn't remember this?" That would be a nice trick, although if it didn't work what was the worst case scenario? Having the story trumpeted in all the tabloids with accompanying grainy photos? It could happen, but she really had bigger things to worry about than PR and her image.

"Yes."

He sounded so confident, but it made no sense to her. Meghan shook her head and felt around for her underwear.

"Looking for these?" Rom pulled a scrap of fabric out of his jacket pocket and Meghan stared.

"Why didn't I notice what you were wearing?" she asked. She took in the suit jacket, the silk dress shirt, the pants. "I saw your eyes, your face, I noticed your hair. I never saw what you were wearing. It didn't register." "Maybe you were taken with my face."

"Maybe you really did hypnotize me." Meghan slid off his lap, thoroughly unnerved. It was as if part of him had been hidden from her, blocked off, and only now revealed. What else wasn't she seeing?

"I did tell you." Rom gave a graceful shrug and returned her panties to his pocket.

"What exactly are you?"

"I told you I was dangerous." He leaned over and kissed the corner of her mouth, and that was enough to make the pulse leap in her throat. "But you've invited me in and I won't be shut out tonight."

"You make it sound like I'm not allowed to have second thoughts." Meghan swallowed with an effort, her mouth dry, far too affected by this man.

"You're allowed. But you haven't changed your mind. You want me."

She did, and she hated that it was so obvious. Her nipples were hard and distended, clearly visible under the fabric of her dress. Her underwear was in his pocket and her dress probably sported a damp patch.

"Don't let it upset you." Rom touched her cheek, then the scraped spot on her lower lip. "You need me tonight. I'm here."

He retrieved the flower and laid it in her hand. Meghan looked down at the blossom and wondered when it had fallen out of her hair. About the time she'd lost half her clothes and most of her mind? Another detail she hadn't noticed and should have. She sat there, holding the fragile bloom, while Rom got out, went around to the driver's window, spoke in a low voice, then returned to help her out of the car.

"What did you do, bribe him?" Meghan asked.

"I clouded his memory. Even if you didn't object, I have no desire to leave him with a clear image of your naked body. That's mine to remember." Rom's fingers dug into her shoulder, a small hurt but one that helped her focus.

"You sound like a jealous boyfriend." Meghan keyed the code into the security gate. They walked through it and she heard the distinctive sound as it locked in place behind them. Was it a good thing or a bad thing that he was inside it with her?

"Possessive," Rom said. "Not quite the same thing. I won't make irrational accusations about your behavior with other men, but neither do I want to share you. That includes letting other men see you naked."

"I don't make a habit of getting naked in public, so it's not likely to be an issue." It wasn't likely to be an issue anyway, because after tonight she wouldn't see him again, and after that, well, she was going to lose more weight and before long nobody would want to see her naked.

Great, now she was depressed about the future, or her lack of one, and the fact that a man she didn't even know and wasn't sure she should be alone with would never be her boyfriend, even if he wanted to be. Which wasn't likely. If he'd wanted to be her boyfriend, he'd missed plenty of chances.

"You don't want to be my boyfriend, anyway," she burst out, then wanted to groan when she realized what she'd said.

"No, I don't." His hands tightened on her. "I want to be your lover."
"Oh."

There was nothing more to say to that, so Meghan focused on entering the right combination into the keypad by the front door. It opened and they walked through it, then closed it behind them. She automatically hit the setting on the pad inside the door that armed the security system but wouldn't be set off by normal movement indoors. It would take opening a door or window to trigger the alarm.

She turned to face Romney. "About this lover business."

"Not business. Pleasure." His hands traced the edge of her dress, just touching her skin, then fisted in the fabric and tore it. He opened his hands and the remains of the dress fell away. Meghan dropped the orchid and saw the white blossom lying on the black silk and thought, *pretty*. Then Rom kissed her again and she didn't think anything at all.

His mouth devoured hers as he crowded her body against the door, the fabric of his suit jacket abrading her nipples. His body pressed into hers, crushing her breasts into his chest and he rode his knee between her thighs, partially lifting her with her sex grinding into his thigh.

She couldn't breathe and didn't care. She dug her hands in his jacket and yanked, wanting it out of her way and his skin bared to her touch. He let out a soft laugh against her open mouth and shrugged off the jacket, then unbuttoned the shirt and let that fall, too.

"Pants," Meghan said, in case he'd forgotten about them. "Get rid of those, too."

"I'll have to let go of you to do that."

"Damn." She ground her pelvis into him, then bit her lower lip.
"Okay, just do it."

Rom released her and left her standing on shaky legs, naked, leaning on the door for support while she watched him undo his pants and slide them off his legs, kicking his shoes free in the process. That made her mind work again. She wasn't sure when she'd lost her shoes but her feet were bare now. In the limo? They were probably still there. Then he straightened and she saw his cock, full, jutting towards her, and forgot about her shoes again.

She dropped to her knees and leaned forward, taking the head of him into her mouth. He buried his hands in her hair. "Ah. I didn't expect that."

He wasn't objecting, though, so Meghan drew him deeper, taking as much of his length into her mouth as she could, running her tongue over www.samhainpublishing.com

and around him, tasting him. She slid a hand between his thighs to cup his balls and he reacted, thrusting himself between her lips.

She closed her eyes and savored the sensation of his hard cock pushing in and out, fucking her mouth, feeling heat building inside her, her clit throbbing with need, her sex swollen for him. His fingers hadn't given her enough relief. She needed more. Needed him hard and hot between her thighs, driving into her, fucking her.

"Enough." He pulled out of her mouth and took hold of her shoulders, drawing her upright. "I want to taste you. Show me your bedroom."

"This way." Meghan led and he followed, his hand on the small of her back, fingers dipping lower to touch the dimple just above her bare ass. She managed not to stagger or stumble on the way, then collapsed across the bed on her stomach.

"Very nice." Rom ran his hands over her ass, then down, nudging her thighs apart and exposing her sex to him. He thrust a finger into her from behind and Meghan gasped at the abrupt penetration. She was slick and ready, his finger sliding into her easily, and he followed it with a second.

Meghan felt the bed dip as he joined her on the mattress, one hand moving underneath her to stroke her clit while his fingers moved inside her from the other side. "That feels so good," she sighed.

"I'm sure it tastes even better." He slid his hands away, turned her onto her back and lifted her higher on the bed, allowing him to move between her open thighs. "Let's find out."

The first touch of his tongue outlining her labia nearly made her come off the bed. He explored her with his mouth, thrust his tongue into her, then sucked at her clit. She felt the sharp edge of his teeth and the sensation sent her spiraling up.

"Rom. Now," she gasped out.

He drove his fingers into her again while his mouth took her and she splintered.

"You taste delicious." Rom raised his head and licked his lips. Meghan felt her inner muscles clench in reaction. She was throbbing everywhere, nipples, clit, vulva, her pulse pounding in her throat, blood roaring in her ears.

He moved over her, his thighs hard between hers, his cock hot and urgent against her pussy, the wall of his chest crushing her breasts.

"Meghan." He flexed his hips, driving the head of his cock inside her, and Meghan felt herself opening for him, stretching around the width of him.

One bright side to having no future—birth control and disease prevention simply weren't issues. Meghan arched underneath him, straining to take more, loving the feel of him bare and thick inside her. She wanted him all the way inside her, and when he came she wanted to feel the liquid jet pulsing into her depths.

"Rom." She shifted under him, restless, impatient. What was he waiting for?

"I love seeing you under me like this." He smiled at her. "I love the feel of your flesh under mine, your sweet, hot cunt taking my cock. I can feel you opening for me, so wet, so ready for me." Rom rocked into her, giving her another inch.

"Rom. I need you now." She arched up into him.

"Dying for it, are you?" He lowered his head to her neck, kissing the pulse point at her throat.

He had no idea. He couldn't have any idea, the words were coincidence. And she was dying for it, aching for him, on fire for him. "Fuck me."

"Oh, I will." Rom's voice was a dark promise in the night.

She felt his teeth scrape over her skin and then his mouth closed over hers again, hard, hot, taking her breath while he drove inside her and took her body. He was relentless, holding her down while he thrust his length into her again and again, forcing her to take the slow pace he set, not letting her shift to get more pressure where she wanted it, not letting her come.

The need built inside her until she would have screamed with it but his mouth devoured hers, allowing no sound escape.

Now. Now, she urged him with her mind, as if he could hear her. She needed more, needed it now.

Maybe he was psychic as well as a hypnotist because he changed his rhythm and began to slam into her, fast and furious, driving deep into her, taking her. She felt her inner muscles begin to pulse and then spasm in an orgasm that seemed to build and build, stretching out forever as he fucked her, peaking when she felt the burst of liquid heat as he spilled himself inside her.

Her heart felt like it was going to explode inside her chest, beating too hard, too fast, as she lay gasping under him.

Finally, she managed to say through bruised, swollen lips, "So you came to kill me with sex tonight."

"No." His lips moved over hers in a kiss as light as the brush of butterfly wings. "I just came to kill you."

Chapter Five

Meghan went still, wondering just who was on top of her, inside her, and how she could get away from the threat he posed. She wasn't noticing things she should, wasn't seeing everything, and even when she'd realized that earlier, she couldn't seem to care about it.

She'd taken this stranger home with her, invited him in, locked them both in the house together. Her heartbeat accelerated, something she didn't think was possible, hammering in her chest while her breath came in too-fast gulps.

"You're hyperventilating." Rom pulled out of her and rolled off her in one motion, lifted her, drew her forward until her legs hung off the bed and pushed her head down between her knees. "Stay there, don't move."

And she couldn't. Even when he left the room, she was paralyzed, as if her flesh had frozen into a living statue of a woman and not the real thing. She heard the sound of her laboring lungs in the empty room, and then Rom was back, holding a paper bag, forcing her to breathe into it.

So that really does work, she thought when her lungs returned to their normal rhythm and the black dots swimming in her vision began to clear.

"Better?"

Meghan nodded, but didn't try to speak. Rom pulled the bag away and set it aside, then climbed back onto the bed. He wrapped his arms around her and drew her down to lay beside him and she went, unresisting, limp.

"What just happened?" she asked after a few minutes.

"I scared you." Rom's hands moved along the curve of her spine, stroking her, his touch soothing.

"You said you'd come to kill me. You didn't think I'd be scared?" Meghan huddled into him, even though it was stupid and suicidal, because she wanted the press of his flesh against hers, his warmth, his strength. His comfort. Which made no sense, but what about tonight made sense?

She could easily believe the veil between the worlds had grown thin and strange things walked the earth this Halloween.

"I didn't think I'd panic you." His lips brushed her temple. "Are you so afraid of dying?"

"Not afraid, exactly." Meghan spread her hand on his chest, feeling his heart beating under her palm. "The idea pisses me off. I want to kick the Grim Reaper's ass, but I don't think a black belt is much use against the incorporeal."

Rom laughed. "No."

"See, this is what I don't understand." Meghan lifted her head and looked into those dark eyes of his. "You send me flowers for years. My friends approve of you. You finally introduce yourself to me and we have fantastic, amazing sex. Some of which is in front of an audience, and I don't care, which is so not like me. Then, in the afterglow, you tell me you're going to kill me and you don't sound like it's a joke. Even if you did, that's not the kind of thing you joke about unless you're a serial killer. Then when I have a panic attack, you calm me down and now you're laughing and rubbing my back."

She shook her head and felt the slide of her hair against her naked back. "Make me understand, Rom."

"You already do, if you let yourself."

Meghan lowered her head to pillow it on his shoulder, closed her eyes, and rested against him while he held her.

If she let herself. What did that mean? What did she understand? He'd told her he wasn't human. What was he?

Rom did something that affected her mind, like hypnosis. He'd made the driver forget her. He'd kissed her hard enough to draw blood and he'd acted like it was an aphrodisiac instead of a gross-out. He'd told her to invite him into her home.

"Would you have been able to come inside if I hadn't invited you?" Meghan asked.

"No."

That was easier to hear with her eyes shut, for some reason.

"Can you see your reflection in a mirror?"

"Yes. That's just the Hollywood version. The blank mirror is so dramatic. Cue danger music."

"Of course." She nodded, her cheek rubbing against his skin as she did. "I should have realized that Hollywood would screw up the facts about *vampires*."

"You should." Rom twined his fingers into her hair. "Movies screw up the facts about so many things."

Meghan let out a low groan. "Don't tell me about them. I don't want to know what else exists outside of a movie screen that shouldn't."

"That hurts." Rom rolled onto his back and drew her on top of him. His erection prodded her belly. "Do you really think I shouldn't exist?"

"Well. Vampires. The undead." Meghan shook her head. "Most onenight stands are not this weird."

"If you don't like weird, you shouldn't pick up strange men on Halloween." Rom shifted her, sliding her along his length, settling her legs down on either side of his so that his cock rode against her labia. "I didn't pick you up, exactly." Meghan rocked her hips into him and felt her clit react as he pressed into her, not quite entering her, but making her want to change her angle and take him all the way inside. It was such a tease and her body hungered for his so sharply. "You picked me up. I think. The details are a little hazy."

"Maybe we picked each other up." Rom gripped her hips and lifted her just a little, adjusted his position and thrust up into her while he pulled her back down onto him at the same time. The abrupt entry made her gasp.

"Maybe we did." Meghan tipped her head back, braced her knees on either side of him and began to raise and lower herself on him, riding him, impaling herself on him.

She started to laugh as the word association registered. "I'm fucking Vlad the Impaler. You're staking me with your inhuman cock."

"There, you are feeling better now."

Rom reached down and rubbed her clit. The direct contact sent so much sensation arcing through her that for a moment she couldn't move. She let out an inarticulate sound, not quite a whimper or a moan but something in the middle or maybe both at the same time.

"Rom." Meghan dropped onto his chest, her hair falling over them both like a cover.

"Too much?" His voice was low, knowing. His finger stroked over her clit again and she trembled, feeling a deep pulsing inside her in response, hot and urgent. Her inner muscles clenched around him, gripping his cock.

"I can take it." Her voice sounded breathy and soft to her own ears. Not exactly convincing.

"I can take you." Rom thrust up into her and kept up the pressure on her clit until she shuddered and groaned, unable to move, paralyzed by pleasure. "I'll finish vou."

"That sounds so final," Meghan said, her voice muffled by his chest.

"What are you going to do, suck my blood?"

"If you'll let me." Rom pulled out and rolled with Meghan, coming to rest over her as she lay on her back, their positions reversed. "It's an option. I think it beats the alternative, don't you?"

"So you know about that."

"Yes."

So Rom knew her secret. Considering everything else, that didn't surprise her. It did explain why he'd never approached her before, and why he'd decided it was time now.

She arched up into him, loving the feel of him on top of her, his weight, the brush of his skin against hers, his cock resting against her sex. "Just out of curiosity, are there a lot of bloodsucking fiends in the software industry?"

"Not many, but we do have to adapt to changing times and shifts in the job market. The technology field has a lot of jobs for night workers." Rom smiled at her and moved his hips, making his cock glide along her labia and rub against her clit.

"Seattle must be a big attraction, then. Long, dark days in winter, lots of rain, not too many sunny days."

"It suited us." Rom lowered his head to kiss the base of her throat, then moved down to draw her nipple into his mouth.

"That feels so good." Meghan dug her hands into his hair, holding him to her as if she thought he might try to get away before he finished her as promised.

"It'll feel better when I bite you." Rom released her nipple and turned his attention to its twin, sucking hard. She groaned in reaction and bucked her hips into him, trying to gain more pressure where she wanted it.

"How does that work, anyway?" Meghan asked. "One bite and I become a born-again bloodsucker?"

"Not quite." Rom kissed his way down her belly and nipped at her clit, making her shriek before he moved back up her body, settled between her thighs and thrust into her again, hard and sure, filling her with one stroke. "I drink you dry and then you drink me."

She blinked at him, trying to understand, moving her hips in rhythm with his automatically. "Sounds complicated."

"Not really."

"Would I have to kill people? Because I couldn't do that."

"No. You don't need to take that much, just about the amount a blood donor gives. If it worries you, you can implant a post-hypnotic suggestion to drink juice and eat a cookie." Rom lowered his full weight onto her, pressing her into the bed, driving so far into her that he touched the opening of her womb and she ground her pelvis against him in response.

"So good. So deep. More," she gasped out.

"I'll give you more."

His mouth took hers, hungry and urgent. His body moved on hers, in hers, taking her hard. He drew her lower lip into his mouth and scraped it with his teeth, drawing blood, tasting her while he fucked her.

Need roared through him. The need to extend his fangs, sink them into her soft flesh, drink the hot blood just below the surface of her smooth skin, drink her while he buried his cock deep inside her, swallow the last of her life while he spent himself into her womb.

But not without an invitation. Not without her choosing it. He held himself in check, taking as much of her as she was willing to give him and taking every inch of it. "I want you," he breathed against her lips. "All of you, every bit, every drop. I want you tonight and tomorrow night and every night. Mine to hold, to look at, to fuck. Mine to keep."

Her eyes opened halfway, her lids heavy, her eyes dark. "Not a onenight stand?"

"Not even close." He drove into her again, a deep, hard stroke.

"A package deal, two for one." She moved under him, twining her legs around his waist to open herself more fully to him. "I get you and I get to keep my life. Sort of."

"You do already work at night," Rom pointed out. "Not too much of a change. And if you don't want me, I'd still offer you the option. I would try to change your mind about us, however."

"Forever is a long time to be alone." She opened her eyes all the way, meeting his directly."

"Yes." He quickened his pace, feeling her inner muscles clenching around him, angling to put more pressure on the spot deep inside her where she craved it most.

"Do it," she said, turning her head to expose more of her neck to him. Hunger shot through him, fierce, hot, undeniable.

"Are you sure?" He wanted her, but he wanted her to be certain.

"I'm sure. Take me now, make me come while you do it."

He did. He sank his fangs into her exposed throat, drank her as he drove into her harder, faster, taking all of her. Her pussy clutched at his cock as the orgasm built, her inner muscles gripping and drawing him deeper, triggering his orgasm, milking him dry. He pumped himself into her as he drank the last of her, then raised his head to look into her eyes as she lay beneath him, trembling in the aftershocks.

"What happens now?" Meghan asked.

"Now you die."

Chapter Six

Rom drew the edge of one fang along his wrist and pressed it to Meghan's mouth. "Swallow."

She did, her throat working convulsively.

"More."

He forced her to drink until she turned her head away, eyes shut, body still as if in sleep. He pulled out and rolled off to lay beside Meghan, gathering her into his arms. A shudder rippled through her.

"It hurts," she said in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes."

It hurt to die, it hurt to be reborn. He wouldn't leave her alone and hurt in the dark. Rom held her close, knowing she would be aware of his presence and comforted by it. Tremors wracked her frame for what seemed like hours. Finally she stilled and rested in his arms. A long time later, she moved her head on his shoulder.

"Rom."

"I'm here." He kissed her mouth, a soft brush of lips, a light tracing of his tongue against hers.

"This has been a very strange night." Her voice was a sigh of sound, but it was steady.

"It's not quite over yet." Rom kissed her again, a little harder this time. "Although the dawn isn't too far off. You should come home with me to sleep, it's safer there."

"Right." She yawned. "Because my roommates won't know that sunlight will turn me into a human torch now."

"That's not quite true, but you'll find it very uncomfortable." Rom smiled at her and sat up, lifting her into his lap. "The bigger problem is our vulnerability while asleep. Especially when you're new, you won't wake easily, even if you're in danger. And you should decide what you want to tell them, how you want to answer the inevitable questions."

"Makes sense. Okay." Meghan yawned again and stretched, her body arching. "We'll go to your place. I get to see Dracula's castle. This should be cool."

"It's not a castle. It's the upper floor of a nice, modern building. Office space and apartment combined."

"No dungeon or spooky torches or tormented spirits? I think I'm disappointed."

Rom laughed. "Well, there's Val. He might spook you."

"Val. What's a Val?" She angled her head to look at him as she asked the question.

"Valentine. My roommate and partner." Rom smiled at her. "I should warn you, he doesn't like women."

"Gay." Meghan nodded. "No problem."

"Not gay." Rom felt his lips twitch at the assumption that was, in retrospect, logical of her to make. "Grief-struck. He lost his wife."

"Oh." Her face went serious. "That has to suck. Was it before or after he became one of the legions of the undead?"

"Before."

"And he chose to live forever with his grief?" Her brows shot up in surprise.

"No, he was told he would find her again and he decided to wait."

"What, reincarnation?"

"Is it stranger than vampires?" Rom asked her.

"Well, no." Meghan sat all the way up and hopped off his lap. "So how do we do this, fly?"

"I'll have the limo pick us up at the gate."

Her face fell, disappointment clear in her expression. "Don't tell me, that's another thing Hollywood got wrong. Vampires can't fly."

"Only if we buy a plane ticket."

"Damn." She scowled and scuffed her toe in the carpet. "I can be seen in a mirror, get exposed to sunlight, and I can't fly. But I have to drink blood. None of the cool stuff, all of the gross-out."

"Enhanced senses and strength are pretty cool," Rom said. "And the hypnotic stare comes in handy."

"Well, yeah. And I don't have to worry about dying because I'm already dead."

"Always a bright side." Rom stood and reached for her, drawing her against him, enjoying the feel of her soft breasts touching his chest.

"There's a huge bright side." Meghan touched him, her hands running over him. "I get you. Tonight and tomorrow night and every night. If I hadn't been dying, you never would have approached me, would you?"

"No." His arms closed around her, holding her close. "I wanted you to have a chance at a mortal love, children. I can't give you that, Meghan."

"You can give me more than enough." Her lips brushed the skin at the base of his throat in a soft caress. "You gave me a second chance, and immortal love. You do love me, don't you?"

"Yes. I have for some time."

"It should seem scary that you've been watching me, but it seems comforting." Her arms wound around his waist as she leaned into him. "Like I've had an angel watching over me."

"That's a nice upgrade from bloodsucking fiend." Rom slid a hand under her chin to raise her face to his and gave her a kiss that was long and deep and thorough.

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The limo driver really didn't remember her, Meghan noted with some amazement. And her shoes were in the backseat, where she must have kicked them off. She picked them up and turned them in her hands. How completely things had changed since she'd last worn them, and how quickly.

"I see you found your shoes." Rom gave her a heated look, as if he was thinking about the way she'd lost them.

"Yes, and quit trying to make me blush."

"He doesn't remember." Rom touched the back of her neck, stroking her skin with a light touch, tempting her.

"You're insatiable." But she climbed into his lap and slid her arms around his neck. "I like that in a man."

"Vampire," he corrected.

"Whatever." Meghan cuddled into him and let out a soft sigh of contentment.

"Do you think you brought everything you need?" Rom angled his head in the direction of the overnight bag she'd packed.

"I have clean undies and my toothbrush. I'll call the house and ask somebody to have the rest packed up and sent over later." Meghan wiggled her ass in his lap, rubbing against him. "Maybe I should have packed more pairs of panties. You ripped off all the clothes I wore earlier. I could run out."

"Then you'll have to stay naked. What a shame." Rom ran his hand under her shirt and followed the curves of her breasts.

She laughed. "Yeah, I can tell you hate the idea. Your roommate probably wouldn't like that, though, and I bet the hypno stare doesn't work on other vampires."

"You'd win that bet." Rom tweaked her nipple through the flimsy fabric of her bra.

"How big is your place, anyway?" Meghan arched into his hand as she spoke.

"I told you, it's the top floor. Big. Plenty of space for privacy." He lowered his head to scrape his teeth over her nipple and she shuddered in reaction.

"That feels so good, Rom." She sighed as he nipped at her breasts, feeling heat rising under her skin, pulsing low between her legs.

"Near dawn," Rom said, kissing the valley between her breasts. "I might have time to get inside you again before we fall asleep."

"Sounds like it'll be a good way to wake up." Meghan smiled at him and moved into his kiss as his mouth came to claim hers.

It was a short ride to Rom's building. He carried her bag over his shoulder and held her around the waist with his other arm, as if he didn't want to let go of her. The apartment seemed empty when they entered it, and Rom guided her to his bedroom, set her bag in a corner and began stripping. "The sun is rising. Get naked."

"The romance is dead." Meghan grinned at him and got out of her clothes at high speed, her fingers flying, fabric slithering to the ground.

"Well, so are we." Rom pulled back the covers on the king-sized bed and climbed in, patting the empty space beside him. "Come here."

She felt her clit swelling and her sex growing slicker. "You didn't tell me turning into a bloodsucking fiend would make me a sex fiend." Meghan joined him on the bed and moved her body against his, rocking into him with urgent motions.

"It doesn't. That's all you and me."

"Nice."

"Very." Rom pulled Meghan on top of him, positioned her, and drove his cock up into her until he was seated fully inside.

"Ahh." Meghan sighed her satisfaction and cuddled into his chest, grinding her pelvis into his as a strange weight settled over her, pressing her down. "Is that dawn?"

"Yes." Rom's lips brushed her forehead. "We'll finish this when you wake up."

"Better than coffee." Meghan tightened her inner muscles around him and then slid into a deep, dreamless sleep.

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Hours later, Meghan was spent and smiling as she punched numbers into her cell phone. She was lying on her belly in the bed and Rom was running his hands over the curves of her ass. She wiggled to let him know she appreciated the attention.

"Hi, Lisa," she said when the phone was picked up on the other end.
"I wanted to let you know where I am so you won't worry."

"Let me guess," Lisa said. "There's a guy."

"There is." And he was scraping his teeth over her bare ass, making her shudder.

"I knew something was up with you. That's the reason you've been so upset lately, isn't it?"

"Well..." It was a good explanation, and Meghan hated to lie outright.

"And you didn't want anybody to know until you two had worked it out," Lisa went on. "I don't blame you, the press gets a hold of everything and no fledgling relationship needs that kind of pressure."

"Exactly," Meghan said. "So I'll be moving out. Have moved out, actually. I need to arrange to have movers come and pack up my things."

"No problem. Give me your new address and I'll take care of it."

Meghan recited the information and hung up before she started moaning into the receiver. Behind her, Rom lifted her hips and pushed her legs apart.

"Sex fiend," she said, but it sounded like an endearment and not an accusation.

"You want me to stop, then?"

"No." Meghan arched her lower back to angle herself for him and pushed back into him as he pushed into her.

His soft laugh floated over her as he took her again.

She was thoroughly sated when they finally dressed and left the bedroom, just in time to hear the doorbell.

"Expecting somebody?" Meghan asked Rom. "A client? A victim?" "No."

They walked towards the door, but a tall blond man dressed all in black beat them to it. "I'll get it."

He must be the elusive Valentine, Meghan decided.

After checking the peephole and presumably ensuring that there wasn't a militant brand of Jehovah's Witness on the other side bearing a wooden stake, he opened the door.

"Meghan?" Lisa came through the door and nearly collided with Valentine. "Hello."

Val stared at her for a long moment before he spoke. "Lisette."

"Lisa," she corrected.

He took a step forward, one hand moving up to touch her hair and tuck a strand behind one ear. "You've cut your hair."

"No, I always keep it short. It gets in the way enough as it is."

"Let it grow and I'll braid it for you."

She snorted. "What is that, a pick-up line? I don't date Goths."

"You don't like my clothes?" Valentine leaned towards her and said, "They come off."

"I thought you said he didn't like women," Meghan said, nudging Romney.

"He doesn't. He likes this one, though." Rom shrugged and pulled her closer. "This should be interesting."

"Love is in the air." Meghan grinned at him, letting him see the emotion brimming her eyes.

"Is it." Rom gave her a long look, reading the answer in her face, then bent his head to kiss her. She leaned into it, her lips softening under his, opening for him, giving him her heart with her response. He'd given her so much, and there was so much more ahead, tonight and every night to come. She'd thought she'd reached the end, and it was just beginning.

About the Author

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Beginnings: A Samhain Anthology

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Beginnings: A Touch of Magic

© 2006 Cassandra Kane

A race against time to save a planet—will the price be too heavy to pay?

Captain Tirana Albasta leads the last scouting mission to mystery planet Samhain, which has already swallowed two previous missions and

a starship full of New Wiccan colonists, Lalith's People.

Determined to keep the planet from UA Special Forces' harsh military control, Tirana finds much more than she expected. For the descendants of Lalith's People have split into two separate societies—the anti-magic Priests and the magical True People—and she has just been caught in

the crossfire.

Complicating matters is her attraction to Loren, the broodingly handsome True People witch who ignites passions she has never before experienced, and who just might make leaving Samhain impossible in more ways than one...

Beginnings: A Warrior's Witch

© 2006 Mackenzie McKade

Legacy bonds them—betrayal will test them—but, love and a little bit of magic will keep them together.

Gifted with both Berserka and Wicce heritage, Sabine wonders which legacy will determine her fate. A path of freedom and independence? Or will the Berserka curse tie her to one man, not of her choosing?

After his father's death, Conall returns to Scotland to take his rightful place as chieftain. Fate steps in and unleashes his hot-blooded lust on one obstinate woman resolved on defying destiny.

A forced marriage binds them. Desire and their animalistic nature draw them together. But someone is threatening to destroy the fiery love growing between them. Salt in the water, poison in the wine has everyone looking askew at Sabine, including her husband.

When the clan demands Sabine's death, Conall must choose between family and the woman he loves.

Beginnings: Babe in Woods

© 2006 Lorelei James

Animal attraction takes on a whole new meaning...

Manhattanite Lacy Buchanan is out to prove she's a tough cookie by signing up for a survivalist hiking trip in Wyoming's Bighorn Mountains. The last thing she expected was to get lost, forcing her to spend the rest of the hike alone with surly, too-sexy mountain man, Becker, who blames her entirely for their predicament. After Becker saves her from a rattlesnake, and gently calms her fears, Lacy feels lucky to be in his experienced hands.

But Sam Becker isn't really a hiking expert. He's strictly the moneyman in Back To Nature Guided Hiking Tours and a last minute, temporary fill-in guide. He can't believe his bad luck when his reluctant charge—a mouthy, but hot, blonde bombshell—pulverizes their only compass, destroying their chances of following the coordinates to base camp. Yet something about Lacy's trusting nature makes him want fulfill her idea he's her rugged hero.

As Sam and Lacy attempt to find a way out of the treacherous mountain passes, their natural instincts take them...farther away from civilized behavior and straight into the mating calls of the wild.

Beginnings: Night Music

© 2006 Charlene Teglia

When death marked her, he offered her rebirth...

Meghan Davies has been living a dream as the bass player for the allfemale hit rock band, The Sirens. But the dream becomes a nightmare with the discovery that cancer, undetected and now too far gone, heralds the end of everything.

Romney Kearns has been watching the sharp-tongued, flame haired woman from afar, wanting, but never approaching because he can offer her nothing but death.

When he discovers that death already has her marked, he sets out on All Hallow's Eve to seduce her, claim her, and make her willing to accept his dark offer. An alternative. Not life as she's known it, but a kind of rebirth. Eternity with him and immortality for her to make night music.

Beginnings: Ritual Love

© 2006 Kate Davies

A lost woman. A hunted man. On a night of forbidden rituals, the veil between past and present lifts—and their worlds will never be the same.

Scientist Moira Sinclair doesn't believe in magic. Or at least she hasn't since childhood. She's only come to Iona in remembrance of her long-deceased grandmother, the last person who encouraged her fanciful side. But now she's stumbled onto a secret druid ritual—and into another time.

Aedan Ap Crannog is furious to discover an outsider spying on their sacred, banned Samhain rites. With her strange garb and stranger mannerisms, Moira is unlike any woman he's ever known. But she could cause trouble for him and the people who follow him in the ancient ways. To prevent her from sounding the alarm, he takes her captive, hiding her in the labyrinth of caves along the far shore.

Despite their differences, sparks burn between them as brightly as the Samhain bonfire. Now captive and captor must find a way to bridge the centuries before the magic disappears with the dawn...

Beginnings: The Last Prophecy © 2006 Jennie Andrus

Hours before being murdered Maddy gives her last prophecy—her sister's death and salvation.

The MacElwain sisters had always been different. In search of a "normal" life, Lottie did her best to ignore her crazy sister, until Maddy predicts Lottie's death. Suddenly Maddy is dead and Lottie has a very short shelf life and, according to Maddy, she's going to need to find a moose if she wants to survive. Unfortunately, moose aren't too plentiful in downtown Toronto.

Not willing to trust her life to an animal, Lottie runs to the shores of Newfoundland, where danger, love and acceptance wait for her to fulfill the last prophecy of Mad Maddy MacElwain

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