



The Team

An Orion Authority book

Lisa Andel

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This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents and dialogues in this book are of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is completely coincidental.

Dedication

To Lila Dubois, a very talented fellow author and friend. To April, for her wonderful covers. And to Lynne, my editor, and the woman that makes my dreams come true.

Series Foreword

Welcome to the Orion Authority:

We are dedicated to the protection of the human race across the United States of America. We are composed of a variety of individuals, with a full spectrum of skills, knowledge and magics. We are actively seeking to spread the organization to areas that currently have no protection.

In the event you are currently active in these activities, or are interested in joining us, please visit our website at

<http://lisaandel.com/oa/orionauthority.html>

Prologue

J.C. Bailey here. I live in a town pretty much like yours. We've got a population of around sixty thousand souls. Mostly human.

We're also home to Hastings University, a school that has become exceedingly popular because of its kick-ass football team, and its reputation for having been the home of the artificial intestine. Now there's some bragging rights for you.

Anyway, I grew up with a very special bunch of boys. We came together because odd things kept happening to us. We stayed together for the same reason. Over time, the group expanded, and we eventually turned it into a paying venture. We simply call ourselves The Team.

It's our job to keep the human population of West Park from learning about the existence of supernatural creatures, as well as keeping those same people safe from them.

We are very good at our jobs.

And we're definitely not children anymore.

Chapter One

Nick and I were both eyeing the last piece of pepperoni pizza. I slapped my right hand into his lap and caressed the length of his cock, distracting him while I scabbed the slice with my left. Hey, it was from Trecaso's.

He pried my hand off, but was laughing as he settled for a slice of mushroom and onion. Brad dropped another six-pack on the coffee table, and we all helped ourselves.

"So who's the new guy?" I waved my pizza in the direction of the kitchen where the man in question was sitting with the rest of our group.

"Indor Brackston. Moved into the old Anderson place a couple months ago." David spoke with his mouth full.

"Indor?" I slanted a look around the coffee table.

"Family name of some kind. Haven't quite gotten a straight answer out of him." Evan reached for another slice of pie while he spoke.

"I thought we got garlic bread." Dryden levered himself off the floor and headed into the other room.

I licked my fingers and slouched back onto the couch. We'd be heading out for the evening in about an hour. This was our planning time, figuring out who was going to work with whom, and where.

We weren't always this formal, but there'd been a rash of preternatural activity in the area, and that's what we did. Something that we were just drawn to, or drawn into. Had been that way most of our lives.

Nick slapped his hand on my chest, and if I didn't know him so well I'd have thought he was copping a feel.

"Can I see it?" His hand was already going for the neckline of my shirt.

I didn't help, just watched as his hand disappeared under the fabric. The knife he was going for was hanging in the center of my chest. I didn't quite manage to keep from jumping when his fingers slid into my bra, and cupped my right breast.

"Hey!" Not that I didn't enjoy it, but God only knew where Nick's hands had been.

"Just returning the favor," he said as he rolled my nipple, then moved his hand to the blade.

"Ass." Though I couldn't keep from smiling.

Nick snapped the blade and let it drop out of the tip sheath into his hand. "This is sweet." He studied the knife as he weighted it in his palm. "How's it throw?"

"Like a wet dream." It was the nicest blade I'd ever owned. The composite metal held enough silver to take care of the nasties, without my having to forfeit too much tensile strength. Its unique triangular shape caused it to fly like an arrow when thrown.

"Hey, Bailey, Corellis, you two are stuck with each other tonight." Reynolds scooped up the empty pizza boxes and headed towards the kitchen.

Nick slid the knife back into its sheath, then took his time replacing it inside my shirt.

I slapped his arm when he cupped my other breast and squeezed. "Hands off, Corellis."

He leaned into me, his hand still on my boob. "You know you want to."

My heart fluttered in my chest. Yeah, I wanted to, had wanted to ever since I'd lost my virginity to him, on a dare, a decade ago. But the man was a player. Had commitment issues, as far as I could tell. Hadn't ever had a girlfriend, but never lacked for company. "Not if you were dipped in Lysol."

His eyes darkened, dropping to my lips and staying there. We both noticed when my nipple beaded against the palm of his hand.

A wicked grin curved slowly over his lips and I held my breath. The rumble of conversation faded into the background as my awareness narrowed down to the man in front of me. He lowered his face until his lips were a whisper away from mine.

"I've dreamt about tasting you again." His voice was husky as he closed in for a kiss.

I dropped to my back and rolled off the edge of the couch, coming to a stop in a crouch facing him. I was vaguely aware of money changing hands between the rest of the group around us. Rolling my eyes, I straightened, then stood looking down at Nick.

"Come on, hotshot, let's go collect our toys."

* * * *

Nick followed me to my house, then parked next to me in the garage. I swung out of the cab of my pickup and trotted inside, pausing only long enough in the kitchen to grab a beer.

I made a quick side trip to my bathroom for the ointment, some gauze, and an ace bandage, then I headed for my armory. It's really my office, but I've got more weapons in there than anything else. Hell, I've got some of everybody's weapons here. We all left supplies at each other's houses so we'd always have something familiar to work with.

Nick strolled in, beer in hand, and headed for the cabinet where he stored his stuff.

"Can you give me a hand here a moment?" I held out the first aid supplies to clue him in to what I was asking for.

"Sure." He set his beer down on top of the desk and removed the supplies from my hands.

I pulled my T-shirt off, then turned my back to him. "Unhook the bra."

The back of the bra came apart and I shrugged it off my shoulders. I felt his hands, warm on my sides, then he stepped into me, curving his fingers over my breasts, while he nipped a path along my shoulder to my neck.

I leaned into his hands. At first to move the wound on my back and shoulder away from his chest, then momentarily forgetting myself as his fingers teased my nipples, and his lips and tongue caused shivers to race over my skin.

One of his hands started to track down my stomach, wrenching me out of the haze of lust that had settled over me.

"Just change the dressing." I'd meant to sound hard. Or at the very least indifferent. I don't think I managed either.

His hands were unmoving, one covering a breast, the other just inside the top of my jeans. We'd flirted off and on over the last ten years. Hell, I flirted with all the guys to some extent. To tell the truth, most of it was just in good fun, I'm not sure that the guys on the team ever thought of me as a girl.

Nick shifted closer, his chest brushing the wound, and I was momentarily blinded by the flash of pain. I concentrated on my breathing, trying to will away the burning sensation.

I hadn't been paying attention. Even with the pain I should have kept an awareness of what he was doing. He'd worked his hand down between my legs, and was preparing to stroke a finger inside of me. Christ. "What is wrong with you?" I tugged on his arm, unable to budge it. He'd never gotten this out of hand with me since I was sixteen. Might have had something to do with the fact that I'd stabbed him the next time he'd tried anything.

His finger plunged inside of me, causing me to jerk back against his erection.

"Nothing some hot sweaty sex won't cure," he breathed against my neck.

I felt my resolve weakening as he worked his magic in my pants. My body melted against his, my wound forgotten as he brought me closer. He bent his legs and pressed the hard ridge of his cock into my butt, as he added a second finger, his thumb brushing over my clit. I don't know if I would have caved or not. Right then I heard a couple of the guys talking as they came down the hall towards the office.

Nick cupped my sex, and for a moment I thought he intended to continue, audience or not. Then he sighed, and drew his hand away, stepping back to pick up the antibiotic cream. I bent over and placed my palms on the top of the desk, just before Dryden and Armo walked into the room.

Nick peeled off the old dressing, then sent Armo into the washroom for a soapy cloth.

"You haven't been changing the dressing often enough," he scolded.

"Kind of a tough spot for me to work." I shrugged.

Dryden was digging through one of the drawers along the wall.

"You got any weapons you wouldn't mind loaning to Indor for a couple of months until he can get himself outfitted?" He pulled up several pieces, glanced at them, then dropped them back into the drawer.

Armo returned with the cloth, and Nick gave me a heads-up before he pressed it to my wound. I gritted my teeth, and still a grunt escaped me.

"Sorry," he mumbled. "Shouldn't have turned your back on a demon to begin with."

"If you'll remember, it was his pet that did this," I groused.

He used the other cloth that Armo had brought to rinse the soap off, then patted the area dry. I didn't have to look to know that the three men were exchanging glances. I'd been out with a guy that had only been hunting with us for a couple of months. Didn't really know him, but everyone he'd hunted with said he did a good job. Until he'd been paired with me.

We'd come upon a demon and his erkat stalking a couple of teenaged girls. James had done everything right for the first part of the fight, but I lost sight of him when the demon had focused on killing me, instead of fighting the two of us at the same time.

I had the demon down, and was digging in my pouch for the saltwater mixture that I'd developed, with a little assistance from a mage, to eradicate the remains, when the erkat swiped its talons across my back. I was quick to dispatch the ugly little pet, doused them both with my mixture, and waited until there was nothing left of them.

James had also disappeared and, as far as any of us knew, he'd never been seen again.

Of course, we knew the demons didn't have him. We'd checked. Beyond that, we had no idea where to look.

Nick coated the cuts with the special ointment our wizard had concocted, placed the

gauze over the entire mess, then wrapped the ace bandage around my middle to hold it in place. Ending high enough that his hand brushed the bottoms of my breasts.

When he was done, I flexed my back to make sure it was going to stay in place. I happened to glance at the other men when I turned to find my shirt. I almost shook my head when I saw that Dryden and Armo were staring in fascination at my boobs.

“You’d think you guys never got to see breasts.” I tugged my shirt over my head.

“Not like those.” Armo stated, shifting his feet, making me wonder if he were reacting to the sight. You know, down there.

“I was just checking out the knife; it’s a new one.” Dryden turned back to the drawer now that I was covered up again.

“And you guys wonder why we never get any new women on the hunt with us.” I did shake my head then, and opened the cabinet where I kept some of my older stuff. I dug through it, and found a boot sheath and an older dagger. It was a nice dagger, but the newer ones were lighter and easier for me to use.

I also found some silver-tipped darts and a belt pack for them. After considering the other items on the shelves, I added a pouch of bluent a local witch prepared for us—not that there’d been that many rogue fae lately, but we’d have to supply the stuff to the guy anyway. I also threw in half a dozen vials of the saltwater mixture we used to dispose of the bodies.

Dryden was dropping all the items we were handing him into a soft leather duffel.

“You got any iron in there yet?” Armo was holding a custom Benchmade push dagger. Flipping through the other items on the shelf, he found its sheath. “I’ve got a boot sheath for it.” He tossed the two items to Dryden, who plucked the blade out of the air with one hand while he snagged the sheath with the other.

“I think we’ve got enough.” He zipped the bag closed. “You two hear about the lamias working the college bars?”

“I thought David and Russell were working that sector tonight.” I was pulling out my own weapons and strapping them on while we talked.

“Armo and I are working it with them, we’re just not sure four of us will be enough. I’ve got a feeling there’s going to be more of them than we’re expecting.”

“Has anyone talked to Reinhold?” Nick finished buckling his back sheath, then slid a fourteen-inch custom sawback into it.

I wondered when Nick had gotten the knife, but didn’t bother asking. He wouldn’t tell me anyway, let alone tell me who was making this stuff for him.

I finished strapping on my knives. I had a dagger strapped to my right ankle, a Dieter/Ray fixed blade on my right thigh, and a set of Colt throwers on my left upper arm. Add the neck knife and my back dagger, and I was set for blades. At least for tonight.

I clipped on my inner pants holster for my Glock, and my ankle holster for the Taurus PT22 that Nick had given me when I got out of the hospital last. I grabbed a couple of spare mags, and clipped some darts along my waist over my left hip.

Since Dryden was talking about the number of lamias out, I threw a dozen of the special vials into a padded fanny pack, then I had to reclip the darts to the strap on the pack.

Figuring I was ready to go, I made eye contact with Nick and raised an eyebrow at him. He nodded, and we both turned to the door at the same time.

“Call us if you need help at the U,” I shot over my shoulder as we left.

* * * *

Nick and I had been patrolling the northwest quadrant of the city for three hours when the call came in.

“Christ, Nick, I don’t know where they all came from, there’s got to be a couple dozen of them, at least.” Armo shouted so loudly I could hear him.

Nick hung up, shot a glance at me, then smiled. “Couple dozen lamias just showed up at Mike and Terry’s.”

“Who called us?” I turned in my seat for a better look at Nick’s face.

“Armo.”

“How many of us is he asking to the party?”

Nick’s cell phone rang again. This time he pulled to the side of the road when he answered. He was quiet for a moment then said, “Not that I’m aware of.” After another moment, he disconnected the call. When Nick told me what was going on, I worked the calendar in my head to see if there was something significant about tonight that would explain the excessive activity.

Usually the lamias hunted in small packs, and there were never more than one or two packs widely spaced in a single city on the same night. They weren’t nearly as powerful as their blood-drinking brethren which was one of the reasons they liked to keep a low profile. That they were drawing such attention to themselves made me think there was something else going on.

I didn’t like not knowing what that something else was.

Reinhold still wasn’t answering. I hung up, and thought some more about the situation.

“We’re missing something here.” I tapped my phone against my chin while I thought. “There’s some reason that so many lamias are out tonight. I’m just not seeing it.”

“Know anyone that’s up on their vampire history?” Nick flipped the turn signal, and I realized we were running out of time.

“Not on my speed dial.”

There were too many possibilities, an historical date, some ancient custom, the phase of the moon. I ran through my mind everything I knew about them. They were a lesser vampire, feeding on the energy that humans gave off during sex. What they did didn’t kill humans, but could permanently cause damage if taken to the extreme. Rarely happened. They were also easier to kill than most of the other kinds of vampires.

So why tonight, of all nights?

Reinhold still hadn’t answered by the time we’d pulled into a parking space on a side street a couple of blocks from the bars. I checked my gear, then hopped out of Nick’s SUV. An almost electric current stirred across my skin, filling the air around me, even as I moved to meet Nick at the front of the vehicle.

“Do you feel that?” Nick asked as he dropped an arm around my waist.

“Yeah.” I fell into step with him.

It neither lessened nor strengthened as we neared our destination. But the constant itch of it across my senses was beginning to irritate me. I pulled Nick to a halt.

“What the hell is it?” I rubbed my arms, surprised that the hair wasn’t standing up on

them. "It's irritating."

"Work with me here," Nick said, before he drew me into his body and lowered his face to mine. Our lips met, and the desire inside of me that I always had around Nick flared hotly as we kissed. He nipped me lightly, then stroked between my lips with his tongue.

With his free hand he brushed down my back, across my hips, to my buttocks. He kneaded my ass while he held me closer, tighter. I found my hands running over the muscles in his back, moving one down his spine then over the curve of his ass, the tight muscle there causing a rush of arousal to flood my core.

Groaning, I rocked myself against his erection as I clutched his buttock, ate at his mouth. He dropped his other hand to my ass, picking me up, dragging my crotch along the hot, hard length of his cock.

If not for the surge in energy around us, we would probably have shed our clothes and taken each other right there. But the sizzle of power that washed over me broke through my lust.

I fought my way free of his mouth, and worked my lips over to his ear.

"It's the lamias, Nick. They've found a way to amplify people's lust. They're feeding off the result."

Nick was breathing hard, still grinding my sex over his shaft. "Christ, I'm not going to make it." His voice was rough, his features harsh.

He put me down, wrapped his fingers around my wrist, and started dragging me back to his vehicle.

"Where are we going?" I had to trot to keep up with him.

He didn't answer me, just hauled me to the back of the SUV, keyed open the lock, and shoved me inside. I scuttled backwards as he followed me in. Shutting the door, he turned and stalked towards me on his knees, his eyes shining, visible even in the darkened interior.

He grabbed my ankles, and tugged, causing me to fall flat on my back. Then his hands were at my waist, quickly opening my pants. I wasn't helping him, but the urge to do so was building inside of me. He pulled one boot off, then the other, released the clip on my thigh sheath, then my fanny pack, and wrenched my pants and underpants down and off my legs.

I flipped the ankle sheath off, as anxious as he was by now to get down to business.

He freed his erection, shoving his pants down to his knees, then moved between my legs. Our eyes met, and for one brief moment, we knew we wouldn't be doing this, actually taking it to this level right here, right now, if not for the compulsion.

Then he fell on me with a hunger that was answered by my own.

I raised my knees on either side of his rib cage, and he was there. Plunging into me without preamble. But I was wet, very wet, and tight. It had been a while. The scream of my inner muscles as he cleaved his way through them only served to heighten my need. He bit my lower lip as he locked his arms around my shoulders in an iron grip. I bit back, digging my elbows into his sides, my fingers into his shoulder blades.

His cock plowed into me, my inner walls clutching at him, squeezing him. The nerves burning with pleasure, needing more.

I inched my knees higher. He changed the angle of his thrusts, and we both groaned. A heaviness in my pelvis started building, my clit throbbing, sending sparks of pleasure

through me whenever the crisp hairs at the base of his shaft ground into it.

Then the release, an explosive absence of pressure that sent shock waves of ecstasy racing outward from my core.

Nick cursed, muttering a constant stream of expletives, just before his semen started splashing across my womb. He came in a series of short bursts, but continued to thrust, his shaft hard yet, his curses taking on a harsher edge.

I felt myself winding towards another orgasm, the muscles tightening, bringing me closer, but still building. He bit my neck, and I screamed as I exploded outward from my uterus. My vagina convulsed around his cock. Then I shattered again when he swelled and hardened further.

His body stiffened; he shouted an incoherent word, then he was spewing, driving his shaft hard against my womb, lengthening my orgasm. With a final slam of his hips, a final wash of release, he collapsed on top of me.

I was still twitching, having trouble focusing, when he levered his chest off mine, and stared into my eyes. "Can you do anything to help us with the compulsion?"

Nick was one of only three men in our group who knew I was more than human. It was one of the few things I didn't talk about. The only reason Nick knew was because I'd lost control of it when he took me to his bed when I was sixteen. Then again, I knew Nick's secret, too, and exactly why he couldn't help us out in this situation. His magic was too similar to the kind that we were fighting.

"Crap. I should have thought of that when the lust started getting to us."

He grinned, and for a moment I thought he was going to kiss me. Then his grin widened, and I knew the idea had occurred to him, and he hadn't said anything. Super ass.

"Better let me up so I can concentrate," I grumbled.

Forcing ourselves to withdraw from each other, we gathered and separated our stuff. Then I pulled my clothes and my sheaths back into place, finding it took a lot more effort than I would have imagined. All the while I tried to think of something I could do with my magic to counteract the compulsion.

In the end I fashioned what was basically a full body condom for each of us that would protect us from outside contamination. It was the best I could come up with on short notice.

"I think that should do it." I started scooting towards the tailgate.

Nick stopped me with an arm across my chest. "I think we should test it out."

He drew me into a kiss, which quickly became heated. When my hands began working on dragging his shirt off, my brain finally kicked in. I shifted my hands to his chest, and pushed.

He backed away from me, enough to see my face. "What?"

His eyes were hooded with lust, his pupils so large they nearly consumed the brown of his irises.

"Oh yeah." He smiled wickedly at me. "We've got to check out the bars." Then he brushed his knuckles down the side of my face.

I suddenly realized that he'd been testing me, seeing just how much desire I had for him without the compulsion.

"Ass," I muttered as I climbed out of the vehicle behind him.

* * * *

Nick had his arm around my waist again. We'd decided to try to appear like a couple, out on a date. I wasn't sure why we were bothering since we were both carrying weapons out in the open. Just two heavily armed lovebirds, that's us. Maybe they'd think that's how we got our thrills.

Why was I even thinking so much about it at all? I realized then that my shields were good, but not perfect. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad for the other men out tonight to think I was attached. It was a scenario I'd used with other guys on the team, and it worked.

I stumbled to a stop when we rounded the corner. Mike and Terri's was half a block down, on our side of the street. The sidewalk between where we stood and the bar held scattered couples engaged in various levels of sex. At least three of the couples were actually copulating. No, make that four; the last group held two males and a female. One of the males was in the middle of the bunch.

"Interesting." Nick's fingers were absently wandering over my hip.

"Different." I agreed with him, snuggling closer to his side.

"Why aren't the police doing anything about this?" Nick's hand stroked down over the curve of my ass.

I pointed towards a cruiser on the other side of the street. We could see feet in the rear side window, with fabric bunched around the ankles, and nothing else.

Nick started guiding me through the bodies, finding the closer we drew to the bar, the harder it became to move forward.

Suddenly he shoved me up against the nearest storefront, plastering his body up against mine. "Strengthen our shields or I'll be fucking you against this wall in a matter of seconds."

He smashed his mouth down on mine, and I struggled to keep my concentration, fought to be able to think enough to bolster our defense.

He broke the kiss so he could attack my neck.

"If I draw power, the lamias, or whatever's casting this spell will notice me." I was breathing hard, having difficulty forming the sentence.

He didn't answer me, just sucked on a section of my neck and ground his cock into my abdomen. I closed my eyes, felt myself sliding into the lust, but marshaled my will, and reached out with my magic, stretching outward along the invisible lines of it toward the source of all my power.

I touched it between the cracks in the sidewalk, and on the devil strip. I sank into the crust of the earth, and let it surround me, shield me. I coaxed it back along the lines until I had a steady stream of energy flowing back into me, filling me.

Then I worked it with my mind, shaped it to my desires, and let it fall over the two of us.

I opened my eyes as Nick's hips slowed, then stopped. He'd been dry humping me, his arousal still bound within his pants, while I'd been otherwise occupied.

Letting go of my neck, he took a deep, shuddering breath. "Damn. I was looking forward to fucking you in public."

"Pig." I figured if I called him an ass again it would start losing its effect. Oh, who was I kidding? Calling him an ass never had an effect on him anyway.

We continued towards the bar, trying not to be distracted by the sights and sounds around us.

"The big, bad guy probably knows we're coming now," I said, just as the man to my

right tipped his head back and cried out, his hips working as he came inside the guy's ass beneath him.

I'd come to a stop and was watching the threesome, and when I realized that, I started walking again. I had to tug on Nick to drag his attention away.

"I've never seen anything like that before." He sounded awed, and I raised an eyebrow at him, wondering if he was more into men than he'd let on.

"No, hell no. I am not interested in men." He narrowed his eyes at me, never realizing I hadn't said the question out loud.

"Come on." I yanked on him again to get him moving.

We paused at the outer door, Nick resting his hand on the surface. To my knowledge, I was the only one of our group that knew that Nick was not entirely human.

"Ready?" He gave me a rakish grin and winked at me just before he opened the door.

We stepped into the lobby of the bar, a place the entire team had been before, so at least we were familiar with the layout. Without discussing it, Nick and I stayed together, and moved past the coat room on the left to the archway that led into the bar proper.

I reached ahead of us with my senses, stopping when I felt the vibrations in the air of a foreign magic. I tested around the edge of that power, tried to taste it, smell it, determine what kind of creature was the cause of it.

Nick moved behind me and pressed himself to my back, asking without words that I let him feel what I was. I opened a connection with him, a simple power connection that let him glide along my magic.

We hovered at the edge, a fine tension building within us, the air turning heavy, expectant.

Nick bent to my ear, and on a puff of breath, said, "Master."

I reeled in my power, knowing now, thanks to Nick, that we were facing a master vampire. A blood drinker, no less.

Reaching into my pocket, I dug out a couple of silver crosses I carried for this type of situation. Nick didn't carry holy items as a rule, since they tended to interfere with his powers. But we'd found, by accident, that if I possessed the item, he could not only wear it, but use it against an enemy without harming himself. At least for a few hours.

I doused my wrist knives with holy water, then nodded to Nick that I was ready. He threw one arm over my shoulder; with his other hand clamped down on my breast, he fondled it while we stumbled into the other room. Since Nick was taller, he fell back against the wall, pulling me against his chest while he kissed me, and checked out the competition.

Why we bothered with the charade, I'm not really sure. The master knew we weren't bespelled like the rest of the people, and he'd felt me call power from the earth. We certainly weren't fooling him with our little show.

Then again, maybe we were confusing him, a little. At least, he didn't attack us immediately.

Nick told me the position of the other players by drawing a picture on my breast. I thought it was pretty clever of him actually. He drew a square around the mound, placing his thumb at the lower edge to indicate our location. Then he spiraled his fingers upward, over my nipple, and splayed them out over the top indicating the general location of the supes.

I figured the middle finger he was pressing hard into my flesh represented the

master.

He felt me drop the knife into my hand, and quickly swished his fingers over the center of my boob, letting me know there were civilians between us and the bad guys.

I moaned a “yes” into his neck, pushing lightly with my palm against his chest to let him know I was ready for action. The bastard had the nerve to lock his mouth over mine and kiss me thoroughly. By the time he let me up for air, I needed another minute to get my brain to function properly again.

Taking a deep breath, I stabbed him with a finger and narrowed my eyes at him to let him know not to fuck with me this time. He grinned wickedly, but loosened his hold, his muscles tensing in preparation.

We turned as a single unit. I knew he’d take the lamias so that I could concentrate on the bloodsucker. Restricting my focus to that single individual, the couples writhing on the floor between us melted away.

The vampire stood facing me, his tall body sleek and leanly muscled. He had long, fine blond hair, and ice blue eyes that I could see clearly across the darkened bar. It should have given me pause, since the phenomenon indicated he was potentially powerful enough to capture my gaze. But my heritage allowed me, among other things, to enjoy a certain immunity to a vampire’s mind control; I just had to hope it held up here.

I smiled at him, knowing exactly the kind of smile that curved my lips. It was the smile I wore in anticipation of a good fight; the kind of smile that never reached my own hazel eyes, which would be burning a brilliant emerald green right now.

I sauntered across the room, stepping around obstacles without taking my eyes off the vamp. I felt the cool pressure of his magic as he sent it out to greet me. The earthy scent of the grave swirled around me, my own magic rising up to caress his.

“Come to me, little one. Come and let me kiss you.” His voice whispered in my mind, but unlike a regular human’s, it didn’t seduce. Too bad for him.

I continued walking towards him and didn’t stop until I was standing almost close enough to touch him. If he’d been shorter, I’d have stood even closer. I wanted to contain what I was about to do, so no innocents were caught in the backlash.

A look of triumph passed over his face as he closed the distance between us. He bent his head, his hair spilling over his shoulders, as he lowered his mouth to mine. When our lips met, I brought my power up, drawing on the threads I’d created outside, feeding the energy, stoking it higher.

He delved inside my mouth with his tongue, and I had a moment’s regret that I was about to end the existence of a man who knew how to kiss so well.

“I want to taste you,” he breathed against my mouth. His mind sent me the suggestion that I wanted to feel his fangs sink into my neck, feel the incredible arousal that only a blood drinker could create with his feeding.

“Tell me your name,” I whispered back, noticing the flare of his eyes as he realized I wasn’t as far under his seduction as he’d thought.

He should have taken the opportunity to step away from me. Instead he held me tighter, and raised the level of his own power. He pushed harder at me as he crushed his mouth down on mine.

“You think of nothing but how good it will feel to have my cock thrusting inside you while my kiss brings you over and over again.”

“Nice visual,” I shot back. “Whether you give me your name or not, you are bound

by the same covenant we all are.” I referred to a covenant that had been instituted a couple of centuries ago as the number and variety of supernaturals increased among the human population.

He raised his head and blinked at me. “Why do you kiss me?”

I shrugged. “You do it well.”

“Yet you would still try to kill me?” He sounded confused.

My smile returned. “In a heartbeat. You broke the rules, you pay the price.”

I watched him with all my senses as his thoughts raced behind his eyes. I was ready when he made his move. He stepped back, drawing his powers sharply to a fevered pitch, then sending them spinning towards my head.

His was the power of the dead earth, mine of the living. In a rush of sensation, mine rose in a wave and engulfed his magic, enclosed it, consumed it. I lanced a spear of energy at the center of his chest while I snapped my wrist knife back into its sheath, then slapped my thigh, drawing my Dieter/Ray.

I was aware, on a separate level, of Nick engaged with the lamias. I felt the life force of the humans in the room, knowing I needed to advance on the vamp to take myself out of their range.

His second blast of magic washed over me, lifting the hair on my head and my arms.

I laughed, a cold, throaty sound that I’d been told sent chills over lesser prey. His eyes became two burning pits as he let the change overtake him. His features sharpened, hardened; his body became denser, his fangs longer. His fingers sprouted claws three inches in length, which he slashed in front of his body to keep me from moving too close.

I circled him, drawing him farther into the hallway that led to the restrooms, reaching out in search of the gate he and the other vamps had used to enter the club. I found it behind me, near the rear door. The vampire chose that moment to lunge at me, one great-clawed hand slicing lethally through the air in a downward arc that would have opened me from shoulder to hip if I’d been standing there. I flinched backwards, narrowly missing the deadly talons, then swung my blade.

Because of his height, I went for a crippling blow, not a killing one, not yet. I caught him in his exposed side, the edge cleaving cleanly between his ribs.

He howled, swiping at me with a series of lightning quick slashes. I left the blade in his side, unwilling to take the time to tug it out before I danced backwards.

I felt a disturbance in the air behind me, then the unmistakable presence of another vampire. I threw a wall of energy at him while I reached over my shoulder and withdrew my dagger. The new arrival shattered my magic with a brittle crash of his own. I changed angles with my dagger, realizing I had only moments before the new vamp would join the fight.

Sighting on the spot in the center of his chest, just beneath his rib cage, I flashed my magic into him, following close on its heels with the tip of my blade.

Striking up and under the bone work, I felt when the silver in the metal entered his heart. My power blasted into the wound. I held the hilt tight, knowing my magic would take it from here as long as I kept the dagger where it was.

I sensed movement behind me and had barely skipped sideways when a shaft of heat streaked past where I had been standing. I tasted the residue of its passing, noting this one was older, farther from the grave. This magic I could not feed off of like the others.

The vamp at the end of my blade ignited in a flash, his magic rushing down my

sword and into me. As he turned to ash, I faced the new threat, fairly vibrating with the influx of power.

He was taller, broader, and darker than the first one had been, with black wavy hair that fell artfully around his face and halfway to his waist. His features were too strong for beauty, but deeply masculine, and extraordinarily handsome.

I raised the sword with one hand, and my magic pulsed.

He raised his hands in front of himself, and held them palms out in the universal gesture of “wait.”

“What has my cousin done?” His deep voice stroked over me.

“He cast the entire neighborhood under a lust, and brought a couple dozen lamias in for a feast.”

He shook his head, and moved several steps closer. I raised my blade, weaving it lightly from side to side to remind him it was there.

“I’m Gareth. Though you may know me better as the Dark Knight.”

Rumors, I had thought they were only rumors. “You don’t exist.”

His self-deprecating smile looked genuine. “I believe I do.”

The Dark Knight was legend. The tales told of this super-hunter that worked alone, taking care of some of the deadliest threats to both humans and supernaturals.

Since he wasn’t actively attacking me, I put up my sword, then leaned back against the wall, crossing my arms under my chest, allowing my hand to rest close to my gun. “Huh.” I scanned him from head to foot, impressed with his physique, but not sure of his claim.

He came to stand in front of me, his size more impressive up close. “You don’t seem particularly impressed.”

“I have no way to verify your claim.” I shrugged, trying to ignore my body’s reaction to his nearness.

He studied my face, a confused expression on his own. “Have I no effect on you?” He placed a hand on the wall next to me, and leaned closer. “None at all?”

I had to crane my neck to look into his eyes. I gave him credit for not using any vampire wiles on me, though I had no idea what was blocking him from feeling my reaction to his body.

“You’re an attractive man.” What the hell was he expecting?

He choked on my comment, his other hand finding the wall, caging me in. “I wonder.” He brought his face close to mine. “Perhaps...” He captured my mouth in a heated kiss.

I’d thought the blond knew what he was doing with his mouth. This man stole my will with his lips and tongue. Opened me, possessed me, with no other contact than his mouth on mine. Had he thought to press his body against me, I think I would have come.

He broke the kiss and studied me again, his eyes narrowing. “Would I find you wet, and ready for me? Are you not aching for me to fill you?”

“Uhhh...” What was I supposed to say? I was spared having to answer when Nick walked up. “Everything okay here, Bailey?”

“Fine.” I glanced at him over Gareth’s arm, getting a grip on my thoughts. “This one says he’s the Dark Knight.”

“He is.” Nick made it a simple statement.

I gaped. “You know him?”

Nick shrugged, letting me know this was another aspect of his life he wasn't going to talk about. "I'll go check in with the team over at Flannery's. Wrap it up here, and get your ass over there." He gave me a hard look, and if I didn't know better I would have said he was jealous.

"I'll be right behind you." I turned back to the vampire, wondering what he planned to do next.

He was giving me a puzzled look. "I don't know what to do," he admitted in a frustrated whisper.

"I don't think I'm following the conversation." Had I missed something?

His eyes focused harder on mine, giving me the full brunt of his attention, and it shot a jolt of arousal straight to my crotch.

"I want you." He still sounded confused.

My vagina clenched.

"I've never run into a woman that I couldn't read before."

"Spit it out, whatever it is you're trying to say. I've got to meet the others."

He closed the distance between us again, this time taking me into his arms. Smashing my body against his, grinding himself into my stomach so that I had no doubt what he desired.

He kissed me, then trailed his lips along my jaw, down the side of my neck. He hovered over my pulse point, opening his mouth and planting his fangs on my skin. He stayed like that, neither piercing the flesh, nor backing off, for several beats of my heart.

It took everything I had not to squirm in his embrace. I wanted to rub myself against him like a cat.

He worked his way back to my mouth, stroking a hand up my side, cupping it over my breast. He deepened the kiss, pinching and rolling my nipple while he rocked his erection against me.

I couldn't stop the moan that escaped me, his body relaxing into mine at the sound.

"I could come to you later." His voice shivered over my skin.

"Look, Gareth, just because I find you attractive doesn't mean I'm going to fuck you."

"Why not?" he asked, surprised.

Crap. "Haven't you spent any time around humans?"

"What's that got to do with it?" He narrowed his eyes at me, and I knew that he knew I was more.

"Everything." I rolled my eyes, and started pushing on his chest to get him to back up.

He didn't take the hint. "Tell me."

"I tend to be wary of strangers. Having sex with someone requires a certain level of trust with me, and I don't give my trust away. So unless, or until, you earn that trust, no sex."

"You must go days, even weeks without having sex." He sounded appalled by the idea.

"I've been known to go months without it."

He gasped. I swear to God he gasped.

"Look." I dug in my pocket until I found a scrap of paper and something to write with. I jotted my cell phone number down, and offered it to him. "That's my name and

phone number. You want to get to know me, give me a call.”

He stared blankly at the paper. “I have to date you to get you into my bed?” He looked up at me, incredulous.

“Honey, you have to date me for me to even consider getting into your bed.”

I left him standing there, totally bewildered.

* * * *

Flannery’s was next door to Mike and Terri’s. I was happy to note that all the copulating couples had disappeared. I ran into Nick in the foyer of the bar, an irritated expression on his face.

“About fucking time. What took you so long?” he growled at me.

My eyebrow rose at his attitude. “He couldn’t understand why I wasn’t throwing myself at him.”

Nick grimaced at me. “What?”

“He had a real hard time accepting the fact that I wouldn’t just hop on his dick right there in the bar.” I tried to move past Nick into the place, but he blocked me with his body. “I had to explain to him that if he wanted me to even consider it, he’d have to take the time to let me get to know him better.”

At least that brought a grin to his face. “The Dark Knight, legend among immortals, most eligible and sought after male on the planet, would have to date you?”

I gave him my “innocent” look. “Yeah, that pretty much sums it up.”

Laughing, he threw his arm around my shoulder and led me into the main part of the bar.

The guys all called out “J.C.” or “Bailey” as we neared the back corner they’d appropriated for our group. Nick planted me on the bench seat of the booth and slid in beside me. Indor, the new guy, and Brad both sat across from us. There were three tables shoved together, next to the booth, which held the rest of our crowd.

“Everybody do okay tonight?” I asked the table in general.

“We lost about half the guys to the compulsion, but Scott remembered the salve, and we got them back before...” Brad trailed off, and I figured I knew what he wasn’t saying. *Before they fucked each other.*

“We get a count on the bad guys?” I snagged a breaded ball of something that was sitting in a basket on the table.

“Twenty lamias, one master vamp, one lamia enforcer.” Nick picked up a jalapeño pepper and popped it into his mouth.

“Heard you met the Dark Knight,” Dryden yelled from the other table.

“Yup,” I shouted back, going for another breaded tidbit, having found it to contain some really tasty cheese.

There were snickers from the other tables. “So that’s what took you so long to get over here,” one of the guys said.

Nick stilled beside me, his hand dropping to my thigh, his fingers wrapping around it possessively. I shot him a look, but he was watching the other table.

“So, what’s he like?” I had to assume that Indor wasn’t asking about the Knight’s sexual prowess. Though I raised my eyebrow at him before I answered.

“From what I could tell, he’s a decent guy.”

He’d only taken one shot, and in retrospect he might very well have been shooting

the blond vamp that was causing trouble.

“Did you see him in action?” Brad leaned eagerly forward in his seat.

“Not really.” I took a sip of my beer. “Nick and I had pretty much wrapped up the situation by the time he showed up.”

The evening wound down after that, and people started leaving.

Nick finally got up from the booth, reaching a hand back for me. I took it, and let him help me to my feet. He slung his arm around my back, and we headed for the door.

When we got back to my house, I didn’t think anything about it when he followed me inside. I headed straight for my bedroom, stripping my weapons and clothes off as I went. I turned the water on in the shower, and while I waited for it to heat up, I unwrapped the ace bandage and the gauze beneath.

The water felt wonderful, though it stung when it trickled over the scratches on my back.

I lathered shampoo in my hair, strong hands joining mine on top of my head. I was too tired to argue the wisdom of this with Nick, so I let him bathe me. Let myself enjoy the feel of his hands gliding over my breasts, the tingle of his magic across my shoulder and down my back as he found a way to numb my pain, the electricity that he generated when he dug in between my legs.

We were eating at each other’s mouths by the time we’d finished washing up. We stumbled out of the shower, across the room, and dove onto the bed. Nick came over me, impatiently tugging my legs around his waist, nipping at my neck, my jaw, my lips. I bit him back, then laved the stinging spots with quick brushes of my tongue.

He drove himself inside of me with one mighty flex of his hips. My back arched, and I cried out with the pleasure of it. Then he was driving into me in a frenzy.

I blew, and still he continued pumping.

I was screaming incoherently, my body wracked with another orgasm, before he joined me in release. His power, so different from my own, blasted into me with his cum. It shot straight up my body, and through my heart. He dug into me, and spewed again, his magic staying silent. When he’d finally deposited everything he had to give inside of me, we collapsed together.

Exhaustion stole over me, and I rode the wave, barely noticing when Nick moved to my side, and curled his body around mine.

As my eyes were drifting shut, I could have sworn that I saw the Dark Knight, leaning against my bedroom wall, a look of satisfaction on his face.

Chapter Two

The ringing phone woke me the next morning. I was struggling to figure out where the thing was when I heard Nick answer it.

“Morning, Mrs. Bailey.”

Shit. It was my mother.

“This is Nick. Can I take a message for her? I think she’s still asleep.”

He didn’t really say that to her, did he?

“Mmmph.” So it’s not what I’d meant to say. He’d get the picture.

“You awake?” He shoved my hair out of the way to see my face.

I stuck a hand out for the phone, while I struggled onto my back. “Mom?”

“Tell me that Corellis boy didn’t spend the night.”

I didn’t say anything, since I wasn’t going to lie to her.

“J.C., that boy is nothing but trouble. Why, Mavis said that he had the nerve to sleep with all three of her daughters.”

“I know, Mom. I know better than to date him.”

“Hey,” Nick said.

“Oh!” my mother said. “Well, I wanted to find out if you were free for dinner tonight?”

I groaned. Mom was forever trying to hook me up with Mr. Right. I don’t know where she kept coming up with “eligible” men for me, but so far they’d all stunk. Frumpy men, with boring jobs, that talked about work, sports or the weather. A few had tried to take me to church on our first date.

Glancing over at Nick, I was beginning to think he wasn’t so bad after all.

“What time?” I sighed. Hey, she was my mother. I had to play along. Besides, I was twenty-six. I hadn’t had a real relationship in ... well, in a while.

“Five-thirty. I’ll see you then.” She sounded way too happy.

I handed the phone back to Nick, and burrowed under the covers, burying my face in my pillow.

He pressed himself to my back. “You do realize you told your mother you’d fuck me, but not date me?”

“You’re the one that told her I fucked you.” I mumbled into my pillow.

His hand stroked down my back, then over the curve of my ass. “You really wouldn’t date me?” He pressed a kiss to my shoulder.

I thought about falling asleep instead of playing with him again, but I didn’t know when I’d get the next opportunity to play with anyone.

“You’re not worthy to date.”

His hand trailed to the center of my butt, his fingers dipping into the crease.

“You wound me.” He slid his hand down to my sex, tickling his way between my folds.

I snorted. “You’re a slut. You’re just not relationship material.”

He shifted his hand to my hip, then repositioned himself between my legs. His hands urged me onto my knees.

“You want me,” he said as he slipped inside.

“Even I need to get laid every now and then.” I groaned as he started working his way in and out of my swollen flesh.

He bent over my back, wrapping himself around me in a warm, living blanket of flesh.

“You dream about the feel of my cock buried deep inside of you.”

He kept his thrusts slow and easy, rotating his hips with every inward drive.

“I dream about the Rock fucking me too.” I swayed my back, changing the angle of my vagina, the depth of his reach.

He slapped himself into me, hard. I groaned, my vagina rippling around his shaft.

“My God, you feel good.” He leaned away from me, gripped my hips, and started pumping into me with increasing speed.

I countered his strokes, throwing myself back at him, as my groin started tightening in expectation.

“Nick,” I moaned, lost in the feel of our joining.

“Come for me, baby. I want to feel you come apart around my cock.”

He was shafting into me faster, harder now, sweat dripping from him onto my buttocks, fingers digging into my hips.

My pelvic muscles clamped down, then wrenched apart as I was thrown into total release. My vagina squeezing, letting up, then squeezing him, as waves of pleasure rode over me.

He brought me again, and a rush of liquid spilled out of my core, over his groin, and down the front of his thighs.

“So fucking hot,” he groaned, then speared into me at a frantic pace, until he was shouting with his own completion.

He took me down to the bed with him, our bodies still twitching in the aftermath.

“Only you,” he breathed into my hair.

I was almost asleep before it occurred to me to wonder why he had said that.

* * * *

“Shit!” I fumbled with my hairbrush, then tried again.

Nick was “helping” me get ready for dinner, which meant that he was hindering me as much as possible.

He’d joined me in the shower, where he’d taken me yet again. Then he worked me into another state while drying me off, taking care of that while I was bent over the bathroom counter. Now I was trying to dry my hair, and he kept touching me, distracting me.

“Nick, get out. You’re not helping me.” I jammed my elbow into his ribs, satisfied when I heard him grunt.

“Why should I help you get fixed up for another man?” he snarled.

I couldn’t believe him. I just couldn’t.

Spinning around, I glared at him. “Look, Corellis, we fucked. Tomorrow night, hell, probably tonight, you’ll be in someone else’s bed. That’s who you are. I know that. I just don’t want to deal with it. So thanks for the wonderful time, but we’re not doing it again. Now, don’t let the door hit you in the ass.”

He loomed over me, his eyes glowing. “Maybe I don’t like the idea of other guys fucking you.”

I rolled my eyes. "Guess you're just going to have to learn to live with it. I do."
Oops. I hadn't meant to let that last part slip out. Maybe he wouldn't catch it.
He raised an eyebrow at me. "You don't like the idea of other women with me?"
I should lie.

"No." I turned back to the mirror and fought with my hair, the wild brown mass curling relentlessly.

At least he had the decency to leave me alone after that. Maybe I'd scared him off.

Once I'd dressed, I stopped by the armory and gathered my supplies for the evening into a duffel bag. I knew better than to wear the weapons to dinner. I'd done that once, and the guy mom was trying to hook me up with ran from the house when he'd spotted them.

I would have kept doing it, if mom hadn't made me promise to stop.

Slinging the bag over my shoulder, I headed for the garage, running into Nick in the kitchen.

He wrapped himself around me, and kissed me deeply. "I'll see you after dinner."

I blinked at him. "Why?"

"You're hosting the group tonight, or did you forget?"

Shit. I had forgotten. "No, I didn't forget."

The side of his mouth curved in a grin. "You never could lie worth a shit."

* * * *

Mom scowled at me as I entered the house.

"What are you wearing?" Her tone couldn't have been worse if I'd been wearing coveralls and a miner's hat.

"I work tonight, mom, you know that." I kissed her cheek, glancing around the room to see if her latest victim had arrived yet.

"Daddy's in the study," she told me as she hustled me off to the kitchen.

He was hiding. He'd stay there until the last possible moment. Smart man.

"Here, put this on." She tied a frilly, flowered apron around my waist.

I glowered at it. "Why am I wearing this?" I had a juvenile urge to jump up and down and scream, "Take it off, take it off!"

"Men are attracted to women who can cook." She busied herself at the stove, stirring a pot of gravy.

Men are attracted to women who can get their entire cock down their throat.

"I can't cook." I wandered closer to her, though, to see what else she was fixing.

"How do you ever expect to catch a man?" she scolded me.

With a net?

"Daddy wants to talk to you before Roger arrives." She didn't look at me when she said that, so my radar went up.

"Bout what?" I lifted the lid on a pot and couldn't identify the bubbling substance.

"Why don't you go find out?"

So she didn't want to tell me. Interesting.

I went to the study and found dad slugging back a drink, watching a ball game on the television. I helped myself to his scotch, then curled up on the sofa next to him. He yelled at some guy on the screen.

"Mom said you wanted to talk to me?"

I caught his furtive glance. Then he gulped more of his drink.

He turned and gave me a stern look. "Quit sleeping with Corellis." Then he went back to watching his game.

"Thanks for the talk, Dad." I slouched back on the couch, determined to hide out with him as long as possible.

A commercial came on and Dad got up to fix himself another drink.

"You might want to give the boy a heads up. Your mother called his mother this afternoon and had a long talk with her."

I finished my scotch and went over to where he was standing, giving him a peck on the cheek. "We're adults now, dad. Nick can take care of himself."

Reluctantly, I started for the door.

"J.C.?"

I paused, and looked back at him.

"I know you're an adult, and I know you're not stupid, but I've got to tell you anyway, because I love you. Corellis can't keep his dick in his pants to save his soul."

My smile just about split my face in two. "I know that, Dad. I only took him to bed because I needed a little release. I chose him for his expertise, not as a potential mate."

His expression changed from shock to a grudging respect. "Just don't say that to your mother."

I gave him a wink, then headed back to the kitchen. When I got there, Mom was taking a roasting pan out of the oven, and the smell of roast beef filled the air. It was a scent from heaven.

Dad popped his head through the doorway. "Roger's here."

Mom finished what she was doing, then hustled me out the door, apron and all, to meet the dreaded Roger.

"Roger, so good of you to come." Mom grabbed the hand of a tall, skinny man, and tugged him down so she could buss his cheek. Then she was presenting me to him, like a prize at a car show. "This is my daughter J.C."

Roger swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbing. He pushed his wire-framed glasses up his nose with his middle finger, and I had to wonder if the gesture held some type of significance. "Pleasure," he mumbled in a voice too high for an adult male.

I smiled at him, though it felt more like a grimace.

Then Mom dragged me off to the kitchen, where she started shoving serving dishes into my arms to deliver to the table. I cringed, as I set the butter dish down, to see that Mom had sat me on the same side as the man. Frankly, I was getting to the point where I was almost willing to marry one of my friends so that Mom would stop doing this to me.

Mom called the men to the table, forcing me to stand by my chair so that Mr. Skinny could pull my seat out for me. After we had all taken our places, and Dad had said the blessing, I grabbed the nearest dish and started loading up my plate.

Mom kicked me under the table.

"What?" I glared at her.

"Offer the food to the guest first," Mom hissed at me under her breath, holding a disturbing smile like a ventriloquist while she did so.

I shoved the dish of rolls at Roger. "Have some."

Mom passed me her plate, and I raised an eyebrow at her. "Pass it to your father, he's serving the roast."

I took another look at Roger, wondering what the hell it was about the guy that had Mom acting so bizarrely.

“What is it you do, Roger?” I handed him Mom’s plate, then retrieved it after it had made its way to Dad and back.

“I’m an accountant with Anderson.” His Adam’s apple bobbed again.

Well, that didn’t answer my real question.

“What do you do, J.C.?” he asked when I handed him my plate.

“Bounty hunter.” I watched Dad load my plate up, thankful he wasn’t going to give me some tiny portion, like my mother usually did, thinking it was more feminine.

Roger squeaked, distracting my attention away from the roast.

“Bounty hunter? Isn’t that dangerous?”

“Not if...”

“She doesn’t actually apprehend the criminals,” Mom cut in.

Technically speaking, I didn’t apprehend the criminals. I killed them.

“Oh. Well then, that’s different,” Roger asserted.

I got my plate back from Roger and dug in.

Mom kicked me again, and I glared at her. “What?”

I got the creepy ventriloquist again. “Don’t shovel your food, eat it sedately.”

I stared at my plate, wondering what eating sedately meant. I stabbed a piece of meat, then watched Mom while I placed it in my mouth and chewed it. She nodded, so I took a piece of potato, and was about to stuff it into my mouth with my meat, when she shook her head.

So, one food item at a time in your mouth. Got it.

“What does J.C. stand for?” Roger asked, right after I’d taken a bite out of a roll.

I would have answered, but I didn’t want to see Mom’s act again, so I chewed and swallowed before I opened my mouth.

“J.C.,” I told him. Hey, I used to say “Jesus Christ,” and I’d do it with a straight face.

He looked confused.

“The J is in honor of her father’s father, James, and the C is in honor of my father, Charles.”

Roger relaxed again, now that he had an answer that made sense to him.

Mom kicked me again, and I thought about punching her out of her chair.

“Don’t you have questions for him?” she said, her face tight, her lips barely parted.

No. I had no idea what accountants did and, to be honest, I didn’t want to know. Besides, it was taking too long to eat this meal, what with having to chew your food separately and swallow before talking and all.

The grandmother clock in the living room chimed, and I counted along. Seven. I stared bleakly at my plate and shoved it away.

“Why don’t the two of you take a walk while I get dessert ready.” Mom patted my hand, and that made me want to punch her almost as much as her kicking me had.

“Sounds like a good idea.” Freedom. That’s all that I could think of, until the gangly Roger rose beside me.

We walked in silence as I led him down the block to the park. I didn’t know about the accountant, but I felt a whole lot better when we were enclosed within the trees in a little mini-forest in the middle. I leaned my forearms on the wooden railing that bordered the path, and let my eyes unfocus.

Roger stood, too stiffly, at my side. "So, tell me a little about your job."

I withdrew the knife that I wore around my neck, snapped it out of its sheath, and held it out in front of him.

"One of my weapons." His eyes tracked the blade, as he took a step away from me. "I usually carry a minimum of seven blades, and two guns when I work."

"Why? Your mother said you don't apprehend the criminals." His voice trembled slightly.

"I don't." I watched his face, but he wasn't getting the hint.

"All that, for protection?" His voice had risen half an octave.

I turned, leaning my side on the rail, studying him. "That too. But primarily so that I can kill whatever needs killing."

Nothing, no change in expression. But I kept an eye on him, not saying anything.

"You kill people?" There it was, the horror finally blossomed across his face.

"Yes, Roger. That is exactly what I do."

Needless to say, Roger insisted we return to the house immediately. He thanked my father for dinner, gave Mom a reproachful look, and fled.

"What did you say to him?" My mother cornered me, exasperated.

"I told him the truth." I grabbed a couple of cookies before she could stop me.

"You didn't." She had her own look of horror, but not for the same reason.

"Mom." I narrowed my eyes at her. "You're fixing me up with men in the hopes of finding me a husband. I'm not in the market for one, but if I were, I'm not going to lie to the man. I'll be looking for someone that knows, and accepts, what I do."

Why I was wasting my breath I didn't know. "Sorry, but I've got to run, the team is meeting at my place tonight."

Mom just stood there blinking at me, as I gave her a hug and kissed her cheek.

I found Dad back in his study. "I've got to go. I'll see you later."

Dad came over and wrapped his beefy arms around me. "Don't tell your mother, but if it's between a Roger and the Corellis boy, I'd vote for Nick."

I couldn't stop my laugh. Dad had actually called Nick by his first name.

Would miracles never cease.

* * * *

Myron, Dave, and Big were already at my house when I pulled in. I went straight for the fridge and helped myself to a beer.

"How'd dinner go with your folks?" Dave sauntered into the room, and leaned against the counter.

"Like usual. Only more so." I rolled my eyes.

"So, you all set to marry the stud your mother picked out for you?" Big grinned at me wickedly.

I smiled back because I couldn't help myself. Big had one sexy grin. "I told Mr. Skinny Accountant that I killed people for a living."

"Shame on you." Myron pitched his empty in the trash can, and helped himself to another. "How are you ever going to find a husband if you scare them all away?"

Brad walked in, followed closely by Dryden.

"Why does she keep fixing me up with men who are going to freak out over my job?" I moved to the table and flopped down in one of the chairs.

More of the team wandered into the room. Todd passed out beverages, then dropped into the seat next to me.

“Ah, that’s what moms do. I get the lecture myself.” Dryden said.

“Every week?” I eyeballed the guys closest to me.

A chorus of “no’s” followed.

“If she keeps this up, I’ll just marry one of you guys just to shut her up.” I was staring at the table, not meaning what I was saying, at least not meaning it in the usual sense of the word.

Otherwise I would have seen the looks that passed between the men. Mostly surprise, but several of them looked at me thoughtfully. A few looked like they were just now realizing I was a girl. Had I caught those looks, I would have been scared.

I dragged myself out of my chair and headed into the living room where I found Reynolds and Sean passing off boxes of pizza from a delivery guy standing at my front door.

Settling on one end of the couch, I looked around the room, figuring out who was still missing. Only Nick and Scott had yet to show up.

Reinhold cleared his throat, his way of letting us know what he was about to say was business related. “I haven’t picked up anything unusual about tonight. No concentrations of activity.”

“Hey, where were you last night? We could have used a heads up about that one.” Todd, looking good in a leather vest and pants, asked from the other side of the room.

“I had to take care of grandma last night, okay?” Reinhold glared at the larger man. Then turned and gave the look to the rest of us.

We mumbled something to him, and went on to other topics.

“Anybody talk to Nick or Scott?” I heard Myron ask, on my way to the kitchen for another beer.

“Nick’s got something he couldn’t get out of, and Scott’s son is in town for the weekend,” Reynolds informed him.

It was Friday night. Activity was usually higher on the weekends. That thought caused me to cast a glance at Reinhold, and a flicker of mistrust passed through me.

“I think you should work with Indor tonight,” Reynolds, our unofficial team leader, said to me.

“I haven’t healed from working with James yet. So I’m going to pass.”

Reynolds had the grace to look apologetic. “Right. Then you get Brad.”

I could live with that.

* * * *

Reinhold had been right. There was very little going on in the way of preternatural activity that night. Brad and I ran into a couple of werewolves duking it out behind a bar in the southern quadrant where we were working. We stopped and watched.

“Nice right hook,” Brad said.

The werewolves, still in human form, scuffled around some more.

“Ohh, great uppercut,” I threw out.

After several minutes of this, the two men paused in their disagreement, and turned towards us.

“Enjoying the show?” One of them growled at me.

“Yes.” Better than wandering around in the dark with nothing to look at.

They moved closer to us, their power sizzling over my skin. It was their built-in warning system to discourage humans from sticking around.

Brad and I didn’t budge.

“Hunters,” the darker one said with distaste.

“So, you going to get back to it, or what?” It was only going on three o’clock in the morning, and their fight was the only thing promising to keep me awake.

The two wolves looked at each other. “Naw, I think we’ll head over to the Grind and get a beer.”

Brad and I exchanged a glance. “Mind if we come along?” Brad asked.

The lighter one shrugged. “Suit yourselves.”

The Grind was a supernatural joint warded to keep humans out. Since there were several varieties of supes that were only active at night, there were a few places around town that catered to them. Other supes took advantage of the all-night hours.

The four of us trooped over to the bar. I hadn’t known Brad wasn’t totally human, still didn’t know it really, so I was interested in seeing if he could get into the place.

He didn’t even bat an eye as we entered. Interesting. I noticed he was looking at me the way I’d been looking at him, and realized I’d never let him in on my secret either.

“Gonna tell on me?” I asked him as we made our way to the bar for a drink.

“Nope.” He used his larger body to make a path for us through the crowd.

We reached the bar and he leaned an elbow on it, looking down at me. “I think, sooner or later, it will come out that the rest of the team is like us.”

He was probably right. When you got right down to it, humans wouldn’t last against supes in a fight. They could get lucky for a while, but not for the years most of us had been on the team.

We mingled with the crowd, keeping our ears open for anything that might need taking care of. Didn’t hear anything of that nature, but I got to meet several nice non-humans.

It was around four-thirty when we left, and I was feeling strangely buzzed. A little tipsy.

“That wasn’t regular beer we were drinking, was it?” I leaned into Brad, thinking he had an impressive chest.

He laughed, and ruffled my hair. “Nope. You feeling pretty good right now?”

I smiled up at him. “Very.”

Our eyes met, and a hush settled over us. He began lowering his face to mine, and I felt my lips part slightly in anticipation. Then he shook himself, his eyes coming back into focus.

“Only because you’ve had too much to drink.” He kissed me, just a quick brush of his lips against mine.

“Well, hell.” I grumbled as he led me back to the car and stuffed me into the passenger seat.

We didn’t speak as he drove away from the curb, and headed out of the quadrant. We both knew that hunting was over for the night.

My house was quiet and dark when we arrived.

Brad didn’t get out, just idled in the driveway until I’d closed the door behind me. I left the lights out inside, not really needing them. Took a quick shower, then crawled into

bed.

* * * *

The meeting the next night was at Big's, with the requisite pizza cluttering the countertops and fridge full of beer.

I slouched on one end of the couch, fingering my neck knife, wondering when Oscar was going to have my new request completed. I'd had a brainstorm, thinking to incorporate receptacles along the flanges of the knife to hold our saltwater mixture, only to release it when buried inside of the enemy. He'd been working on the prototype, and running into more problems than I would have thought possible. I made a mental note to ask him when I picked up the new sawback he'd just finished for me.

Nick dropped down next to me, close enough so that his thigh was touching mine.

"Do you mind?" I raised an eyebrow at him.

"Sorry," he said, then leaned over and kissed me before I had a chance to see it coming.

A couple of the guys hooted.

Nick drew back from me, but not far enough. His eyes were only partially open, and shining with desire. "I should have kissed you first."

"Get off my face, Nick," I growled at him, thinking it would be easy to poke him with one of my darts.

"Babe, you don't mean that." His lips curved in a grin.

Reinhold cleared his throat and Nick sat up, but kept an arm draped around my shoulders.

"Expect additional goblin activity. If I'm remembering correctly, tonight is their Zafer Gau, their victory night. Probably won't get a lot of violent ones, but they do go overboard, get careless, and we can't have that happening."

"Anything else?" Russell asked.

"Just one thing, but it doesn't make much sense to me. Maybe it'll make sense to one of you. I see water, beings connected to water, and a sense of threat. Nothing imminent, but it's out there watching."

We looked at each other, but nobody had any idea about what it could mean.

"If that's it," Reynolds said, rising from his chair, "I'll come around and tell you your assignments tonight."

As soon as he'd spoken I hopped off the couch and away from Nick. I didn't want to be trapped with him again this evening by default. I headed for the bathroom, and was careful to lock the door behind me, something I'd never worried about before with this group.

I used the pot, then stared at myself in the mirror as I washed my hands. I couldn't see any difference in how I looked. I figured there had to be something, though, that had set Nick off. With a shrug, I headed back into the living room in time for Reynolds to tell me I was with Big tonight.

Good.

Big ambled over, his bear of a frame making me feel stupidly petite and feminine.

"You armed, or do you need to stop by your place?" He flashed that wicked smile of his.

"Got any catnip at yours?" For some unknown reason, goblins reacted to the

substance. It mellowed them out. Go figure.

“Got loads.” He turned for the door, and I trotted after his back.

Thirty minutes later we were ready, and he drove to our assigned sector. We’d drawn the thirty-something bar strip, and it promised to be more entertaining than most of the other quadrants.

Big parked on a side street, and we headed out on foot, sensing the area for disturbances.

I felt the unmistakable ruffle of vampire power wash over my skin, and I turned to Big to see if he noticed anything.

“What are you picking up?” He’d stopped walking and was looking down at me.

“Vampire.” I swiveled my head, trying to locate the source.

He waited, then followed at my back as I started in the direction the sensation was strongest. It led us to an alley that ran behind the strip. Dropping back, I motioned for Big to give me a head start. He was a great hunter, but he radiated an aura that was as loud as a claxon.

Slipping into the shadows, I made my way silently along the brick and concrete backs of various buildings, skirting dumpsters and assorted trash, feeling the vibe growing ever stronger.

I heard the unmistakable sound of sex. The slap of flesh on flesh, the moans, the heavy respirations of a couple actively involved. Peeking out from around the trash bin I was currently sheltered behind, my mouth dropped open, and I almost gave myself away.

Gareth had a woman up against the wall on the other side of the alley. He was driving his cock into her with abandon, her head tilted to the side, her face a study of ecstasy as he sucked on her neck.

She screamed his name, her body bucking against his, her eyes open, but glazed.

I couldn’t tear my gaze away as the muscles in his ass bunched and flexed, powering his cock into the woman’s cunt.

She came again, and Gareth removed his fangs from her, licking the wounds closed, before he tipped his head back. His face was taut, the bones standing out harsh under his skin. Then he groaned, and I saw him jerk as he released his seed inside the woman.

Time slowed down, and in a strangely surrealistic way, he lowered his head, and turned it in my direction. Our eyes met, and he smiled.

A chill raced over my body. I dropped my eyes, only to see his cock, slick with their combined fluids, as he withdrew from her body.

He murmured something to her; she straightened her clothes and hurried through a door to her right. Then he took his cock in his hand, and stroked it, from base to tip, in a slow, leisurely glide.

Turning, he started towards me, his hand working his flesh as he walked.

“Enjoy the show?” His voice caressed me, and I started to reach for his shaft before my brain kicked in.

“Not especially.” I narrowed my eyes at him, tucking my hands under my arms.

His grin told me he suspected otherwise. Taking a step closer to me, he reached with his free hand for my shoulder. “I’d like to do the same thing to you. Right here, right now.”

That was all it took. “Fat chance,” I snarked at him. “Nothing turns me off quite like seeing where your cock has been right before you intend to put it in me.” As the words

came out of my mouth, I knew I meant it, and he could tell I did.

With a sigh, he put his dick away and fastened his pants. "Pity that. I do so enjoy women."

"How nice for you." I grimaced at him. "Not to change the subject, but what are you doing in these parts tonight?"

Gareth flashed a look over my shoulder, and I knew that Big was making his way in our direction.

"He's with me," I told the vampire.

"I was checking out a lead, found it was unsubstantiated, so I took the time to feed." His tone was all business as my partner reached us.

"Big, this is the Dark Knight; Gareth, Big."

The vampire studied Big for a moment. "I can see where he gets his name."

"Everything okay here?" Big asked, not taking his eyes off the vamp.

"Just fine." I squinted at Gareth. "He was just taking a dinner break."

Big's face split in a smile, and I felt like punching him. "Sorry I missed it."

"You going to be in this sector much longer?" I asked.

"The rest of the night," Gareth told me, his expression blank, not giving me any indication as to what he was up to.

I nodded, then grabbed Big's arm. "Let's get on with the patrol." I tugged him until he was moving along with me back down the alley.

"That really the Dark Knight?" Big asked as we turned the corner.

"Yup."

"Damn."

I didn't have any idea what he meant, and I didn't feel like asking.

We came around to the front of the strip, and I got a blast of goblin. Kind of an oily, rancid essence that coated my skin. "Keep your eyes open." I thought about dropping a knife into my hand, but decided to wait.

We scanned the street as we neared the first bar, not seeing anything out of the ordinary. The feeling grew stronger as we drew closer to the front door of the second place. I paused, letting my senses fill, expand, then reach beyond the door. "Feels like an entire horde," I told Big, finally dropping a knife into my hand.

"Let's take a look," Big said, the anticipation in his voice hard to miss.

Opening the door, I stepped inside, quickly scanning the immediate area. We were in an empty foyer. Big motioned to me to let him take the lead. I moved a step behind him and followed him into the main part of the bar.

The music was louder than I'd expected in this part of town, with raucous voices raised in drunken celebration. A quick scan showed that virtually all those present were goblins. There were a few couples quietly secreted in back booths, but they weren't human enough, or dark enough, to bother with.

Several of the goblins caught sight of Big and me and waved us over, lifting pitchers of beer in invitation.

"Want to join them?" Big asked.

"Might as well have a beer with them and scope out the situation," I answered, sheathing my knife.

Big wrapped a protective arm around my shoulder. The goblins made space for us at their table, and we sat, thanking them when they handed us each a mug.

“To the night.” A large, exceedingly ugly male raised his drink in salute.

We raised ours, and I checked the contents to make sure it wasn’t spelled or poisoned. Big drank half his mug in a single swallow. Impressive. I hurried to catch up, but it still took several gulps before I’d reached the bottom of my glass.

I exchanged a glance with him, and he shook his head. Nothing going on with this bunch.

We made our excuses, then headed back outside.

“There might have been a couple that were getting close to the edge,” I told Big as we made our way to the next establishment.

“We’ll have to see what happens later.” He stopped at the door, and I took a look inside.

As soon as I nodded he opened the door, and we moved in.

This place, like the next three that we checked on, were minus any goblins, and we were thinking that maybe they were all at the one party.

As we neared the next door, Big’s hand shot out and stopped me. “It’s not goblin, and it’s not the Knight.” His voice had taken on a hard edge. “I don’t know what it is, but it feels like danger.”

It skittered over me too, lifting the fine hairs on my arms. It was evil and powerful. I reached out and made the slightest touch against the earth, establishing a thread that I could draw on if the need arose. I drew my wrist knife, and plucked a dart from my belt with my left hand.

Big and I made eye contact, then he opened the door, and we walked in like two regular customers, Big’s hand on my back, the hilt of his dagger poking into my wound.

He guided me to a table, near the source. Holding out a chair for me, he surreptitiously scanned the bar while I sat. He took a seat to my left, letting me know our quarry was to the right. He didn’t need to, though, because the guy’s aura was hammering away at my right side. Leaning forward, he brushed his lips against my ear. “Male, two human females,” he breathed.

A waitress stopped by our table, fortunately standing across from Big, so I could look over that direction and check the guy out for myself. He was nuzzling the neck of one of the females, his hand on her breast. I caught sight of his aura. Souleater.

Standing up, I bent back over and kissed Big on the cheek. “Souleater,” I whispered into his ear, then looked around for the restroom.

Finding it located on the far side of the room, I squeezed Big’s shoulder, letting him know I’d be passing close to the supe. If things went as planned, Big would appear to be focused on my ass as I walked away, while he surreptitiously watched the guy’s reaction.

I let a hint of power leak from me just before I passed the man. Then I took my time in the bathroom. I wasn’t disappointed when I came out to find him leaning against the wall, waiting for me.

He smiled, and I felt a rush of heat between my legs.

“I couldn’t help but notice you when you passed my table,” he said, straightening from the wall, his Call reaching out for me, embracing me. “You’re a very beautiful woman.” He moved quickly to my side, one arm circling my waist, drawing me closer.

“I’m here with someone,” I said, letting my voice sound slightly breathless.

“I won’t take much of your time, but I would like to get to know you better.” He started herding me to the back door.

The air around me thickened as he added more power to his Call. I affected a dreamy expression as he opened the door and ushered me out into the alley. I had to catch myself from jerking in recognition of the place where Gareth had fucked the woman against the wall. Frankly I was surprised there was no one else out here, as popular as this area seemed.

He turned and backed me up against the building, his mouth lowering over mine. Just a brief kiss while he grasped my thighs and lifted me. I hooked my legs around his back, sighing as he pressed his erection to my sex. He captured my lips again, quickly working his tongue into my mouth, expertly stroking it around my own.

I was actually enjoying his kiss, and when he lowered me to the ground to rid me of my pants, I helped him out, dropping my weapons to the ground. He lifted me again, and I locked my legs behind his back.

"I love the way you smell," he whispered as he angled his head and deepened the kiss. He worked his cock free, and the sigh I let out had more to do with having to fuck the guy and knowing my partner was probably witnessing the action by now, than by the thought of him sliding it inside of me.

I kept hoping he'd try for my soul. But that wasn't happening, so I let him forge his way into my vagina.

He was good, rotating his hips as he drove his cock in and out of me, brushing over both of the sensitive spots inside my sheath. Even though I fought it, I was winding up towards climax, my breath heaving in my lungs, my attention narrowing down to the feel of his shaft as it cleaved its way through my flesh.

"That's it," he rasped, increasing his pace, and driving me that much closer to release. "Come for me." His fingers tightened their hold as he dug into me harder, faster.

My orgasm blasted through me, and I cried out. He gripped me tighter, pressing his chest against mine to hold me firm while he pummeled into me.

He stilled, then he was slamming his cock into me in time with the pulses of his release as he shot into my depths.

Our bodies twitching in the aftermath, he leaned against me. "Sorry to disappoint you hunter, but this is all I'll be taking from you tonight," he said, before he pulled out of me and set me on my feet.

"Oh, hell." I narrowed my eyes at him, and he had the nerve to laugh.

"Malcolm." I knew that voice.

The man before me didn't turn around, just kept smirking at me. "Gareth."

"Step away from the woman," the vampire said.

Malcolm didn't move, but I could see a light ignite in his eyes, one that I didn't like the looks of. "If I don't?" he asked.

"Then you'll have to answer to me," the Dark Knight stated, an edge to his voice.

"Me as well," Big added.

Malcolm tipped his head to me. "I enjoyed the fuck." Then he turned to the side, and walked away from us.

Gareth moved too close to me, anger flashing in his eyes. "Care to explain that?"

I knew what he meant. I'd just let a total stranger fuck me. "Part of the job," I snapped at him, looking around for my pants.

"Part of the job?" he nearly roared at me.

Big placed a beefy hand on his shoulder. "Back off, Gareth. These things happen."

We do what we do for a reason.”

Gareth snarled at Big, his fangs fully extended. I stepped between them. “Would you rather we took him out, just because of what he is, without making sure his intentions are evil?”

“You fucked him; that’s a little different than checking him out.”

“It’s the safest way with a souleater, and you know it,” I barked at the vamp.

It took a visible effort for Gareth to get himself under control.

“I’ll deal with you later,” he growled at me, then spun away and stalked off down the alley.

“What the hell was that all about?” Big asked, leaning against the wall next to me.

“Hell if I know.” I shook my head, tugging my pants into place, then replacing my weapons.

Once I was dressed I urged Big back inside. We passed Malcolm where he’d rejoined his two humans. I stopped next to him, smiled at the women, then bent to his ear. “Don’t even think about it tonight,” I whispered.

He pulled me into his lap and kissed me thoroughly. “Not a chance,” he said as he set me back on my feet.

Arrrgh. Men.

Big and I finished out the remainder of our watch with only a couple of goblins that passed over the line of acceptability. Mostly because of our secret weapon.

Catnip.

Chapter Three

I was puttering around in the kitchen at two o'clock the next afternoon, making Kraft macaroni and cheese for my breakfast, when the phone rang.

"Lo?"

"Dinner, tonight at seven. Be here." Mom was using her "no arguments" voice.

"Mom, aren't you ever going to stop trying to fix me up?" Christ. I was whining, I knew, but I couldn't stop myself.

"No," she snapped at me, and hung up.

Guess I couldn't argue my way out of it. Then I wondered, why seven? She knew the team met at nine. Forgetting about it for the time being, I spent the afternoon cleaning my weapons. Todd drifted in at one point, shuffled through his drawer, then sat next to me.

"You want to go out to dinner tomorrow night?" he asked while he helped himself to the oil and started cleaning a ritual blade.

"Where?" I'd stripped my Taurus and was in the process of putting it back together again.

"The Marcado?" He started working on the sheath.

"Oh. Like a real date then." I wasn't sure how I felt about that.

He set the sheath down, reached over to me, and turned my face towards him with a hand on my jaw. I saw his eyes flash with hunger when I met his gaze.

"A very real date," he said as he swooped in on me and captured my lips.

Electricity shot through me as our mouths met, my nipples hardening instantly, my crotch heating and weeping with arousal.

He angled his lips and his tongue worked its way into my mouth. I somehow managed to set the gun parts aside, then I crawled into his lap, straddling his hips. He leaned back, taking me with him, pressing the length of his erection up against my sex.

I groaned, and he deepened the kiss. He shoved his way around the inside of my mouth, tasting everywhere.

One of his hands was pulling on my hip, urging me to slide back and forth over his cock, while the other worked its way to my breast. He palmed the entire globe, and squeezed.

I started thinking about fucking him, right there in the office.

"What the fuck?" Scott's voice broke through the haze of lust clouding my brain.

Todd slowly released me from the kiss, but he didn't move his hand off my boob. "Hey, Scott." His voice was husky, and I felt my vagina clench at the sound of it. He must have felt it too, because a wicked smile curled his lips. "I'll pick you up at seven," he said, his eyes looking straight into mine.

"Seven," I parroted, still not steady in my head.

"Take it into another room," Scott grouched.

I moved to get off of Todd, but he clamped both hands on my hips and ground himself against me again.

"Todd," I said in warning.

"Oh, all right." He let me go.

"Reynolds said your son was in town." I turned towards Scott and watched while he

selected a knife.

"Yeah, well," he said, looking pissed, "his mother changed her mind, and came and got him this morning."

"Shit, I'm sorry, Scott." I went to his side, wrapping an arm around his shoulder.

"She's a total bitch," Todd contributed from where he was still sitting.

Nick strolled into the room. "Who's a bitch?"

"Scott's ex," I said over my shoulder. "You going to be okay?" Stupid question, but I had to ask.

"Yeah."

But I felt the tension radiating off of him.

I gave him a squeeze, then turned towards Nick. He'd fucked someone else since I last saw him. Really sucks to be able to tell that about a person as one of my talents.

"How's the wound?" He gave me a devilish grin.

"Fine." I bit the word off, trying not to project the anger that had boiled up inside of me. You'd think I'd be immune, or at least know better than to get mad at him.

"Let's have a look at it." He motioned me towards him.

"Sure," I said, and walked over to the desk. "Todd, would you mind giving me a hand here?"

Todd sauntered over, flashing a smile at Nick. I took my shirt off and faced the desk, waiting for one of them to help.

"Look, she asked me," Todd said, in a more reasonable tone than I'd expected.

"I don't care. I'm the only one on this team who's going to touch her." Nick growled back.

"I think you're mistaken about that."

"Touch her, and I'll beat the living shit out of you." Nick's voice had dropped to a deadly whisper.

"Fight about it later," I snapped, then relented. "Nick, get your ass over here, then."

I turned my back as Nick gave Todd a look that could melt steel.

Then Nick's hands were brushing up my back, unclasping my bra. He stroked me as he slid the straps off my shoulders and down my arms, moving closer so that his groin was pressed to my lower back by the time the bra dropped off my hands and onto the floor. He splayed his hands over my stomach, moving them lightly up my ribcage until he was cupping my breasts. His breath warmed my neck, and as he closed his hands over my breasts, he pressed his lips against the spot he'd warmed. I cursed in my head that my body reacted the way it did to this man. Getting a grip on myself, I reached for his wrists, and tugged at them, trying to pry him off my chest.

"Just look at the wound." My voice came out breathy, and I wanted to smack myself.

Without stepping back from me, he moved his hands from my chest. Placing one between my shoulder blades, he pressed my upper body towards the desk.

I bent over, palms flat on the surface, then realized he was holding my hips, his groin mashed against my ass.

"Nick." Good, that came out with the irritation I was feeling.

He rocked into me a few times, then backed away, laughing. He worked quickly and efficiently on my back. By the time he was wrapping me up for the day, several more of the team members were in the room.

Every one of them stared at me, their eyes slightly glazed. Good God.

Nick started embracing me again, but I spun to face him. “Coreellis, let’s get one thing straight. I’ll enjoy your company if and when I feel like it. If I want to sleep with other members of this team, that’s my decision, not yours.”

Nick narrowed his eyes at me, a storm brewing in them. “I will not have other members of this team touching you.”

“You don’t have any say in the matter.” I butted against his chest, not giving a shit that I hadn’t put my shirt back on.

“As your lover, I’d say I have a right.” Nick glowered down at me.

“No.” I glared up at him. “We are not a couple, we fuck. There is no commitment here, Coreellis.”

“I say you’re wrong,” he growled.

“Tell that to someone that can’t read your aura,” I spat in his face.

He blinked at me. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means you fuck everything you come across, and I know you do because I can see it in your aura.”

“Really?” He took a step back from me.

“Yeah, really. One of my ‘gifts.’”

His eyes darted around the room, letting me know I was revealing myself in front of the others. And not just my breasts.

“Oh, who gives a shit about that?” I glanced over my shoulder at the gathered men.

“How many here aren’t human?” I asked, and raised my hand.

Slowly, one by one, and then faster, everyone else in the room raised theirs.

“I’ll be damned,” Nick breathed out.

“Brad and I figured it out the other night.” I turned back to Nick. “We figure the entire team is preternatural.”

“Makes sense. Hell, it’s the only thing that does,” he said.

Since I’d sidetracked him, I took the opportunity to put my shirt back on. No, I wasn’t an exhibitionist, but in our line of work we ended up doctoring each other. Modesty didn’t serve any purpose. Most of the men had seen me naked, or almost naked, before. Just as I’d seen most of them in the nude. We had Reynolds, our unofficial leader, and official M.D., for more serious injuries.

I happened to glance at the clock, and realized that I needed to get ready for dinner.

“Shit.” I looked down at the pieces of my gun. “I’ve got to get ready for dinner, and I don’t want to leave my gun apart.”

“I’ll take care of it.” Nick gave my waist a squeeze, but didn’t hang on.

“Thanks,” I said, and turned to go.

Todd stood, and walked with me as I left the room. He didn’t say anything, but stayed at my side until I’d entered my bedroom.

“Still interested in going out tomorrow night?”

I smiled at him. “You bet.” And I meant it.

He grinned back, took me into his arms, and kissed me thoroughly.

“Hell, I’m sorry I have to kick your ass out now, so I can get ready for dinner at my parents’.”

“That’s okay.” His grin turned wicked. “I intend to take my time with you.”

His look alone told me he didn’t mean the relationship. “Oh.”

* * * *

Twenty minutes later, I was staring into my closet, wondering if I should even bother. I knew I was going to dress for work. But there were variations on that theme, and I couldn't decide which one I wanted to take.

I pulled on a pair of black jeans and a tight red T-shirt. Over that I wore a frumpy, grayed sweatshirt that I'd last used to wash the car with.

I secreted a few weapons about my body, then downed a glass of scotch. All set.

I managed to arrive at my parents' at six forty-five, so there wouldn't be a lot of time for Mom to harp at me before my "date" arrived. Dad was cocooned in his study, getting quietly smashed, no doubt. I looked longingly in that direction as Mom hustled me off to the kitchen.

"Don't do any of that creepy ventriloquist talk tonight," I said, shuddering as I climbed onto a stool at the breakfast bar.

"I don't know what you could possibly mean." Her expression indicated she clearly did. "And take that ratty sweatshirt off." My mother busied herself at the mixer, whipping potatoes.

I peeled off the shirt, while I wondered what to do if my mom did that icky talking thing with me. I gave up, knowing she'd do whatever she wanted to anyway. Especially since Dad poked his head in the door and let us know the latest victim had arrived.

Out we trooped to the living room.

The latest catch had his back to me when I entered, and I was pleasantly surprised by his long, lean legs and tight ass. Narrow hips. Broad shoulders.

He turned, and I froze. It was the Dark Knight. What the fuck was the Dark Knight doing here at my parents' house?

His eyes sparkled at my obvious confusion.

"J.C., I'd like you to meet Gareth Rynne. Gareth, our daughter J.C."

Gareth took a step towards me and enveloped my hands with his. "A true pleasure," he said, that deep silky voice of his wrapping around me.

"What the hell are you doing here?" I whispered urgently.

"You said I had to date you before I got to fuck you," he replied, quietly enough so that my parents didn't hear.

"Shit." It was the only response I could think of.

Dad took charge of the vampire, while Mom and I put out the food. At least I'd convinced Mom to include a bottle of wine, even though she was serving a simple baked chicken. I didn't mind being seated next to the vamp. Hell, this was the first fix up I was going to enjoy.

"Mom, Dad, how is it you know Gareth?" This should be good.

"Your father and I met him several years ago when the congress asked for our help with those missing children."

I remembered the case. Mom was a strong touch psychic. Dad, well, I got most of my talent from him. That also meant they knew what Gareth was. If they didn't like Nick, they should have really disliked the vamp.

I studied Mom for a minute. "Are you really trying to fix me up with him?"

She looked me straight in the eye. "Yes."

Go figure.

"What do you do when you're not working?" Gareth asked, his fork paused halfway to his mouth.

"Pretty much anything I like," I answered. "I've taken several self-defense classes, a couple of dance classes. I work out, when I get the urge. What about you?"

"I'm pretty much of a loner. I travel, a lot. I'll take on specific assignments if they appeal to me." He motioned for the butter and I passed it to him.

"And if you're not working?" The room had narrowed down to just the two of us.

He turned, and captured me with his eyes. Leaning closer, he lowered his mouth towards mine. "I seduce beautiful women."

"Oh, my," my mother blurted out, breaking the spell.

"No kissing at the dinner table," my father growled.

A small smile spread across my lips, and I gave Gareth a nod, acknowledging that he'd "gotten" me.

We finished the meal, passing on dessert, so Mom suggested the two of us go for a walk. I led Gareth to the park at the end of the street where I'd taken Roger.

Once again, I found myself leaning against the railing at the side of the trail in the little woods. This time I had my back to it, with Gareth standing in front of me.

Before I knew what he was doing, he'd lifted me up and set my butt on top of the rail. Then he worked his way between my thighs. I still had to look up at him, but we were much closer than when I was standing.

He kissed me. Just like that. No intense staring, no hesitation. He took my mouth with his, and danced his tongue erotically around the inside.

I was floored.

He deepened the kiss, pressing closer between my legs, holding tighter with his arms. When he broke away from me, he rested his forehead against mine, his breathing almost as fast as a human's.

"Fuck me, I want to taste you," he hissed.

"Well, you *were* invited to dinner." My nipples hardened at the thought.

He jerked away from me, searching my eyes. "You're saying yes?"

I smiled at him, cocking my head to the side in invitation.

He groaned, brushing my hair out of the way, holding it off the side of my face with one hand, the other wrapped around my back. He caught me at the waist, then bent to my neck, his body vibrating with excitement.

He drew his tongue along the length of my neck, causing me to shudder, then lowered his mouth over my pulse.

I wrapped my legs around his waist, dragging his erection harder against my core. He slid his hand from my waist, braced his arm across my back, then bit down, piercing my flesh.

"Aaahhh." I didn't scream, really; it was more an exhalation of sound.

With the first sensuous draw of my blood, my vagina spasmed, clenched, then exploded. I crushed his groin to mine, holding him tight with my feet crossed behind his ass. I ground my sex against him, as I continued to come.

He held me tight, even after he'd withdrawn from my neck, and licked the punctures closed. Staring down at me with a dreamy look in his eyes, he dipped for my mouth, groaning, when he sank his tongue between my lips.

Rocking his hips forward, I was reminded by the hard length of him of what else feeding for some of the more powerful vampires entailed. I'd been outmaneuvered. The guy was definitely slick. I'd lost this round, but he was going to find it twice as hard to

get into my pants the next time.

When he let me up for air, I decided to be blunt.

“Let’s get this over with; I’ve got to get to work soon.”

“Not so fast.” He covered my hands where they were working on my pants. “I’ll wait until you get home from work to finish with the meal.”

I couldn’t even argue the point with him, and that really pissed me off.

“Fine.”

* * * *

I’d been paired with Nick again, and I was thinking it was Reynolds’ idea of a joke.

After dinner, I’d gone home and changed tops. Not that I cared if the guys knew I’d let a vamp dine off me, but Nick had been acting strangely so I was being discreet. I was now wearing a deep red sleeveless sweater with a mock turtleneck.

I’d also noticed that Nick had found another woman to fuck since I’d last seen him.

We were currently in the alley behind the hardware store, fighting a rash of demons.

“Behind you,” Nick called out as he shot a blast of power to his left, then dropped to the ground.

I drew a throwing blade as I spun around and dropped, and let it fly. I rolled to my right, ending up on the opposite side of the alley from Corellis, and scooped my knife up from the puddle that was all that remained of the demon, thankful I had taken the time to enchant all my hardware.

“Ektrazers,” I yelled to Nick, telling him the base type of demon we were fighting. It was force of habit, so not necessary where Nick was concerned. Hell, they were pesky buggers, though. Only magic and enchanted items worked against them.

I stood in one fluid movement, whipped my fixed blade out of my thigh sheath, and stabbed it behind me without looking. Then I jumped backwards, barely avoiding the clawed hand that sliced through the fabric of my sweater, only lightly creasing the flesh underneath. Flipping my dagger to an underhand grip, I swung my arm forward and impaled the demon that had nearly scored.

“Seven o’clock,” I called out as I danced to the other side of the alley.

Nick shot a bolt of power in the direction I indicated, and I caught a glimpse of the demon as it dissolved. Two more came at me from the front, and I was busy for the few minutes it took me to dispatch them. When they were reduced to goo, I flicked my gaze around the alley looking for more.

All was quiet.

Nick came up beside me and placed a hand on my arm, not even out of breath.

“That’s all of them.” He started moving his hand off my arm, then stopped. “You’re injured.” His fingers went to my shoulder, turning me to face him. He traced the slice with the tips of his fingers, a tingle of his power flowing with his touch as he healed my wound.

“That should ... what the fuck?” He yanked up on the top of my sweater, exposing more of my shoulder and neck. “That’s a vampire bite.” He looked at me with an accusing glare. “Knight.” He picked me up and pinned me to the back wall of the hardware store. “You let him fuck you awful fast, for all your talk of dating.”

I felt the heat of his magic around my body before my clothes fell away.

“Nick, stop.” I drew on the earth, and began reeling in more power for defense.

I heard his zipper work, then he grasped my thighs and hiked my legs around his waist.

“No,” he growled. He thrust forward, impaling me. “I will not stop.” He fucked into me with short, hard digs of his cock.

“Why? Why are you doing this to me?” I was beginning to lose focus, my body falling to the pleasure.

He didn’t answer me, just picked up the pace, lengthening and deepening his strokes.

“Nick!” I screamed, as I flew into orgasm, pelvic muscles shuddering with the intensity of the pleasure.

Nick planted his cock high and deep, then groaned as his shaft throbbed, then spewed thick jets of cum. He stabbed me a few more times, with each subsequent blast of his seed. Then finally stilled.

With his penis still embedded, he forced my face up and away from his chest where I’d buried it. When he was sure I was looking into his eyes, he spoke. “Because you are mine.”

He kissed me, allowing his cock to drop from my body. Through the kiss, I heard whistles and a couple of rude comments called out around us.

Nick continued kissing me until he was well and truly done. It was only then that I took a look around the alley and found that half the team was lounging there. Their idiotic grins evidenced that they had been there for a while.

The ass didn’t help me back on with my clothes, either. I muttered all the vile things I’d like to do to him while I dressed. He was damn lucky Todd had not been one of the men in the alley or I would have followed up on my threats.

I almost went ahead anyway when he just laughed and slung an arm around me, satisfaction blazing across his face.

“What brings you all here?” I raised my eyebrow as I scanned the faces of my teammates.

Most of them dropped their gazes, shuffling their feet or clearing their throats.

“You were sending,” I snarled at Nick.

He shrugged, his expression never changing. “Couldn’t help it.”

“Everybody back to work.” I glared at them until they started to move out.

I didn’t talk to Nick again for the next two hours. It remained quiet and I was glad, because it gave me a chance to figure out how to keep Nick from coming into my house when we finished our shift.

When he pulled into my garage instead of dropping me off at the door, I went straight to my pickup, just as I’d planned.

“Where do you think you’re going?” He crowded me against the side of the vehicle.

“I promised Gwen I’d come over after work and ease her cramps. She’s having a bad one this month.”

“Okay, more information than I needed to know.” He took a step back.

“Oh.” I dug my keys out of my pocket. “I’ll see you later then.”

He mumbled something, then went back to his car.

I went ahead and got in my truck, then pulled out of the garage and swung out into the street. I even went so far as to drive over to Gwen’s, park in her parking lot, and enter the lobby of her apartment building. I was hoping I wouldn’t really see her. She and I had become friends of a sort when she was dating Russell. Now that the two of them were

over, I was uncomfortable hanging out with her.

I was waiting at the elevator when I finally felt Nick's magic drift away from me. Even so, I kept my eye out for him as I made my way back home and into my house.

* * * *

I felt Gareth arrive just as I was finishing up in the shower.

Torn between arousal and irritation, I planned on making him wait for me. Should have known better. He handed me a towel as I stepped out of the tub, his gaze taking a leisurely stroll down my body.

He watched me with hungry eyes that took in every detail while I dried myself. I'd seen guys that reminded me of predators before; hell, Nick reminded me of a predator. But the Knight had them all beat, hands down.

"Stalling won't help you. I am not bothered by the sun." His hands went to his waist and he drew his shirt over his head.

My mouth dropped open when his upper body was revealed. He was a work of art. Hard slabs of muscular beauty. He walked out of the bathroom, and I followed dumbly after him. As he went, he toed off his shoes, then bent to remove his socks. When he stood beside the bed, he turned back to me with a sexy half-grin as he unzipped his pants.

I stared. I couldn't stop myself, and I didn't care. My eyes were locked to the thickness I could see behind the front of his trousers. I felt moisture trickling from my vagina, and started urging him in my mind to hurry up.

"Drop the towel." His voice had turned husky while his hands slowly opened the fastening at the top of his pants.

I flicked a glance at his face, dropped the towel, then went back to watching his crotch.

"Get on the bed." His hands stopped at the top of his zipper. I waited, but he didn't move.

I made a face at him, but I crawled onto the bed, propping myself on my side so I could see him.

He lowered his zipper and his cock sprang out, all thick and ruddy. My breath whooshed out of me at the sight of it.

Then he was prowling across the bed to me, climbing over me so that I fell to my back.

"I can't wait to take you." He nipped at my lips, working his hips between my thighs. "Next time I'll savor you, but I've been thinking about filling you for so long that I'm not going to wait." He eased my legs up his sides.

"What makes you think there'll be a next time," I managed to say.

He stilled. "Of course there will be a next time." He blew off the possibility that I meant what I said.

Taking my mouth, he plied his magic there for a minute. Then I felt the blunt head of his cock poised at my opening. I shuddered, he said "yes" into my mouth, then he drove himself in.

He filled me, stretching me to capacity, and still he inched his way further.

"So tight." His breath warmed my cheek. Then he raised his head, eyes closed. He pulled back and worked his shaft even deeper. "So fucking tight."

When he'd buried his entire length within me, he opened his eyes. They were a

startling bright blue. I sank into those eyes while he started stroking his cock in and out of my sheath. Heat flushed my groin, my breasts. It rose up my neck and washed across my face.

All the while those blue, blue eyes watched me.

He angled his hips, shafting his way into me at the new angle, rubbing over the spot deep inside that sent fingers of electricity radiating throughout my groin. I groaned, long and low, as he continued his assault.

I felt his lips on my neck, the sting of his fangs as they were drawn across my flesh. My magic rose, swirled out of me and through him, calling his magic out. I jolted as my orgasm broke over me, cried out, as the first spasms blasted pleasure through my entire body. My power surged, forcing his to merge with mine. His fangs pierced my skin, and the detonation that followed sent me flying from my body.

I was still screaming, bucking against him, as I returned to my head. I felt the hot wash of his cum splashing against my womb, causing a series of mini-orgasms to race through me.

Gareth groaned, dropping down onto my chest, his breath sawing in and out of his lungs.

We stayed that way for several minutes, the sweat drying on our flesh, other fluids gluing us together.

He winced when he finally withdrew from me, and crashed at my side to the bed. I was drifting, not falling asleep, but not fully awake. Just basking in the glow of our combined power and release.

He moved beside me and drew me to him, urging me to press my back against his body. When he was curved around me, his arm heavy across my waist, his thigh tucked between my legs, he spoke to me. His voice was barely above a whisper.

"I'm over four thousand years old. Never, in all those endless days, all those vast months, have I ever experienced anything like you."

I had no response to that. Certainly my own tale would pale in comparison. And I didn't think a simple "you were good, too" would suffice. But I couldn't just say nothing. So I settled for what I considered a compromise.

"You were incredible." I snuggled my ass tighter to his groin. "Doesn't mean you still won't have to work to get back into my bed again."

Then I did fall asleep, with the soft sound of his laughter ringing in my ears.

* * * *

Gareth was gone when I awoke. Today was my day off from work, unless I ran into something that needed taking care of while I was out and about. I had a date with Todd tonight, and I had to decide if I was going to sleep with him.

I changed the sheets on my bed, took a long, leisurely bath, then began the preparations for my night out.

Todd arrived exactly on time. He was wearing soft black leather pants, a black T-shirt, and a black leather jacket. His hair was loose around his shoulders, his green eyes a shade darker than kelly.

I was wearing a black halter dress that barely covered my ass.

"Hey, you look like a girl." He grinned, his eyes heating with desire.

My heartbeat kicked up as he checked me out. It pounded in my chest when he took

me into his arms and kissed me.

“Come on, if we don’t go now, I won’t be able to later.” He gave me a little push towards his car, keeping his hand on my back.

He opened my door for me, and I slid into the seat. Then watched as his lean frame crossed in front of the car, highlighted by the moon.

I appreciated the way his thighs flexed when he sat down in the driver’s seat. Aware, not for the first time, that he was really built. I realized at that moment that many of the men on the team were also that way.

He took me to a dark, moody restaurant in the Lakes area. We sat in a corner booth, his thigh pressed tightly to mine. The candle in the center of the table cast his face in a tantalizing contrast of glow and shadow.

“Christ,” he exhaled, his eyes focused on the neckline of my dress.

“Todd, what’s gotten in you tonight? Hell, you’ve seen me naked before.” He had, too. Todd was one of our better medics.

His eyes met mine, pure masculine predatory hunger glimmering in their dark depths. “You were one of the guys then. Now you’re all woman, and I can’t stop myself from thinking about how you’re going to feel wrapped around my cock.”

He kissed me, a wild ravaging of lips and teeth. My body arched against his when he slipped a hand inside the top of my dress and trapped my nipple.

Instinct broke us apart when the waiter delivered our drinks to the table. A flick of the man’s eyes drew our attention to the fact that Todd’s hand was still in the bodice of my dress. We both looked at it, equally surprised that it was there.

I’m not sure we behaved any better during the meal, but at least we weren’t thrown out of the restaurant.

Then, when the waiter asked us if we’d like dessert, Todd about bit the guy’s head off.

“I need the check. Now.” He glowered at the smaller man.

He paid, then hustled me out the door.

We’d parked near the rear of the lot. Todd’s hand rubbed up and down my back as we walked towards it, then he dropped his hand to my ass. When we got to the car, he spun me around so I was facing him, pinning me to the side of the vehicle, crushing his erection into my stomach.

“I’m not sure I can wait to get you home.” He ate at my lips, his hands grabbing and squeezing any part of me he could reach. “Let me bend you over the hood,” he rasped.

I wanted that. I could see the image in my mind, and it was sparking desire throughout my body.

A sudden, tearing pain lanced through my head. Todd dropped to a squat, yanking me to the ground with him, reaching inside his jacket for his gun.

I couldn’t think. My brain was zapping as an electrical charge ricocheted around inside my skull. I could see Todd’s mouth moving, but I couldn’t hear the words. Then he was sliding away from the car, away from me.

I braced my hands on the cool metal surface of the door, and tried to lever myself to my feet. A bolt of black lightning struck me in the middle of my chest, right over my heart.

I tried to inhale, tried to cry out, as the world around me went dark.

Chapter Four

Ugh. What was that smell?

I tried to blink my eyes open, but wasn't having any luck. When I moved to reach for my face to see what the problem was I found that my arms were secured behind my back. Similarly, my legs were bound at the ankles.

Just great. I didn't even have a clue as to who had captured me. It didn't take a brain surgeon to figure out why someone would want to; my job kind of assured that I made enemies. Now, just to figure out who, and wait for an opportunity to do something about it.

With nothing else to do, I passed the time trying to figure out what the stench was. Maybe that would provide me with a clue.

As the hours ticked by, and nothing came to get me, I found myself growing used to the smell. Then it got to the point where I couldn't really scent it at all, even though I knew it was still there.

Finally, I heard a sound. A weird, slurping, plopping sound. It made me think of something not quite solid, hunching its way across the floor. Whatever it was, it sounded large.

I jumped when a cold, wet tongue of flesh traced a line down my arm. The tongue moved onto my thigh, and began to work its way towards my sex. Clenching my legs tight didn't slow it down.

"Are you enjoying my pet?" A deep masculine voice reverberated around the room.

"Depends on what he does when he gets a little higher," I countered, pleased that I didn't sound upset.

I felt a cool brush of air across my cheek, then the man spoke directly into my ear. "It will feel very good as he fucks you with his tongue, until he becomes aroused. Then the glands along the surface will begin to release a hormone that will react with your flesh like acid."

His breathing grew heavier as he spoke.

"Or perhaps he'll be so overcome with arousal that he'll wrench your thighs apart and impale you with his—cock. Shall I describe that particular aspect of his anatomy to you?"

I felt Nick's magic lightly touch me, then it was gone.

"Well." I so did not want to hear the details of the creature's shaft. Racking my brain, I tried to think of any other way to stall for time. "I'll pass, but thanks anyway."

The man laughed, stroking his hand down the center of my body, cupping my mound through my dress.

He squeezed. "I would much prefer to do you myself anyway."

Tongues surrounded both of my ankles and pulled them apart, tearing whatever had been used to bind me. Then my legs were drawn up over my body, held wide, nearly bending me in half. A cool breeze washed over my sex, and I knew my underpants were gone.

He cupped me again, this time dipping his thumb between my cheeks, to press against my anus. "Here, I think. Yes, I will fuck you here." He pressed his finger through

the tight ring of muscle.

A deafening boom roared through the room. I was suddenly released, my legs dropping down to the surface that I lay on. Someone shouted, and I thought it sounded like Nick, but I couldn't feel his magic.

Then it was there. A tremendous blast of power washed over me, energizing me, enabling me to see. I'd only seen Nick once in his other form, and my breath caught in my throat at the sight of him as he fought with half a dozen creatures the likes of which I'd never seen before. He was darker in this guise. His brown hair had gone a deep and shiny black, a wild mane that tumbled nearly to his waist. His eyes had gone black as well, even the whites. Dark energy writhed around him, causing a blast of arousal to shoot straight through my core. He was beyond awesome as he wielded his power.

Several creatures had burst into the room, and he was fighting them all.

But what in holy hell were they? Four resembled men. Seven feet tall, and jet-black with spikes sticking out the tops of their heads. Their hands were huge, a fine webbing between the fingers, close to their palms. Their feet were the same, oversized and webbed.

Another six or so beasts were making the slurpy, plopping sounds as they wove around Nick. They were gelatinous things, forming appendages as they went, making what they needed extrude from their malleable bodies.

Nick was as tall as the men, but broader, bulkier. The bones in his face were more pronounced, his muscles more defined, and considerably larger. Power sizzled over his skin, the center of his eyes blazing red with it, as he blasted away at them.

Concentrating, I found I could free my wrists, then reached out with my senses in search of earth. I was furious when I ran into steel walls so thick I couldn't touch the soil I needed.

I felt a gate open, and readied myself to use the last of my magic to blast whatever new threat approached.

The Dark Knight sauntered into the room, casting a wicked grin in my direction before joining Nick. The two men worked together with the ease of partners, like men who had fought side by side on more than one occasion. I had to wonder about that.

With the Knight's help, the fight was so one-sided that it took no time at all for the two men to finish off the creatures.

Nick came to me, as the Knight winked at me, hanging back.

"You okay?" He gathered me into his arms and stroked his hands over my body, searching me for damage.

"I'm fine. You got any idea what that was all about?" I waited for him to finish with his assessment, knowing it wouldn't do any good to try to stop him.

"Come on. Let's get you home." He pulled me tightly to his chest, and held me there, not doing anything else for a moment.

"I'll see you later," the Knight said, and I wasn't sure if he was talking to me or Nick.

"Nick?" I still hadn't gotten an answer from him.

He stared into my eyes, the flames gone, the irises lightened to brown, though a different kind of fire was sparking to life. "Home," he said, and the chamber around me vanished.

* * * *

Nick couldn't keep his hands off me. He took a shower with me, then hustled me off to bed. Every time I tried to ask him about the "kidnapping," he'd distract me with sex. So okay, I could have been more restrained, but I'd never been turned on to anybody the way I was turned on to him.

I fell into a thoroughly sated sleep, cradled in his arms, without ever learning a single thing about the events of the night.

* * * *

It was dark. Darker than was normal for this time of night. I stood outside, naked, unconcerned because of the depth of the night. Tipping my head back, I let the gentle breeze wash over my skin, speaking to me in the language of my birth. I heard the depth of power beneath my feet, and reveled in the fact that I was one with it.

I sensed someone approaching, unfamiliar with the feel of their magic. Yet there was a sense of peace that accompanied the stranger, so deep that I stood my ground and waited for him.

"J.C." The whisper of a masculine voice floated to me on the wind. "I have a message for you."

Waiting patiently, I heard the soft inhalations of the speaker.

"He does what he must, knowing you don't understand, unable to enlighten you."

I lowered my head, and turned in the direction of the voice. "Who?"

I heard the sharp rasp of a breath, one that sounded painful to take. "I cannot say." The speaker groaned. "Remember this: no matter what you think, there's only you."

I opened my mouth to question him when he screamed, a high, thin sound that rose sharply then cut off abruptly. Reaching out with my senses, I felt a dark, devious magic, swirling, dissipating.

The earth's power rose to comfort me, and I let myself fall into its warmth.

* * * *

"J.C."

My eyes flew open, and I was surprised when I could see the silvery light of the moon illuminating Nick's concerned face as he hovered over me.

"What's wrong?" I breathed, thinking there was danger closing in on where we lay.

"You went somewhere." I noticed the fine line of perspiration on his brow. "I thought I'd lost you there for a moment."

Placing my hand along the side of his face, I cursed once again his inability to commit, a lack deep within him that kept us apart. "I'm here." For now.

He captured my lips with his, an edge of desperation in his kiss as he crushed me to his chest. Then his nature took over, his kiss turning demanding, as he wedged his hips between my legs.

He speared his way into me; his gaze trapped mine, his powers pulsing against my shields.

"Let me in, J.C." His voice was a whisper, but his tone was hard.

He bent closer to me, pecking at my lips, as he powered his cock in and out of me, pushing, ever pushing at my psyche.

"Why, Nick? Why am I supposed to give you everything, when you give just a

portion in return?" I was slowly losing myself in the feel of his shaft, the fluid, powerful movement of his muscles as he pumped his hips.

"Because you're mine." I could barely hear what he said, then he thrust his tongue into my mouth, and with a short snap of pain, he entered my mind. I cried out at the brief discomfort. Thought, for a minute, about fighting his presence, then felt myself swept away on a torrent of sensation.

Groaning, I ground my pelvis against his, muscles thrumming, coiling. He moved his mouth to the side of my neck, and I felt his fangs depress the flesh.

"Do you give yourself to me?" His lips brushed my neck as he spoke, his voice a testament to seduction.

"Right here, right now, I'm all yours," I had the presence of mind to say.

"Always," he rasped, then pierced my skin.

I screamed as a blistering orgasm ripped through my groin. This was different from the other times he'd fed from me, but I couldn't figure out why. Every slow, erotic draw of my blood sent me spiraling into the throes of ecstasy.

I felt his cock pulse, then liquid heat flooded into my core as Nick joined me in release. He kept bringing us, over and over, until I lost consciousness.

* * * *

I woke to the sound of male voices. I couldn't make out what they were talking about, though. Irritated, I felt beside me for Nick, and found the bed empty.

Rolling to my feet, I was sorry I'd made such a sudden move, as all my muscles ached in protest. By the time I'd made it into the bathroom, however, I was feeling pretty good about those aches. They were in all the right places.

I showered, rubbed my hair dry, then threw a little makeup on. I slipped into a pair of well-worn jeans, but since my bandage was wet, I didn't bother putting on a shirt. Armed with the supplies needed to put a fresh dressing on, I headed out of the bedroom.

The voices were coming from the kitchen, and I stopped in shock in the doorway when I found Nick and Gareth sitting at the table, drinking glasses of wine. Recovering, I headed towards Nick. Gareth's arm snaked out and captured me as I walked past him.

In one fluid movement he rose from his seat and drew me into his embrace. Then he lowered his face to mine, and blew me away with a heated kiss. My nipples beaded against the soft fabric of his shirt as a murmur of appreciation rumbled within the vampire's chest. He broke the kiss to taste along my jaw and down the side of my neck, pausing over the marks that Nick had left on me, tonguing the tiny wounds.

I was starting to wonder why Nick hadn't interfered when I felt the warmth of his body against my back. His lips found the other side of my neck, his hands moving to my stomach. Gareth chose that moment to move lower, licking a trail of arousal down over my collarbone. Then he circled my nipple with his tongue before he sucked the tightened bud between his lips.

I arched my back, pressing my breast harder against his mouth, as Nick opened the front of my jeans, and slid a hand inside. He rocked his erection along the crease of my ass while he drove a finger deep inside of me. I groaned and Gareth nipped me before moving over to my other breast.

"Take her pants off," Gareth breathed, before latching onto my nipple.

"Wha—?" I stuttered, as Nick shoved my jeans over my hips and down my legs. He

picked each foot up, then kicked the fabric aside.

He slid his hands up the inside of my thighs as Gareth continued to toy with my breasts. Then he was urging my legs apart. I spread them, and Gareth kissed his way down my belly as he lowered himself to his knees. Glancing up at me, with an evil grin, he leaned forward and drew the flat of his tongue over my clit.

Nick assaulted me from behind, his tongue probing into my vagina, his finger teasing the tight bud of my ass. Gareth suckled me, occasionally flicking the tip of his tongue over the hardened nub, while Nick stroked his way into my vagina. He added a second finger to the one in my rectum, and then a third.

Clutching desperately at Gareth's shoulders with my fingers, I blew apart under the multitude of sensations the men were giving me. Neither one moved away, until I was reduced to tremors.

"Here, or the bedroom?" Nick said.

"Both," Gareth replied.

I had just started to wonder what they were talking about when Gareth stood and lifted me off the floor. I wrapped my legs around his back, wondering how I'd missed the fact that he'd opened his pants and had shoved them down his thighs so that his cock jutted proudly away from his body.

Then he was shafting his way into my vagina, and I no longer cared.

I flinched when I felt the blunt head of Nick's cock prod my anus, then relaxed and bore down as he shoved his way past the tight ring of muscle, and buried himself deep. The two men stood motionless, for a moment, then started to move.

They overwhelmed me, filled me, their counterstrokes immediately driving me out of my mind. I came, trapped between them, my body writhing, jolting. Then they were both pressing their magic into my mind. Both wrapping themselves around my brain, stroking my very essence with their own.

Their cocks rammed harder, faster into me, blasting me over the edge, with another, more violent orgasm close on its heels. I cried out, and they responded by lowering their mouths to my neck, sinking their fangs in deep, at exactly the same time.

They kept me from passing out, for I was quickly headed that way. Instead, I was subjected to such intense pleasure that it shattered my soul. I was sobbing, no longer in my right mind, when Nick's cock jerked in my rectum, and the heat of his release began to fill me. Moments later Gareth's dick throbbed, and his seed started bathing my womb.

They continued to thrust, as their semen blasted again and again, deep inside of me. Until, with a final shudder, they leaned into my body, pressing me tightly between them.

"Fuck me," Nick breathed against the side of my head.

"I've still got a fucking hard-on," Gareth cursed.

I was floating, barely aware of my surroundings, as they withdrew from my body, and carried me to the bedroom. I didn't know whose arms I was in, and I didn't care. All I wanted to do was sleep for a day or so.

I wasn't going to get to do that, though, as they positioned themselves on the bed. Nick lay on his back, and the two of them moved me over his chest, my legs splayed on either side of his hips.

He wrestled me around, and then stabbed his way into my vagina. Stroking a few times, before holding still.

Gareth moved to my back, guided his cock to my anus, and without any hesitation,

rammed himself to the hilt.

They were merciless, demanding, consuming, as they flayed my body with their hunger. Truthfully, I don't know how many times I came, nor how many times the men did. All I know was that it was too much, way too much for me to handle. On the one hand, I wanted to roll myself into a tight protective ball, and hide myself from the torment of pleasure they were flooding me with. On the other, I wasn't sure any single male would be good enough for me in the future.

Days could have passed for all I knew, and still they fucked me, fed from me, invaded me.

Finally, with a blinding climax racing through my body, I went blissfully blank.

Chapter Five

My alarm went off and I cursed as I slapped the palm of my hand down on it, not having remembered setting it the night before. Hell, I couldn't seem to bring into focus what I'd even done the previous evening. The harder I thought about it, the further it got away from me.

Hopping out of the bed, I nearly stumbled. Frowning, I took inventory of my body, noting bruising and tender places, but having no memory of how I came by these things.

Must have had a helluva night. I'd ask one of the guys later if I'd been hit with a power bolt.

Feeling much better after my shower, I pulled on a pair of black jeans and a black girly T-shirt. The capped sleeves worked better for me, for the arm sheath I wore for the throwing knives. I slipped a couple of clips in my hair to keep it out of my face, but left the rest of it down.

Strolling out into my living room, I realized I didn't know where we were meeting tonight. It took me ten minutes to find my cell phone, its charger for some reason plugged in to an outlet in my kitchen.

"Hey, Reynolds, where's the meet tonight?" I dropped a clean filter into the coffee maker while I talked.

"J.C., are you up for it?" The edge of worry in Reynolds voice stopped me in the middle of scooping out the grounds.

"Was it that bad?" I wasn't dead, so anything else was okay, as far as I was concerned.

"What day do you think it is?" he asked.

"Tuesday," I answered, wondering at the question. I finished filling the filter, then poured the water into the back of the machine and flipped it on before Reynolds answered me.

"Friday," he stated, his tone flat.

"Friday?" I'd lost three days? "Question's still the same, where are we meeting tonight?"

"If I didn't know you better..." I heard the rustle of paper, then he said something I couldn't understand. "We're meeting at Brad's. It's your turn to bring a case of beer."

"You got it." I found a mug, and set it down by the pot. "Can I ask what happened?"

"You were kidnapped outside of the Marcado. Nick and the Dark Knight eventually rescued you. Even they wouldn't talk about all that had been done to you while you were in the creature's possession. You were really out of it though; something in their chemistry must have reacted badly with yours." He was quiet for a moment. "We almost lost you."

"Thanks for everything." I really meant it, too.

"You'd do the same for any one of us." Reynolds said, then signed off.

I poured myself a mug of my favorite caffeinated beverage, then dug inside the fridge for something edible. Fortunately, someone had stocked the thing recently, so I helped myself to the ham and fixed a sandwich.

Three days lost. It wasn't all that disturbing; I'd lost more time than that before. It

was inconvenient, and I'd have to check my weapons, to see if I'd lost any.

When I was done with my food, I headed for the office and checked over my supplies. Everything was in its place. Vials of saltwater mixture had been added, as well as some more of the salve that warded against foreign spells. Someone had even cleaned my guns, and left them wrapped in oiled rags.

My back began itching, and I wondered if it had healed enough for me to go without covering it any more. The biggest problem with demon wounds was infection, and since mine was clean, enough time should have passed.

Todd walked in, and without even thinking I pulled my shirt off, and dropped my bra to the floor. His eyes widened, then the pupils dilated. He was on me in two strides, his head bending to my chest, his lips wrapping around my nipple.

I threw my head back, my fingers tangling in his hair, as he nipped and suckled the tender bud. Instead of pleasure shooting through me though, I grew uneasy under his attention. Then an odd burst of energy shot through me and into his mouth, knocking him on his ass.

"What the hell was that?" He shook his head, wiping the back of his hand over his mouth.

"I have no idea." I went to his side. "Are you okay?" I reached for him and he waved me off with his hands.

"I think you'd better keep your distance." His eyes were wary as he scooted away from me.

Sean wandered in at that moment, looked at Todd where he sat on the floor, then at me, bare from the waist up.

"She deck you?" He asked the other man.

"No, but close." Todd grunted as he dragged himself up off the floor.

"Come here." I motioned to Sean. "Suck my nipple."

"Uh, I like you and all, J.C., but I don't really feel that way about you," Sean said, his face scrunched up with distaste.

"It's not a come on, Sean." I planted my hands on my hips. "I want to find something out."

"Go ahead, Sean. I'd be interested in seeing the results," Todd threw out.

Sean looked between the two of us, like we were up to something.

Armo chose that moment to arrive.

"Fine, if you won't do it, maybe Armo will." I narrowed my eyes at Sean. "Armo, come over here, I need you to do something for me."

Armo crossed the room, his eyes focused on my chest. "What?"

"Suck my nipple." I said.

His eyes flicked to my face. "Are you serious?"

"Absolutely." I pressed my chest out a little farther.

He licked his lips, then placed his hands on my waist as he bent his head towards my breast. I could feel his breath wash over my skin when he spoke. "You're not going to stab me if I do this, are you?"

"No, Armo." I arched my back, encouraging him.

His lips were warm and moist. He drew the nipple into his mouth, then suckled on it, his fingers clenching in the flesh on my sides. He angled his head, and drew more of my breast into his mouth, a low groan vibrating from his chest.

Then I felt that same burst of energy, and the next thing I knew, Armo was picking himself up off the floor.

"I've never had that happen before," he said, looking at the other two guys.

Indor and Brad came into the room, and I was beginning to wonder what they were all doing here when the meeting was at Brad's tonight. While I was pondering that question, Sean stepped up to me.

"Okay, I've got to give it a try."

I found myself bent backwards over his arm while he laved my nipple with his tongue. He toyed with it for a moment, then drew it into his mouth, sucking and flicking it, then sucking some more.

He was very good, and I felt a wash of disappointment that he wasn't attracted to me. That was right before he was thrown from my body, dropping me, both of us landing heavily on the floor.

Dryden, Evan, and Big had arrived, and that just about made up the entire team.

"Hey guys, you've got to try this out." Sean grabbed Big's arm, and dragged him over to me. "Suck on her tit."

Big blinked at him, then blinked at me.

"Go ahead." I shrugged.

He raised his eyebrow, but bent over and drew my nipple into his mouth. Just like the rest, he was blasted to the ground.

Evan managed to suck on me a little longer; he even moved over to the other breast before he got blasted. After that, Dryden had to give it a shot, too. Must be a guy thing. Even Indor came up for a try, and I let him, figuring what the hell.

Another thought occurred to me, and I blanched. "Todd, come with me a minute, would you?"

I thought he was going to refuse me, then he followed me out of the room. I didn't stop until we were in my bedroom, and I'd shut the door behind him.

"What if it's not just my nipples?" I asked him, panic edging into my voice.

"What do you mean?" Todd leaned back against the wall, crossing his arms over his chest.

I grabbed his wrist, and tried to drag him across the room to my bed.

"Come on, Todd, you've got to fuck me, I've got to know." I kept tugging, but he wasn't budging.

"Damn." He shook his head, dropping his arms, and coming with me. "I really don't want to get my cock electrocuted," he grumbled, but he started working on his pants.

I stripped, then climbed onto the bed, raising my knees, and spreading my legs wide, wishing he would hurry.

Even with the prospect of a jolt to his most treasured body part, his eyes were gleaming as he lowered himself between my thighs. Stopping himself just above me, bracing his upper body on his forearms, he barely took aim, then slammed his way in. He set up a fast, hard pace.

"I want as much of you as I can get, in case something happens." He hissed, his hips powering his cock frantically.

Oh, shit. I'd barely had time to form the thought when a much larger blast of magic shot through me, and straight into Todd where we were joined. His entire body stiffened, only the whites of his eyes showing, as he was wrenched away from me, and flung

halfway across the room.

I scrambled to his side, my heart stopping for a beat, when I couldn't tell if he was breathing or not. Then he shuddered and raised his head, his unfocused gaze searching me out. He managed to concentrate on my face, and his eyes narrowed to a squint.

"That really hurt," he said, then dropped his head back to the floor.

I reached for him, barely brushing the tips of my fingers over his stomach.

"Get away from me, J.C. I really don't want to hurt you, but I'm not letting you zap me again."

I could understand that, so I found my pants and undies, and dressed. "I'll just leave you alone then."

"Good." He hadn't moved.

I made my way back to the armory, not at all surprised to see that no one had hung around. Pulling my bra and shirt on, I armed myself for the night.

I still hadn't seen Todd when I headed for the garage.

* * * *

Reynolds, Nick, and Todd were absent from the meeting. A couple of the guys eyeballed me, frowning. Dryden, in his role of second, asked me what I'd done with Todd.

I leaned close to him and whispered. "I had to find out, Dryden. So I asked him to, you know, fuck me."

Dryden narrowed his eyes. "You didn't kill him, did you?"

I gaped at the man. "No."

"Tell me you didn't zap his cock."

I looked down at my feet and shuffled them around.

"You blasted Todd's cock?" His voice had risen, the men closest to us wincing.

"I had to know!" I insisted, but it sounded lame, even to me.

Dryden gave me a harsh look. "Don't fuck anyone else on the team until you get that problem fixed."

"Uh..." I didn't even know what was causing the problem; how could he expect me to fix it? "Okay."

He nodded, satisfied with my answer, and moved off.

I sat on the couch next to Sean, his sudden fascination with me a bit unnerving. We both reached forward at the same time for a piece of pizza, and our hands bumped.

He slid a grin at me.

"Why?" I raised an eyebrow at him.

"I can't stop wondering what would happen if I kissed you." His voice lowered, his eyes dropping to my lips. "If I slid a finger into your tight—wet—pussy." He leaned closer, and was whispering in my ear. "If I drove my cock deep inside of you."

He flattened me against the back of the couch, capturing my mouth with his. Thrusting his tongue between my lips, he ravaged me with his kiss. Until he was shocked off my face, only to land unceremoniously in the middle of a pizza.

Grinning, he shook the food off, scooped it back into the box, then headed for the kitchen. I couldn't help but shake my head at him.

"Think you're up to working with Indor tonight?" Dryden asked, having taken over for Reynolds' usual partner planning as well.

“No.” I snagged a piece of pepperoni, then took a giant bite.

“Good. Just take it easy on him, will you?” Dryden laughed as I tried to chew fast enough so I could tell him to go to hell.

Reinhold cleared his throat, and everybody stopped talking.

“All three of the local pack leaders have reported unusual rogue activity in the area.” He cleared his throat again, this time with a nervous gesture. “I’ve picked up—something—drawing them to the southeast quadrant. I’d like to be more specific, but I’ve honestly never felt anything like it before.”

“Best guess,” Dryden barked.

“Slightly demon, but not as greasy feeling, just wet.” Reinhold shrugged.

An image flashed into my mind of a seven-foot tall male with webbed feet. Then it was gone.

“Everybody have a holy item?” Dryden let his gaze touch everyone in the group. Then he nodded, satisfied. “Move out then. Bailey, Rhodes, and Myron take the southeast quadrant, together.”

Indor moved to my side, and I stared at him for a moment, letting my senses expand. “No offense, Brackston, but I’m going to probe you before I’ll partner you.”

He inclined his head, then rested on one hip, waiting for me to get on with it.

I managed to do a surface scan, fairly easy, the next few layers increasingly harder to breach. What I really wanted to see remained locked solidly behind his shields.

“Let me in, Brackston,” I growled at him.

“I will, if you will,” he countered.

Planting a scowl on my face, and my hands on my hips, I squared off with the man. “Look, Indor, my loyalties are not under question here. You, however, have yet to prove yourself to this team. Your refusing a thorough scan leads me to believe you’re hiding something. What are you hiding, Indor? What is it you don’t want your partner, the person who is risking her life to work with you, to know?”

He blinked at me, a bead of sweat forming at his right temple. It expanded, then traced a shiny, telling path down the side of his face.

“Dryden, I think we’ve got a problem.” I reached out instinctively to the soil on the other side of the wall, drawing on the earth, fortifying my shields. “Sean, Myron, Big, back me up here. We’ve got an unknown.”

The edges of Brackston’s form wavered, then held. If I hadn’t been absolutely focused on the man, I would have missed it. I also saw the irises of his eyes flickering as his mind worked.

I felt the rest of the team forming a circle around the two of us. Felt magics, different from my own joining together, enclosing us in a safety net.

Reinhold moved to my left side, knowing I handled my weapons with my right. He was sending calming waves of energy directly at the newest member of our team.

In a quiet voice, without taking his attention off the man, he spoke. “Let’s force him into his natural state.”

I glanced to my left when I felt a surge of power coming from that direction, and was surprised to find it was Dave wielding that magic. Someone on the other side of the circle joined his power to Dave’s, the two forces flaring brightly for a second, then coalescing. A third source fed into the other two, and soon Brackston’s image began to shimmer.

The man’s hair receded as his skin tone darkened, glistening wetly. Spikes rose from

the top of his head as his body expanded, stretching in height and breadth.

“What is he?” I heard one of the team ask.

No one answered.

I stepped closer to Brackston, pausing only when he grinned, his eyes lighting with an unholy blue fire.

“Attenderé meh, little vessel.” Brackston’s long, webbed fingers reached for me.

A bolt of power passed over my skin, breaking me out of my inaction. I added energy to the magic I felt flooding into the creature before me. I was shaken when he stared directly into my eyes, his smile fading a little.

“Ah, well. At least I have tried,” he said.

Then he winked out.

Not believing he was so easily taken care of, I opened my senses wide, searching everything around me, and finally accepting the fact that I couldn’t feel him, that he was truly gone, whether by our actions or his.

“Dryden, what made you pair me with Brackston tonight?” When I didn’t get an answer, I spun around to glare at the man.

My breath caught in my throat as I found him collapsed on the floor. His head was flung back at a painful angle, his eyes wide. A white, foamy substance filled his mouth and ran down his chin. The stuff wasn’t moving, as it should have been were he breathing.

I raced to his side, once again calling my magic as I went. Dropping to my knees, I thumped my fist against his chest, backing it with a burst of energy. He flinched, foam spraying out of his mouth, then—nothing. Big appeared on the other side of Dryden’s body, inclining his head to me. Together we worked on our teammate for the next minute, desperately aware of how quickly time was running out, even for one of us.

Big nodded at me, and we tried again. Focusing on his heart, his lungs, I drew more power from the earth. Opened myself wide to the energy of my element. Visualized myself as an enormous conduit directing the life force of the planet straight into the man before me.

I heard Big curse, then he backed quickly away from Dryden and from me. My teammate’s body had started glowing a bright, violent gold. All the air was sucked out of the room, into that brilliance, then with a gale force, oxygen blew in to replace it.

I was sent sprawling over Dryden’s body. I could hear the thuds and groans of the others as they were slammed about the room. Softly, at first, I felt the man’s heart start to beat. As it grew stronger, I tapered off on my magic, slowing the flow of it, then capping it off.

“Holy shit,” somebody said behind me. Other voices agreed.

It didn’t occur to me they were commenting on my magic; that if I thought about it, I would have seen that I had wielded more power than I ever had before. All I cared about was the man on the floor whose color was returning to normal, whose chest rose and fell as he breathed.

His eyes flickered open, and I was relieved to see that they were his eyes. Admitting to myself, only then, that I feared they would show me someone or something else inside.

“You’ve been bitten.” His gaze had dropped to my neck.

“What?” I felt along my skin, finding nothing.

He sat up, and placed a finger on the point where my neck met my shoulder. “Here.”

He moved his finger to the other side of my neck and touched the same location. "And here."

As much as I wanted to run to the bathroom and check out his claim, I had to find out what had happened, before his memory of the event faded.

"What happened to you, Dryden?"

"What are you talking about?" His confused expression looked genuine.

"You hooked me up with Indor. Who just happened to be some kind of creature none of us are familiar with."

He blinked. A slow dropping of the eyelids, then lifting them again. "Indor?"

As it turned out, not only did Dryden have no memory of the evening, he didn't have any memory of Indor Brackston at all.

* * * *

I paired with Evan, and we set out with the other two teams for the southeast sector. Reinhold had it right, there was a tremendous amount of activity in the area, with both rogue and pack members roaming about. Our teams split apart to take different sections of the quadrant, then Evan and I ended up heading away from each other when we came upon a couple of rogues that ran off in different directions.

The rogue I was following was a vicious one, but new and unaccustomed to fighting in his half-form. I downed him quickly, my natural energy surging through me, much more potently than before. I felt great, barely wondering how this change had occurred. I just took it in stride, then set to work on dissipating the guy's body.

I felt another were coming at my back, so I dropped to the ground, rolled to the side, and brought my hand up with a defensive spell held right at the tips of my fingers. Fuck. Why is it the rogues were always so damned good-looking?

He threw a wicked grin at me, the tip of his tongue snaking out to caress his bottom lip.

"Christ, you smell good." He sauntered towards me with a sexy stride.

I held off blasting him just yet, because there was rogue, and then there was rogue. Unless he intended to harm me, being a loner was no crime.

With the animal grace of his kind, he knelt over my body, not touching me, but caging me between his arms and legs. Leaning closer, he brought his face to the side of my neck, and inhaled. Then he licked me.

"I want you." He nuzzled my neck, his lips working their magic, causing goosebumps to rise along my flesh. "I bet your pussy's tight. Tight and hot." He had a low, throaty voice that nearly made me moan. He kissed his way to my mouth, then hovered over it, his eyes searching mine.

I'd just opened my mouth to tell him to back off, when he closed the distance between us. His mouth danced with mine, in a passionate touching of lips that set fires burning throughout my body. He worked his legs between my thighs, lowering his hips, until he was cradled firmly against my sex.

Angling his head, he took the kiss deeper, thrusting his tongue into my mouth, dominating, demanding. I began kissing him back with abandon, grinding my crotch against the hard ridge of his erection, wondering if I could use my power to remove the obstacle of our clothing. I did notice he wasn't being zapped, and wondered if it was just team members that phenomenon happened to, or if whatever had been causing the

problem was gone.

“Fuck,” he said as he broke the kiss, still so close his lips brushed mine when he spoke. “I don’t think I can wait until we get to a bed.” He pressed his hips forward, emphasizing his need.

“Allow me,” I breathed, and without thinking about the consequences, I flashed us into my bedroom, into my bed. I had to find out if I was safe, and since I’d promised not to fuck anyone on the team, this seemed like an opportunity I couldn’t pass up.

He took notice of the new location, nearly flying off of me as he swiveled his head, taking in his surroundings. “You’re a witch?”

“Among other things.” I rocked my hips, trying to get him back to the sex we were about to have.

The grin he shot me was positively sinful. “Gods, it’s going to be good to fuck someone I don’t have to worry about hurting.”

He dove on me, eating at my lips, his hands rough as they learned the contours of my body. “Clothes,” he growled, and I spelled them off.

With a minimum of adjustment, he found and pierced my core. Several hard thrusts later, he was buried to the hilt. Breathing heavily, he rested on top of me for a moment. “Sweet,” he hissed, then started a deep, steady stroke that set my sheath on fire.

Literally. Heat started pouring out of my inner muscles. A sweat broke out across the werewolf’s brow, his rhythm faltering. “Hot, so hot,” he mumbled, tucking his hands under my ass, gripping firmly, and powering on.

By degrees, the heat increased, until it became nearly unbearable. The were valiantly pounded on, though as a were, his core temperature was higher than mine. Sweat streamed off both of us and ran into my eyes, so much so that I had to close them.

Just when I thought I would combust, I felt his cock jerk, the coolness of his semen flooding into the inferno of my vagina.

He made a strangled sound as he continued to spew into my depths. Collapsing on top of me briefly before rolling off to the side, he said, “No offense meant, babe, but you’re just too damn hot to fuck.”

Well, at least I’d never heard that line before. “I think I’ve been cursed.” I turned onto my side so I could look at him. “I was shocking men yesterday.”

He grimaced, one hand drifting towards his groin in a reflex action.

I placed my hand on his stomach, rubbing lightly in small circles. “I’m sorry. I was really looking forward to this, too.”

“Were you now.” A deep masculine voice spoke behind me.

Gareth.

“Thought you didn’t go in for casual sex.” The bed dipped as he sat on the edge of the mattress behind me.

Twisting around, I narrowed my eyes at him. “What are you doing here?”

Gareth leaned over me, planting his palm on the bed beside my waist. “Wondering why you’re fucking a total stranger.”

“Maybe I should go,” the werewolf said.

I looked over my shoulder at him. “I’d rather you didn’t. I’m sure now that I know about the problem, I can do something to counteract it.” I smiled at him, encouraging him to believe me.

“What about the vamp?” He flicked a glance at Gareth.

“He’s leaving.” I fixed the Knight in my glare as I finished speaking.

Nick strolled in, the stain on his aura so bright I knew he’d literally pulled out of a woman to come here.

“J.C.,” he growled.

“Save it, Nick,” I snapped back at him.

The rogue sat with his back against the wall, an eyebrow raised at this new intrusion.

Nick practically thundered across the room, stopping only when he was standing next to the vampire. “Do something, Gareth.”

Odd. I crossed my arms, unable to do more since the Knight still caged me with his upper body. Then I looked between the two men, sensing a connection there that I’d never seen before.

“Just what have the two of you been up to?” I asked.

Neither one responded.

“On second thought, never mind. I’m sure I don’t want to know.”

Gareth bent low, next to my ear. “Can you not feel the connection?”

A shiver passed over me at his words. “No.”

“Only because you are not trying,” the vampire continued.

It was then that I knew they’d done something to me; that they were responsible for my body’s attacking any other male that came along. I thought again about the three days I’d lost, and wondered what else they’d done to me. Anger, deep and hot, boiled up inside of me.

“Go. I don’t know what you’ve done, but I’ll be damned if I’ll just lie here and take it,” I gritted out through clenched teeth.

I felt Nick’s power come up, and without thinking, I reached over and wrapped my hand around the werewolf’s ankle, flashing us out of the room and into the back yard.

“Picture your home.” I’d let go of his ankle, and wrapped my arms around his waist.

When he nodded, I let my magic sweep over us.

* * * *

The wolf and I appeared in his bedroom, standing next to a very large, very comfortable looking bed. I scanned the rest of the room, and found it to be decorated masculinely, and tastefully. It was obvious, even to me, that the man had money.

“Why do you run as a rogue?” I turned to him, searching his face.

He grinned, a rather boyish expression. “I’m too much of a hardhead to subjugate myself to an alpha, and I have no desire to head a pack of wolves for a living.”

“Now *that* I can see.” I still needed to come up with a counterspell to protect us during sex. Screw Nick and Gareth if they thought they would control who I chose to sleep with. Especially when both men were fucking everything that moved.

“Give me a minute,” I said when he started to gather me into his arms. I concentrated all my energy on finding anomalies within myself. Each one I came across, I first tried to destroy, or remove. When that proved useless, I surrounded it with an impenetrable shell. I figured it was only a temporary solution, but I’d work on it more, later.

When I’d covered all the territory, I grinned at the wolf. “Let’s give it a try.”

He stood looking at me for a moment. “If it’s all the same to you, I’d rather take you in my natural form.”

I gaped at him. “You mean, as a wolf?” Did I want to have sex with a wolf?

Actually, I found the idea intriguing.

"I'm more resilient in that form." The side of his mouth curved into a grin. "Harder to fry."

I laughed. "Well, okay then."

His smile widened, and turned positively lascivious. "Kneel in the center of the bed." He guided me with his hands up onto the mattress.

I knelt on my hands and knees, then glanced over at him so I could watch as he shifted. It was a fascinating process, his human form sort of melting, changing shape, and then reforming into the biggest damn wolf I'd ever seen.

"Very nice," I breathed.

He moved behind me, then raised himself over me, straddling my body. Bracing his head over my shoulder, he gripped me with his front legs. The feel of his fur against my back made my vagina contract and a wash of fluid seep out.

Then he was prodding my sex with the head of a cock that felt very human. He found my opening, and with a hunch of his body, started driving his shaft inside of me.

He thrust with powerful strokes, and I clutched handfuls of the comforter to keep from crashing to my face.

Soon I was beyond aroused and climbing towards climax. My muscles coiled tighter, and when his cock started to swell even further inside of me, I blew. He pumped furiously for several moments, the drag of his enlarging shaft driving my orgasm higher. He growled and started spewing, filling me with his seed. Then all movement ceased as he locked inside my vagina. With a howl, I felt his cock throb, and another wash of semen jetted into my core. He continued coming, off and on, for the next fifteen minutes. The eroticism of the act, the feral groans he was making, and the heat of his cum brought me with him each time.

When he finally stopped coming, he pulled himself from my depths, then shifted back to human form.

"Come on." He lifted me up in his arms and carried me into the bathroom. "I come a lot more as a wolf," he said by way of explanation. Then he proceeded to clean my crotch.

"Christ, that was wonderful." His chest rumbled with satisfaction as he carried me back to his bed.

He laid me down on the mattress, then rolled with me until I was trapped beneath him. Grinning, he flexed his hips and impaled me. My back arched, and I brought my legs up around his hips, angling my pelvis to take him deeper.

He rumbled his approval, then set to stroking me with deep, hard thrusts. "Fuck, you feel good," he breathed into my ear.

Shit! I felt my crotch start to heat, and cursed the fact it hadn't done so while he'd taken me as a wolf. I was going to kill Nick and Gareth if they'd doomed me to screwing animals.

He increased his pace, arms wrapped around my shoulders to keep me in place while he drove relentlessly inside. The burn in my vagina leveled off, at a much lower temperature than the first time. I breathed a sigh of relief, then jolted as my orgasm exploded without warning, my hips bucking against his, my sheath clenching around him like a fist.

"God, yes." He lowered his mouth to my shoulder, and grasped it between his teeth.

His strokes grew more powerful yet, wrenching me into another climax. Screaming, I felt my cunt grip his engorged shaft. Pleasure ripped through me as his cock pulsed, followed by the blast of his semen across my womb.

He flung his head back on a roar as he emptied his seed into me.

He rolled us onto our sides without withdrawing from me, draped an arm around my waist, and smiled. "I haven't had a fuck like that in a very long time."

I played with the hair on his chest, running my fingers in little figure eights. "I know I enjoyed myself." Sneaking a peek at his face, I caught sight of his grin. Not arrogant, but eminently masculine.

"Don't think I'm done with you." His voice was husky, and he rocked his hips forward, letting me know that he was hard again.

"On the contrary. I believe that you are."

Our heads snapped to the side at the intrusion. Gareth leaned against the wall, his arms crossed over his chest, a fierce scowl on his face.

"What is with that guy?" the were said, slowly stroking his length inside of me.

"I have no idea." I turned away from the vampire, and wrapped my arms around the wolf's back, hitching my leg higher over his hip.

He brought his lips to mine, and I opened for his kiss. He rolled onto his back, adjusting his hands for a firmer grip, then started driving up into me as he thrust his tongue into my mouth.

I sat up, placing my palms flat on his chest, undulating my hips in counterpoint.

I'd actually forgotten Gareth was there until a set of strong arms wrapped around me, yanked me off the werewolf, and flashed me back to my bedroom.

"God damn it, Gareth!" I screamed as he dragged me off to the bathroom.

He kept a tight hold on my wrist as he turned the water on in the shower. He remained silent, glaring at me while he adjusted the temperature. I glared back.

He managed to undress himself, switching the hand that was holding me captive when necessary. Then he shoved me under the spray and stepped in behind me.

I did nothing. Just stood there like a rock. Even when he growled, then picked up the soap and started cleaning me. His movements were jerky, impatient.

Afterwards, he barely ran a towel over me, then threw me over his shoulder and stomped over to my bed. "Fuck!" He turned, slammed out into the hall, and started opening doors until he found the guest room. Tossing me down on the bed there, he dove on top of me, lifted my legs and speared me with his cock.

"You have no idea what's going on." The skin of his face was drawn tight over his bones, a swath of color flushed across his cheeks.

I continued to glare at him as he hammered away at me, unwilling to participate, even though it was starting to feel pretty good.

He pressed my legs out, flat to the mattress, narrowed his eyes at me, then bent to my breast. His hips picked up speed as he sucked my nipple into his mouth, then sank his fangs into the soft tissue surrounding it.

I came, shattering beneath him, a wail working its way between my clenched jaws. His thrusts became erratic, frantic, then he was blasting his cum deep inside of me.

He continued to feed from me long after I thought he should have stopped. "Are you draining me?"

Another minute passed, then he sighed, slid his teeth from my flesh and licked the

wounds.

Looking down at me, I saw the anger had left his face, replaced with a hard glint of determination.

He slid his cock from my body, then stretched out beside me. “It’s a good thing I didn’t tell Nick that I knew anything about him, or he would have tried to stop me from telling you what I’m about to say.”

I rolled over onto my side, so I could see his face. “And what would that be?”

He brushed the hair out of my face and over my shoulder, then ran his hand down my arm, and left it resting on my hip.

“Right after you turned seventeen you were attacked by a demon.”

“I upped the training for this job because of that.” It had been a vicious attack that had nearly taken my life.

“What you don’t know is that you were killed.” He gave me a moment for that information to sink in.

“I was almost killed, you mean.”

“No.” His fingers rubbed my hip lightly. “You *were* killed. Dead.”

“That doesn’t make any sense.”

“Nick loved you; he went to his grandfather for help.”

I grimaced, knowing what kind of grandfather Nick had.

“In exchange for his grandfather returning your life, Nick had to pledge a decade of service to the—man.”

“Ouch.” Nick’s grandfather was a demi-god. He was old, dark, and evil.

“He—contracted—Nick’s debt to the demoness Agralaht, who commanded him to service her six daughters, virtually every night, for the duration of his servitude.” He quit talking, and waited for my response.

“That’s a hell of a story. Why didn’t Nick just tell me?”

“Because if he did, his grandfather promised to revoke the life he had returned to you.”

Fuck. I hated to admit it, but everything made sense.

Except for the newest developments, that is.

“How much longer till he’s free?” I held my breath while I waited for the answer.

“Three months.”

“Okay. That explains part of this. What about the zapping, and the heat?” I frowned at him. “And why are you guys interfering with my sex life?”

Gareth drew me closer to his body. “Do you trust me?”

“No.” Did he think I was stupid?

He laughed. “You do know what Nick is, don’t you?”

Well, I thought I did. “He told me he was a mix. Demon, mage, and demi-god.”

“Basically, his type were originally called asura, but the word has suffered through translation over the years, and people use it now for the demons that you are most familiar with.”

“And this means what to me?”

“Nick’s worried that his grandfather is going to fuck him over.” Gareth pressed down on my hip, raising his body over mine as I lay back. “He always intended to wed you one day, so he took the initial steps to bind you to him a couple of days ago. He hoped that that would keep you here should the old devil try to rip you away from him.”

He worked his way between my legs, grinning at me now as hunger flared in his eyes.

“Are you saying the binding is causing the things my body is doing? And what’s your part in all of this?” I raised my knees along his hips.

“Yeah, I think it’s his binding doing that. As for me? I’m his backup plan. He’s linked the three of us, so when the time comes, if he’s unable to stop his grandfather from doing something to you, I’m supposed to save your life.”

Then he stopped my questions with a kiss that stole my breath and blew my mind away.

* * * *

Gareth had followed me to work the next night, and I didn’t complain. Hey, the man was a legend, the best hunter on the planet, what was I going to say?

I’d been paired with Russell, and we were working the northwest sector, keeping our eyes open for the troll that Reinhold had seen wandering somewhere near the area. We’d never had much of a problem with the reclusive creatures, but every now and then they’d get a hankering for human flesh, and that’s where we came in.

We were standing on the sidewalk in front of a short strip of quaint shops when Gareth tipped his head to the side, turned slightly, then started in that direction. “I heard something,” he shot over his shoulder.

I leaned back against the wall of a bookstore that was closed for the evening and watched as Russell started after the vamp.

I stared after them until Gareth stopped and conferred with Russell, gesturing in my direction. Sighing, I leaned away from the wall, and took a step towards them.

A great, hairy arm wrapped around my throat, lifting me off the ground. I figured we’d just found our troll.

He was shoving at my hair, trying to get it out of his way, when I stabbed him in the arm with a dart.

Oddly, neither Gareth nor Russell turned in my direction. Their backs were to me, and I could tell by their postures and their gestures that they were arguing about something.

The troll doubled his effort. I snapped my left wrist sheath, flipped the blade around, then stabbed the creature in the leg. He roared, loosened the arm he had around my neck, so I tucked my chin and slid from his grasp.

I drew my sawback as I turned around. I raised my arm and brought the knife down and across his body.

The beast froze, then blinked at me. His mouth hung open, yellow teeth glistening with drool. I raised the blade again, and he lifted a hand, palm out, and waved me off, shaking his shaggy head.

I stood, torn about what to do, my arm ready to strike, as I took in the pathetic creature before me.

“Don’t,” the Knight called from behind me.

“Why not?” I yelled back, not taking my attention from the troll.

Gareth moved next to me and lowered my knife. “He’s not a troll. That’s why we’ve been having such a hard time finding him.”

“He looks like a troll.” In fact, he didn’t look like anything but a troll.

“It’s a spell.”

I studied the beast, but for the life of me I couldn’t see the spell. “I don’t see it.”

Russell joined us and stared at the creature. “I don’t see it either.”

Gareth stepped forward and placed a hand on the troll’s shoulder. “Come with me,” he told it, and they both disappeared.

I looked at Russell and found him looking at me, one brow raised in question.

Not having any idea what the Dark Knight was up to, I shrugged. “I wonder if that’s the only troll?”

“Yeah,” Russell grunted. “Gareth said there weren’t any trolls in the area, and I told him that Reinhold was never wrong.”

I couldn’t help the laugh that escaped me, only laughing harder when Russell glared.

* * * *

I was off Sunday night, bumping around the house, going a little stir crazy what with neither Nick nor Gareth around pestering me.

Sean stopped by. The wicked tilt to his lips as he scanned my body should have set my radar off. As it was, I felt my pussy twinge and my nipples tingle.

I took the time to check him out. His auburn hair was a sexy mess about his head and the lust in his dark green eyes was compelling. He wasn’t as tall as Nick, but his shoulders were broader, his chest deeper. His arms were thickly muscled, as was his stomach.

I let my eyes wander over the prominent bulge in his pants, and saw it move as I stared. I inadvertently licked my lips and he grabbed me, pinned me to the wall, then kissed me thoroughly. He didn’t get jolted.

He narrowed his eyes at me in a scowl. “Why didn’t it happen?” I was trapped against the wall, his arms on either side of my head.

“I don’t know. It seems to do what it wants.” I didn’t think my shielding was still in place, and I wasn’t going to reinforce it for him.

“Here.” He grabbed the front of my jeans, and I watched in fascination as he popped the button and unzipped them. Then he shoved his hand beneath my panties, dug his way between my legs, and started working his fingers between my labia.

“Oh.” I said in a dull monotone. “Feels so good.”

He squinted at me, but kept his hand moving. “Ah ha.” He circled my opening with his finger, then shoved it in. He pumped it in and out a few times, then added a second finger, flicking his thumb over my clit.

“Do that again.” I canted my hips forward, telling myself that this was just an experiment. “Maybe I need to be turned on or something.”

We both stared at my crotch as Sean put some effort into what he was doing.

“Ah, hell,” he grouched, then plastered his mouth over mine, working his tongue inside with a lot more skill than I would have given him credit for.

He was so good, in fact, I barely noticed when he shoved my jeans down my legs. He broke the kiss and stripped them off of me while I was still gathering my wits.

The next thing I knew, his mouth was on me, licking a trail from my anus to my clit. He sucked the bud and nipped it lightly before licking his way back down to my vagina. He repeated the process until I was moaning and pressing myself against his face, then he thrust his tongue inside of me.

He worked my vagina for several minutes, then returned to my clit. The moment he suckled on the bundle of nerves I exploded. He continued, easing me through my orgasm, then bringing me down slowly.

With that wicked gleam shining in his eyes, he drew me down to the floor, released his cock, and impaled me. I slapped my hips back at him, lost in the feel of his shaft rubbing over my nerves. He angled his stroke, and I found myself racing towards the peak. A few hard thrusts later and I was shooting over the edge. I screamed, my body bucking against his, my sheath milking him. There was a warning tingle that didn't register on my brain, then Sean cried out, his entire body jerking and twitching as electricity raged from my pussy, through his cock, and into him.

His eyes rolled up in his head. I felt him coming, an endless series of bursts, filling my vagina, and trickling out. Strange, strangled sounds bubbled out of his mouth as he continued to convulse. Then his hair burst on fire, and I tried to roll him over so I could get something to put it out.

I couldn't budge him, so I uttered a quick spell, thanking God when the flames died down, sputtered, and went out. It left his hair about an inch long, with blackened ends that were crinkled and brittle.

He finally slumped over me, all movement stopped except for the heavy beating of his heart and his harsh inhalations.

"Holy shit," he muttered, finding the strength to brace himself up on his elbows. He grinned, looking absurd with his fried hair. "That was fucking awesome. Wanna do it again?"

"No!" What the hell was he thinking? "Are you insane?"

It took several minutes for me to talk Sean out of fucking me again, but he finally relented and withdrew from me.

"You've got to let me do that again sometime," he said as I tried to shove him out the door.

"Just go, will you?" I pushed on his back.

"Say yes, and I will."

"Okay, yes." I didn't mean it. In fact, I would do everything in my power to keep that from happening again.

"Later." He bent and gave me a quick kiss, then ambled off down the walk, whistling softly as he went.

Chapter Six

The next two days passed without any unusual occurrences. I'd worked Monday with Big. We ran into very little action, but he's fun to work with anyway. Tuesday I was paired with Dryden, another boring night.

Though he didn't come hunting with me those days, Gareth would show up as soon as I crawled into bed. He didn't waste any time speaking, so I had no idea what he'd been doing with his time.

Wednesday came and I realized that I hadn't seen Nick for almost a week. He hadn't even shown up for work with the team. He'd talked to Reynolds though, and the man appeared satisfied with his explanation.

Gareth's spending the nights with me, however, was messing with my head. Mostly, because I was starting to become attached to him, and I didn't see how that was going to work out in the end, any better than the relationship with Nick.

I was arming myself for the night, wondering vaguely why my mother hadn't called lately to try to fix me up, when Gareth strolled in, leaned a hip on my desk, and started watching me.

"Mind if I tag along tonight?" There was something in his tone that alerted me that tonight was different. That he was coming along for a reason.

"No, I don't mind, but it sounds like something's up. What do I need to prepare for tonight?"

"I've just got a feeling," he said, and I knew from experience that his feelings were a lot more accurate than some of our intel.

Done with my preparations, I strolled over to him. He absently pulled me between his legs. "A feeling about anything in particular?" I rested my hands on his chest.

"Remember those things that kidnapped you? It feels like that." His black eyes held a disquiet that I'd never seen before.

"You haven't been able to find out what they are, have you?"

He barely flinched, but I was looking for a response and I caught it. "Some type of demon spawn, most likely."

"Hey, Bailey," Myron called as he entered the room. "Knight."

"Myron." At least the legend had bothered to learn the names of the guys on my team.

I heard my teammate open his cabinet and rummage through his supplies. My attention was still on Gareth, waiting while he tried to work out the situation.

"Shit," the vampire cursed as he rolled to the floor with me. A blast whizzed past overhead, shattering against the far wall.

Gareth continued to roll, then swept me off the floor in a fluid movement. "God damn it." He started running with preternatural speed towards the back of the house. Another blast seared past, much closer than the last one, causing the vampire to dodge, coming hard up against the kitchen counter.

He spun away, sped straight for the door, turning his back to it at the last second. I was jolted as he came into contact with the solid wood, then we crashed through, Gareth stumbling down the back stairs before he got his balance back.

Twisting to the side, he ran flat out towards the woods that butted up against the back of my yard. Then he was flying between the trees, barely missing the trunks, the branches whipping cruelly across my flesh.

Suddenly we were in different woods, the trees much larger and further apart. He slowed to a walk, then stopped, setting me on my feet. I held my questions as I watched him sense the area around us.

He took my hand, and we appeared inside a dark stone room, an immense fireplace occupying an entire wall, the logs snapping and crackling as they burned.

I spun around, taking in the entire area. It should have been cold, but the room was filled with warmth. Panels of soft fabric lined the walls and a deep rich carpeting covered the floor. The furniture was all overstuffed, in warm earthen tones.

"Welcome to my home." Gareth's voice held a note of pride, and I couldn't blame him for it.

"It's beautiful." I smiled up at him.

He stared into my eyes, his expression turning fierce. "Christ, I need you." He pulled me tight, devouring me with his kiss. He took me down to the floor, and I didn't need any encouragement to whisk our clothes away.

"Thank God," he hissed, then dove on my nipple, his hands touching me everywhere. I reached for his cock, but he jerked away from me, jamming his way between my hips. He grabbed my ankles and brought them to his shoulders. Wrapping his arms around my thighs, he quickly speared his way in, then leaned his weight over me, forcing my feet towards my head.

Setting a brutal pace, he brought me in no time, my orgasm still rippling through me when he reached his own crisis.

Dropping my legs to the floor, he seated himself more firmly inside of me, his cock pulsing out the last of his cum.

When I came back into my head, he was grinning at me in a way that was almost giddy.

"What has gotten into you?" I asked, not sure I wanted to know the answer.

"I know what they are." He gave me a quick, hard kiss, then pulled out of me and yanked me to my feet as he stood.

I magicked our clothes back on as he dragged me down a wide hallway, not stopping until we were in the biggest kitchen I had ever seen.

He spoke in a language I didn't understand to one of the men there, then he shoved me down onto a bench at an immense wooden table. Taking a seat beside me, he didn't say anything until the man had brought over two mugs.

"Well?" I couldn't take waiting any more.

"What type of demi-god is Nick's grandfather? Or perhaps a better question would be, who is Nick's grandfather?" His eyes sparkled.

"Got me." I took a sip of the beverage, surprised at the meaty texture.

"Varuna." Gareth nodded his head like he'd said everything that needed to be said.

"So?"

"His element is the ocean and the underworld, among other things."

It was starting to come together for me. "I think I see what you're driving at. Nick's grandfather created these creatures to abduct me."

His eyes went flat. "More than just abduct you. I believe he means to torture you

before he kills you.”

“I’ve never even met the guy. Why would he want me dead?”

“Two reasons I can think of. The first, as I told you before, is the leverage having you would give him over Nick. The other would be the fact that Nick has started—wedding you. If he kills you now, before Nick can complete the wedding, it won’t kill Nick as well.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” I took another slug of the heavy ale. “So what are we going to do about it?”

Gareth stared at the table for several minutes while he thought. “We need more information before I’ll risk taking you home.” He got up, so I stood up too. He placed his hands on my shoulders. “You’ll need to stay here. This is the only place I know for certain that you are safe.”

“Will you get a hold of Reynolds for me, and let him know?”

“Don’t worry about it,” he said, and flashed out.

* * * *

I’d given myself a tour of the house, which had taken a lot longer than I’d expected. The place was huge, and castle was a more appropriate word for it than house. Along the way I ran into several people, but I couldn’t understand them and they couldn’t understand me, so I quit trying to talk to them.

Now I was back in the room with the fireplace, curled up on one end of the couch, wondering how long it would be before Gareth returned.

Fortunately it wasn’t long. I was staring into the fire, becoming rather mesmerized with the flicker of the flames, when he walked into the room.

He scanned down my body, while the tension threatened to choke me. Jumping to my feet, I grabbed his arm and dragged him down onto the couch.

“So tell me. I’ve been going nuts here with nothing to do, and nobody that speaks my language.”

He stretched, leaned back against the cushions, and grinned. I threw myself into his lap, straddled his hips, and fisted my hands in the collar of his shirt. “Spit it out, bloodsucker, or I’ll make you sorry.”

Faster than I could blink he had me flattened on my back on the seat of the couch, his body wedged between my legs. “You’ll make me sorry, huh?” He nipped my lips. “Make me pay, will you?” Rocking his erection against my mound he licked and nipped his way down my neck.

“Gareth!” I was whining, and I knew it, but I couldn’t help myself.

“Get our clothes off, and I’ll think about telling you.” He blazed a trail of heat across my throat. “If I have to take these clothes off, you’ll just have to wait.”

I spelled our clothes off, and he drove himself quickly inside of me.

“That’s better,” he said, hitching my leg a little higher along his side. He pressed his cock, all the way in, then slowly drew it out again. He repeated the process, and I lost it.

“God damn it Gareth, either fuck me or tell me what you found out.” I hissed.

“I thought you’d never ask.” He smiled, and just as he started powering his strokes, I felt the familiar rush of Nick’s magic.

It thickened in the air around us, but the swell of Gareth’s cock brushing along my vagina stole my attention. I rolled my hips to meet his pounding thrusts, gasping at the

shockwaves of pleasure he sent shooting through me.

I was close, drawing rapidly nearer to the violent release of tension that beckoned to me, when Gareth stopped, tightened his grip around me, and turned us over so that I was straddling his hips.

Confused, I blinked at him. His arms banded tightly around me so that I couldn't move.

"Why'd you..."

A hand brushed across my back, wrapping around my hip, as the couch dipped behind me. I knew it was Nick, as familiar with the feel of his magic as I was with my own. When the blunt head of his cock prodded my anus, he didn't even have to tell me to bear down, to let him in.

With one long, smooth thrust, he buried himself to the balls, then let out a breath that washed warm air over my back.

"God, I've missed you," he said, as he started stroking his way in and out of my rectum. "And thanks for not killing me."

"I don't know what you mean," I gasped.

"I pissed someone off. That troll was me." He groaned, rotated his hips, then resumed his stroke.

"Oh, God." I looked into Gareth's eyes, silently thanking him for stopping me. "I didn't even sense you."

Gareth smiled at me, letting me know it was okay, then joined Nick, moving in opposition, both men increasing the speed of their strokes as they coordinated their movements.

The Knight loosened his hold on me, and I arched back towards Nick. Gareth pinned my hips as Nick slid his arms around me and captured my breasts in his hands. He kissed a path along my neck, then nibbled on my ear. "Tell me you're mine." My skin pebbled in response to his voice.

"I'm yours," I breathed out, seeing the irony in the comment even as I said it.

Gareth grunted, slamming into me with more than usual force. "Think you could save this for another time?"

Nick laughed, the vibration of his chest against my back only sparking my desire higher. He brushed one hand down my stomach, bringing it to rest at the top of my slit.

"Come for us, love." He sank his fangs into my neck as he rubbed a tight circle over my clit.

I screamed, my inner muscles grasping their cocks, bearing down, then releasing. Nick bent over, shoving higher, harder into me, as he lowered me towards Gareth.

"Again," the Knight commanded, as he pierced the other side of my neck.

He drew my blood into his mouth, and a wall came tumbling down in my mind. Images flashed through me as my body was consumed by a fiery release of ecstasy so strong that it bordered on pain.

I'd been here before, done this before with these two men.

Nick was whispering words in his elemental language. The memory mirroring the words he was chanting inside my mind, my memory. I felt the weave and flow of magics from Nick, through me, into Gareth. A bright shiny link that tied the three of us together. Bound us, body and soul.

The Dark Knight cursed, his body bucking as his climax ripped from his balls.

Still the magic wound through us, tighter now, closing down on Nick and me. When just the two of us were encircled in the power, Nick's voice rose louder in my head. He was demanding something from me, but I didn't speak his language, didn't know what he wanted.

His energy surged, grew blindingly bright, and the barrier fell away.

"My life to yours, my heart to yours, my soul to yours. Pledge these things to me." He repeated the words, and I found myself taking up the chant.

"My life to yours," I heard myself saying, "my heart to yours, my soul to yours."

He groaned, his cock throbbing in my dark passage. "Always." His voice whispered through my mind.

"Always," I echoed.

I thought the world had ended. The light expanded outward with the speed and intensity of a nova. Pure energy shot through me, slammed into Nick, and bound us tight. When the gale subsided, we were collapsed in a heap, smashing Gareth into the cushions of the sofa, a dazed look on the legend's face.

Nick's cock pulsed one last time, and I felt the heat of his seed as it spewed into my ass.

"Fuck." Nick moaned.

Gareth blinked.

I couldn't move. "What the hell was that?"

"Christ, Nick, you didn't tell me you were going to wed her when I was fucking her," Gareth growled.

"It just happened." Nick shifted, and his cock slid out of me. "I didn't mean to bring you along for the ride."

"Tell me he didn't wed you too." I knew my eyes were wide.

Gareth chuckled. "Hardly, but I'm a little beyond linked with the two of you now."

Nick rose to his feet, easily lifting me off the vampire, drawing me into his embrace. "Only you," he whispered into the hair on top of my head.

I hugged him, at a loss for words.

* * * *

"So let me see if I've got this right." I speared another meatball and plunked it on top of my spaghetti. "Nick's grandfather has made a bunch of those creatures, and their only purpose is to capture me, torture me, and then kill me?"

"I'm sure he's got other uses for them as well, but that's the bottom line as far as we're concerned." Nick handed me a piece of garlic bread, and I dipped it into my sauce.

"How do we fight them, what weapons are most effective against them? Are they even vulnerable to the salt water mix we've got?" I was talking with my mouth full, but I found I got more accomplished if I didn't waste time with all that chewing and swallowing before I spoke.

"Enchanted blades with a high silver content. Holy items," Gareth said, using a spoon to hold against the tines of his fork while he twirled his spaghetti.

Both Nick and I stopped eating to watch him.

"What?" He caught us staring as he stuffed the forkful of food into his mouth.

"I've never seen anyone do that before," I said, looking at Nick for confirmation.

"Do what?" Gareth trapped some more strands, and lifted them towards his spoon.

“That,” Nick said. “Use a spoon.”

The vampire watched as he twirled his spaghetti, then gave us both an annoyed look. “Right.”

I dug back into my food. “What about saltwater?”

“Doesn’t work. Neither does fire. Use your magic to disintegrate them.”

“The team’s meeting us at your house in about an hour.” Nick dropped another piece of bread on my plate.

“Gee, I’m going to miss it here.” I wrinkled my nose.

“Shut up.” Gareth slanted a grin at me.

We completed the meal in silence, Gareth’s people making sure our mugs were kept full and we had plenty to eat.

I slouched back in my chair, rubbing my stomach. “That was good. Thanks.”

“We should probably get to J.C.’s and get ready for tonight.” Gareth set his mug down on the table.

“Are you sure they’re going to try for her tonight?” Nick flicked his hand and dressed himself for the evening.

“No.” He gave Nick a look, then headed out of the room “I’m just going to change clothes,” he called over his shoulder.

I raised an eyebrow at that statement, then magicked my standard work clothes on, adding the weapons I usually carried, then checking my pack to see if I had any holy water vials on me.

When I looked up, Nick was studying me. “Do you really know what we did earlier?”

“Some kind of bonding thing.” I shrugged, zipping my pack closed.

“The ultimate bonding thing.”

I glanced at him, knowing he was telling me something, hell, even thinking I knew what it was, but I didn’t want to admit it.

“Just spit it out, Nick.”

“You and I are wed. It’s stronger than mating, and way more than marriage.”

Several thoughts passed through my brain in a flash. I almost let go of my anger at his taking this step without even discussing it with me. Without ever having had an exclusive relationship with me, for that matter. But the bottom line seared across my brain and I knew, in that moment, what the most important issue was.

“Oh, Nick. Tell me you didn’t do this now just to protect me.”

“I hadn’t meant to take it this far yet. It just happened.”

“No.” I shook my head, knowing it was true. He still had two and a half months of obligation on his debt. A debt he had incurred buying back my life. If we were joined tighter than a true mating, he’d be physically unable to—service—any woman but me. “We are so screwed.”

* * * *

I paced the length of the living room, nerves jittering for the first time in my life. Not because I was scared of the bad guys. I was terrified for Nick and, I guess, myself.

Myron and Scott showed up first, took one look at Gareth, then set off for the kitchen. The others straggled in after that. There was one new addition, who I didn’t notice until Nick and the Knight suddenly glued themselves to my sides.

Following their gazes, I studied the man. He was almost as tall as Big, though not as bulky. He had rusty blond hair and sea green eyes. He canted a crooked smile at me, filled with even white teeth. Catching sight of Reynolds, I latched onto his arm as I headed for the newcomer. "Introduce me."

"Erik Dawson, this is J.C. Bailey. Bailey, Dawson."

"Did anybody scan him?" I didn't take my eyes off Dawson as I picked up on the vibe that emanated from his body. I also happened to notice the way his irises—fluctuated—after I'd been staring at him for a while.

Big, Sean, and Dryden moved into position behind the guy.

"Big did," Reynolds answered.

"How deep, Big?" I started drawing threads of power to me, ready to perform my own probe.

"I think you should take a look yourself," Dawson said, his grin wide.

Was this a trap?

"Nick, Gareth, anchor me." I felt my two men take up positions at my back, each one resting a hand on my shoulder. When I felt our bond click into place, I smiled back at the new guy. "I'll take you up on that offer."

He inclined his head, and I sent my magic in his direction. He threw his shielding wide open to me and I sped deep inside of his essence at a blinding rate.

I expected to find the enemy, or at the very least a trap.

I didn't expect to find a gift.

Reaching the very center of his being, I was flooded with the strongest, purest magic I had ever touched. Nick hissed, and nearly broke contact with me. I could actually feel Dawson shift his very energy to align more with Nick's.

"He's an Adivar," Gareth whispered in my ear, speaking of an almost mythical people that were said to offer their unparalleled magic when they perceived great injustice.

"I'm Nick's Adivar," Dawson stated.

"Why?" Try as I might, I couldn't sense any taint that would challenge his statement.

Dawson shrugged, a very human gesture. "I know more about the situation than you do."

I dropped my power. I let it snap back into me, then I bled the excess back into the earth. "Want a beer?"

Nick took a step closer to the Adivar. He reached his hand forward, palm out and brought it close to the man's chest, waving it over the surface, without making contact.

Dawson watched, then reached his own hand forward and lightly brushed Nick's arm. "Shake my hand," he said with a calm voice.

Nick froze, and I could feel the tension building inside of him. Instinctively, I stepped forward and placed my hands on Nick's waist. The moment Gareth's hand touched me, Nick dropped his palm into Dawson's hand.

I flinched, causing Gareth to jerk. But the searing power I expected never came. Instead a soothing stream of energy flowed through us, its waves undulating as it aligned itself, altered itself to our individual patterns.

Dawson broke contact. "I'll take that beer now."

The rustle of movement around us alerted me to the fact that the entire team had closed ranks around us, ready to come to our aid should it have been needed.

For the first time in a very long time, I felt the rush of emotion at what a very special group of people I belonged to.

We all moved away from each other, spreading out to various chairs about the room and the kitchen. The pizza arrived, and things fell into a more normal rhythm.

Dawson, however, became part of our little group.

Reinhold cleared his throat, and we dutifully turned our attention in his direction.

"I've got a treat for you tonight." He grinned, and it occurred to me that he rarely did that. "The imps are in town for their annual blowout."

I laughed with the others, even if it was a sick kind of joke. See, once a year the imps came en masse to the surface and had the party to end all parties. They favored drinking a kind of moonshine that, when tremendously over-imbibed, would cause them to swell to twice their normal size, often resulting in an explosion. You'd think it would be a tragic loss to their people, but they just weren't that smart. It certainly didn't stop them from doing it every year.

Our job tonight would be to keep the humans from witnessing a bunch of drunken imps, exploding or otherwise. They were always a handful, even before they started bursting and spewing their gelatinous bodies across the room.

I went to my office, grabbed the box of vinyl ponchos I had stashed there, brought it out to the living room and dropped it on the floor. "You might want to grab more than one," I told the group at large. "I went through three last year, and I could have used more."

Reynolds paired off the rest of the team, knowing that the four of us would be working together.

I was helping myself to another piece of pepperoni, watching Dawson grab a slice of deluxe.

"What?" he asked, noticing my glance, then took a big bite out his piece.

"That's got anchovies on it," I said, when I was really thinking "you guys eat pizza?" like I was some kind of rube who was watching a city slicker.

"Love 'em." He smirked as he chewed.

I didn't mean to, but my eyes dropped to his lap, and I was suitably impressed with the package behind his zipper.

He reached over and placed his finger under my chin, raising my eyes to meet his. My breath froze in my chest when I saw the hunger burning within him. "I'm not so very different from you," He said, brushing his thumb over my bottom lip.

"Let's wrap this up folks, I've got a feeling the imps are going to show up early and stay late," Reynolds barked.

* * * *

We were standing outside of the Sterns and Oar, listening to the squeaky voices that came from within.

"Now aren't you happy we followed those imps over here?" Nick said as he dropped an arm around my shoulder.

"Ecstatic," I mumbled, glancing down at my poncho to see if I should change it first. It was still relatively clean, so I led the way inside.

The Adivar's head swiveled as he took everything in at once, and I had to wonder how sheltered a life his people led if a grungy human pub filled with intoxicated imps

was such fascinating entertainment to him.

"You'll have to take care of the employees later," I told Gareth, meaning for him to selectively alter those people's memories of the events they were witnessing. As it was, I gave them a lot of credit for going about business as usual, when they'd been overrun by two-foot high blue creatures.

"One more time." The high-pitched warble of an imp caught my attention as several of the little guys around him raised their drinks and downed them in seconds.

"Heads up," I managed to get out before the leader of the bunch blew outward, showering us in gunk.

Wiping the offal out of my eyes and shaking clumps out of my hair, I couldn't help but laugh. I saw one of the other imps swelling to dangerous proportions, and just managed to scoot behind the Adivar before another volley of glop sailed our way.

Dawson grinned down at me, "I don't know about you, but I'm having a hell of a good time."

I rolled my eyes, then made my way to the bar. I asked for a scotch, neat, and threw it back as soon as I got it. Then asked the bartender for another.

"You folks look like you came prepared." He inclined his head, indicating my poncho.

"I've seen this phenomenon before," I replied, knowing that Gareth would take care of anything I said.

"Don't seem like very bright creatures." He looked thoughtfully at the imps, flinching when another one exploded. "You'd think that would hurt."

"Hey, Angus, they've found the kitchen, what do you want me to do?" A well-rounded woman around my age walked in from the back hallway.

"You've got everything put up?" Angus asked her.

"Turned the vats off too, but not before one of the buggers deep fried itself." She grimaced.

"What did that look like?" Of course I had to ask. I'd never seen one do that before.

"Like someone had gone nuts with the funnel cake batter. Blueberry." She grinned, and I was once again amazed at the resiliency of these people.

"You folks don't seem too disturbed by all this." Gareth had moved up next to me, and rested his arm on the bar.

"Well, I can't say I've ever seen any of these little guys before, but our family has known its share of fae. We still keep in touch with the pixies that lived in our yard back in Cork."

"These would be imps. I guarantee there's nothing of the fae in them." Gareth motioned for me to take a seat at the bar, then he rested against the one next to me.

Nick sat on my right while Dawson took the chair at Nick's right. We ordered a pitcher and shots, and I was thinking we could use some popcorn or nuts as we turned our backs to the bar and watched the imps.

"Incoming," Dawson shouted, and we all ducked our heads as two more of the creatures sprayed the area.

Their fellow partiers looked around the room, confused, then went back to what they were doing.

The woman came down the hallway again, and went behind the bar.

"What now, Gina?" Angus asked her, and I listened in.

“Got any idea if these things can freeze solid, and be okay when they thaw?” she asked.

I spun around to look at her. “And you’re asking because?”

“Three of them managed to get into the freezer.” Her lips twitched.

I slid a glance at Gareth, then Nick. “Why don’t you guys bring them out, and let’s see what happens?”

After the men had trooped off behind Gina, Angus came to a rest on the other side of the bar from me. “These imps, they do this often?”

“Once a year. I’m not sure what they’re reasoning is for it; to the rest of us, we consider it a kind of cosmic population control,” I told him, thinking that I’d talk to Gareth about leaving their memories alone.

The men returned, each carrying a very stiff imp. Several of the other imps noticed, and went clambering over to them. Nick stood his on top of a table, while the other two were placed on chairs.

Everyone returned to the bar, and we watched as the imps poked and prodded their frozen brethren, then grew bored with the immobile creatures.

“Should I ask how you folks know about these things? Or should I be minding my own business?” Angus had poured himself a mug of ale.

“We’re part of a team that polices the city for supernatural trouble makers.” I thought that the imp on top of the table might have twitched.

“Glad to know.” Angus refilled our pitcher.

Another imp blew, his friends cheering as gobbets blasted through their midst.

“Did that one move?” Dawson asked, and I checked the imp-cicles.

Soon the imps started to fall over, a sure sign their night was drawing to a close. All of a sudden the three frozen ones started to sizzle. It was disturbingly fascinating as they puffed and oozed like Fourth of July “snakes.” They grew to a certain height, then the foamy tube of blue bent over and squirmed its way to the floor. Once the entire mass was reduced to foam, it deflated, leaving behind nothing more than a puddle of goo.

“Now we know,” Nick said.

Half a dozen more imps exploded and several more fell down before they finally started gathering up their buddies. I could feel the gate open on the other side of the pub, and watched as they lugged the unconscious ones back to their realm.

Gareth and Nick pitched the remaining few through before the gate closed, and the room fell blessedly silent.

“Let’s clean up this mess and go home,” I said with feeling. “And Gareth?” I waited until he stood close to me. “What say we leave their memories alone. I think we’ve got some new friends here, and that never hurts.”

He nodded, and the three of us got to work while Dawson wandered around the room, looking at everything.

When the last of the glop was taken care of, I leaned up against Nick’s chest.

“I say we go to Gareth’s and get cleaned up,” Nick said as he rubbed his hand in circles on my back.

“Sure.” I didn’t care where we went as long as I could shower, and crawl into bed.

With this bunch, I should have known better.

* * * *

Nick whisked our clothes off the moment he landed us in Gareth's bathroom. Eager to be clean, I went straight to the sunken tub and jumped in. Nick followed on my heels, catching me, and drawing me into his embrace. He covered my lips with his, angling his head as he kissed me thoroughly.

"You taste of imp." He smirked.

"We all taste of imp," Gareth said as he joined us in the bath.

"I've never tasted imp before," Dawson stated, having stopped on the edge to lick his lips.

My eyes widened as I took in his physique. His chest was broad and lightly furred with fine reddish-blond hair. His waist and hips were lean, his stomach flat and ripped with muscle. A trail of hair led from just below his navel straight to a soft patch of dark red-blond hair and a long, thick cock that looked impressive even in its flaccid state.

I followed his cock as he stepped over the edge and down into the tub. When I could no longer see it, I raised my eyes to his face, and found him staring at me with the same heated desire I had seen there earlier.

I turned my face into Nick's chest, and held him tighter. The last thing I needed right now was another lover.

Nick eased me down into the water and began bathing me, and all thoughts of the Adivar left my head. Once we'd taken care of each other and dried off, Nick led me into the next room, and held the comforter back while I crawled into bed.

I fell asleep with Nick curled around my back, holding me tightly to his chest, his groin snug against my ass.

* * * *

Hands were roaming over my body. I swam up through the fog of sleep, as a finger teased my clit. "Mmmm."

Nick's lips found my shoulder, his tongue flicking out and trailing along my skin to my neck. He shifted, lifting my leg, drawing it up and over his hip, as he worked his cock into my sex.

He started stroking me slowly, his hand moving to my breast, his fingers pinching and twisting my nipple. I arched backwards, taking him deeper, my eyes opening as a male groan sounded in front of me.

Gareth was between Dawson's thighs on the other side of the bed, the two men kissing with a savage passion that took my breath away. I felt my pussy clench as the Adivar raised his knees and crossed his muscular legs over the vampire's back.

I heard Nick's breathing deepen as Gareth braced his cock against Dawson's anus, then flexed his hips and drove himself all the way in.

Dawson's head went back, and a long, low groan issued from his throat. Nick's cock jerked inside of me, his strokes suddenly erratic, frantic.

The Knight drove relentlessly into the other man's ass, the sounds of their pleasure loud in the stillness of the night.

Nick doubled his effort, almost pacing the vampire as he battered his way inside of me.

I could tell that the two men we were watching were very close to coming, and it sent me reeling over the edge. I screamed, lights flashing behind my eyes as Nick powered on, nearing his own culmination.

When I came back into my head, Gareth was bending low over Dawson, his fangs glinting, then disappearing into the other man's neck. Dawson cried out, his body bucking as the scent of his release filled the air.

Nick pierced my flesh with his own fangs, and I shot off into another climax as he drew my blood into his mouth.

Gareth stilled, followed shortly by a tightening of Nick's body. Then the two men were thrusting, coming, thrusting, the Knight warming the depths of Dawson's ass while Nick filled my cunt.

Sated beyond belief, I fell back to sleep with Nick's cock still buried deep inside of me.

* * * *

The smell of coffee woke me the next afternoon. I stretched, and let Nick roll me over so I was facing him.

"Morning." We were alone in bed, but the thought of the two men together sent a shiver through me.

Nick kissed me, taking it from there until we were both crying out our ecstasy.

We took a quick shower together, then magicked our clothes on, my stomach rumbling, letting me know it had been a while since I'd last eaten.

We found the other two men in the kitchen, laying out a feast.

Gareth came to me, a wry grin on his face as he took me in his arms and kissed me.

"Sleep well?" He squeezed the cheeks of my ass, then let me go.

"Very." I wondered if he knew I wanted to see him and Dawson fuck each other again.

I took a seat at the table and we all dug in.

There was a pot roast and gravy, with potatoes and carrots, a sweet multi-grain bread, sliced apples, oranges, and pineapple.

Gareth had served a mellow red wine with the meal, and I found myself enjoying more than one glass of it.

"You going to tell her?" Gareth asked, and I looked up to see who he was speaking to.

His gaze was leveled on Nick. When I raised my eyebrow at him, he shrugged. "It's nothing."

"His grandfather has been summoning him, and he's been ignoring it," Gareth said.

"Keep ignoring it." I narrowed my eyes at him, knowing he'd do whatever he thought was necessary. "He just wants to trap you or hurt you, anyway."

"That's what I intend to do," Nick stated, helping himself to more meat.

"So what's the game plan today?" I slouched down in my seat, comfortably full.

"I'm going to check on some sources, and see if I can find out what Varuna's creatures are up to," Gareth said.

"I'd like to stop by my place and pick up the new knives."

I gaped at Nick, wondering if he'd lost his mind.

"You're kidding. Your grandfather probably has traps set up at your place," I fumed.

"I need to pick up that new sawback." The planes of his face were starting to stand out as his temper rose.

“Have someone pick it up for you.” I just knew he was going to try something without me. “Gareth, tell him.” I tried to draw the vampire into the disagreement.

“He’s a grown man, honey. If he wants to put himself in danger that’s his choice,” the Knight stated.

“Dawson. You’re not going to let him do this, are you?”

“I’m not his keeper, J.C.” The Adivar glared at Nick, though. “Just remember, Asura, you die, so does she.” He flicked his gaze at me, and a shiver went down my spine.

Chapter Seven

I'd torn apart my Glock and was bitching under my breath about men in general, and Nick in particular. All four of us had headed to my house after we'd finished eating, then Gareth and Nick had taken off on their own agendas.

The Adivar was digging through my cabinet, examining every single item he came across with such interest it was starting to make me a little crazy.

"What, you've never seen a dart before?" I snapped at him.

He just glanced at me over his shoulder with a serene smile plastered on his face, then went back to examining something else.

Todd strolled in, taking a wide path around where I sat.

"I'm not going to attack you," I snarled.

"Hey, I'm not risking any more body parts around you." He went to his drawer. "Anyone hear from Reinhold today?"

"I just got here." Shit. I hadn't even checked my answering machine.

Setting the pieces of the gun aside, I trotted into my kitchen, almost choking when I saw there were fourteen messages.

Nine of them were from my mother. She was pretty pissed off-sounding by the last one. Seems I was letting a really good catch get away. With my luck it would be one of those water creatures.

Of the remaining five, three were hang-ups. One was from Reynolds, telling me that the meeting had been moved to Evan's place tonight. The last one was just plain odd.

"Midnight tonight, at Pete the Wrapper's."

I didn't recognize the voice, but it sounded male. I played it again, but couldn't pick up anything that would clue me in to the identity of the caller.

I jumped when I felt Dawson's breath wash across the side of my neck, feathering my hair. I hadn't heard him come into the room, let alone get so close to me.

"Eep!" I hated when I made that sound.

"Where's this Pete's place?" he asked, an annoying half-smile on his face.

"Pete the Wrapper is the bartender at Flannery's, one of the college bars." Calling the place his made no sense to me. Pete was a harmless enough guy, but he tended to cling to anything female, and was hard to peel off.

"I see." Dawson said, his eyelids lowering over his eyes in a sexy dip.

It occurred to me that he was thinking about kissing me, and I didn't want that to happen. I started easing my way to the side when he dropped his hands to the counter behind me, caging me between his arms.

He lowered his face until his lips were nearly touching mine. "Do you know how long it's been since I've tasted a woman?"

"Look, I'm already taken." My body was responding to his nearness, though.

"Yes," he whispered, and closed the distance between us.

I gasped as he ate at my mouth. His lips were moist and firm; his tongue slid between my lips to explore the inside my mouth. He angled his head, his arms coming around me as he deepened his exploration.

He rocked his hips against me, the hard length of his arousal heating my stomach,

calling moisture to my core.

"God, I want you," he hissed as he traced a path along my jaw with his lips.

I had enough sense left to think of Nick. "I think Nick would object."

He nipped the lobe of my ear, his breath hot on the side of my neck, arousing me further. "I know he wouldn't."

I stopped my hands, which had started their own journey over the muscles of his back. "Yeah, right."

"On the contrary." He licked the tender spot below my ear. "He owes both your lives to me. He won't mind if I find some pleasure in your body."

My nipples hardened; Dawson growled low in his chest in response. Moving to the place on my neck where it met my shoulder, he drew the flesh between his teeth, and sucked.

"Ahh." I leaned my head back, my breasts pressing harder into his chest.

"Grrr." He dug his cock into my stomach, his fingers clenching around my hips.

Breaking away from me, he stared at me with eyes glazed with lust. "Bedroom."

I hesitated a moment, before I took his hand, and led him down the hallway.

Todd stepped out of the office, took one look at us, and saluted Dawson. "You're a braver man than I."

The Adivar gave him a funny look, but I dragged him past my teammate before he could question him.

We entered my room, and he shut the door behind him firmly. I backed away from him, aroused, but unsure if I should be. Wondering how Nick would really feel if I let this man have me.

He prowled towards me, a loose, easy stride that was backed by a powerful tension. He waved his hand, and our clothes disappeared, his eyes gleaming as he scanned down my body. His ruddy shaft stood out from his body, pointing towards the ceiling, a bead of pre-cum glistening on its tip.

"On the bed," he growled.

I climbed up and scooted into the center of the mattress, unable to tear my eyes away from him the entire time. He looked larger, deadlier, than he ever had before, his aura roiling like a thundercloud around him.

With a fluid grace, he crawled after me, pressing my legs apart as he advanced. His breath washed over my sex, and I was lost.

I heard him inhale, followed by a rumbling sound vibrating in his chest. Then I felt the rough, wet texture of his tongue as he licked my slit from anus to clit. I jolted off of the bed, when he flicked the tip of his tongue across the tightened bud.

He dropped an arm over my abdomen and pinned me down as he buried his face deeper into my cunt and started sucking and licking me with fervor. I was reduced to whimpers before he circled my clit with his lips and started suckling.

My climax slammed hard and fast into me, wrenching a scream from my throat as I shuddered against his mouth. He eased me through it, then ran his tongue down to my vagina, and lapped at the cream that had flooded out of me.

"Fuck me, you taste like heaven." He wiped his face on the blanket, then levered himself over me. Dropping lower, he wrapped his arms around my shoulders, his expression intent, the fires of lust burning bright in his eyes.

Then he attacked my mouth with unbridled passion, his teeth nipping, his tongue

thrusting. I raised my knees on either side of his waist, desperate to feel the hardness of his shaft against my vulva.

I felt him arch back, the head of his penis dragging down between my lips, then he hunched forward, and drove his entire length to the back of my vagina in one serious thrust.

He set up an altering drive. Fast and hard, then slow and easy. I couldn't keep up with the pattern, but the results were driving me wild. He'd bring me close, so close, then back away.

"Fuck me," he said as he ground his pelvis against mine, almost sending me over. "You're a vessel."

"What?" Was that a compliment?

He slowed to a crawling pace, gliding in slowly, drawing out with even less haste.

"You're a rare woman." There was a hint of awe in his voice. "Most beings can only impregnate someone with a similar magic to their own. But every now and then someone comes along that can breed with anyone, anything. Males are called patrons, females vessels."

"Huh." Since I wasn't planning on having any kids right now, I concentrated on getting him moving.

He sped up, but every time I'd come close, he'd ease off again. I finally snapped.

"Fuck me," I begged. "Let me come."

His grin was pure sin, then the thunderstorm broke around him. Flashes of lightning shot off his body as he powered his cock in and out of me. An electrical hum invaded me from my groin, expanding to cover my entire being.

I blew apart, screaming his name as the lightning came faster and faster. I went over again, much harder, my inner muscles vising down on his cock.

His eyes began to glow, the light spreading, growing. His face was harsh with strain, wild with power as he neared his own completion. Muscles tensed, he pounded into me, then he cursed. His cock heaved inside my sheath as he blasted his seed against my womb.

We trembled and writhed together for several moments before his balls ran dry.

Dropping his head next to mine, I could hear the breath rasping in his chest.

"Christ, that was incredible." He turned his head, and kissed my cheek.

"Yeah." I didn't have the wits to say more.

Suddenly, every muscle in his body went rigid.

I took a breath to ask him about it, and he vanished.

* * * *

What the hell? I sent my senses throughout the house, not finding him, or any other living creature.

I crawled out of bed, my nerves jangling, and I didn't even know why.

Showering quickly, I threw on my black jeans and a bronze T-shirt, grabbed my socks and boots, and headed for the kitchen.

After starting some coffee going, I finished dressing, raking my hands through my hair and shaking it out to dry. Already edgy, the feeling only grew, so I started drawing threads of power to me, preparing myself in case I needed to call on my element.

Sean strolled in, and I blinked at him, surprised to see how clearly his aura shone

around him. It was solid and true, and a little of the tension I felt eased out of me.

"Grab a mug, and join me at the table," I told him, knowing something was coming my way.

"What's up?" he asked, his eyes drifting to my boobs, and staying there.

"Something's coming."

"Not yet." He leered at my chest.

"Sean." I thumped my palm on the top of the table to get his attention. "I'm serious. Don't you feel it?"

He flicked his eyes to my face, then I saw his aura flex as he verified my claim.

"Fuck." He stood. "I don't know what it is, but it's big. Let's go to the office."

I refilled my mug, then tagged along behind him as we went to the armory. We both headed to our cabinets, intent on arming ourselves for any eventuality.

I strapped my Colt throwers on, then dug out my Taurus, added the Glock and the holsters for both. After clipping them on, I slung my pack around my waist, clasping my darts over top of it. Next came my Dieter/Ray fixed blade, then I strapped on my back sheath, and unwrapped my new Benchmade sawback, thankful that I'd already taken the time to enchant it.

I strapped my wrist sheaths on last, checked the action on both, and patted the center of my chest, assuring myself the blade I wore there was still in place.

I grabbed more vials of holy water than I did the salt mix. Saw the new batch of salve, and tossed a jar of it to Sean. I smeared a swath of the gunk across my upper lip, working it into the skin, then I replaced the cap and dropped it into my pack.

Almost as an afterthought, I grabbed four crosses out of the drawer. Gave two to Sean, hung one from a belt loop, and pulled the other over my head.

"Who do you want to call in?" Sean asked me, his hand on the phone.

"Big, Brad, and Scott. Anyone else you want to add." I leaned a hip against the desk while he phoned.

He cursed, and held the phone out to me.

At first all I heard was static, then a chill ran through me when a deep, thoroughly evil laugh blasted through the earpiece.

"Fuck." I dropped the phone on its base and crossed my arms.

"Let's go into your back yard," he said, already heading for the door.

"Good idea." I hurried to catch up to him, the disturbance around us growing thicker at an alarming rate.

We'd just made it outside when the wind picked up, and an electrical charge filled the air.

"They're here." Sean said, drawing his short sword, his free hand already weaving a spell.

I turned so that we stood back-to-back, dead center in the middle of the yard. I palmed my throwers, shifting my weight to the balls of my feet, opening my senses wide.

Then my world went insane.

Two dozen of the seven-foot tall creatures poured out of three gates that opened at the edges of the yard. I sent my knives off in quick succession, sucking power out of the earth at the same time, and visualizing a nova of energy that I sent blasting outwards towards my enemy.

Sean's magic was so close to mine, that I could feel his spells as he cast them, our

energies combining, growing, as we continued our assault.

The demons kept coming, those that didn't fall to our magic drawing ever nearer, while still more of the beasts stepped out into the yard from the gates. I heard Sean grunt, but couldn't take my eyes off the creatures before me.

Willing more power into my hands, I saw myself as an open pipe that was funneling the very soul of the earth into the darkness that was advancing. For a moment it held, the beasts coming to a halt, their magic sizzling impotently against the wall I'd created.

But as more and more of them gathered, they inched forward, ever forward.

Nick, Gareth, Dawson. I threw everything I had into the call. Then I drew my Benchmark, using it in place of my hand to direct my powers.

A blast shattered too close to my left shoulder, and I felt the sting as it ripped through my shirt and scorched my flesh. Sean grunted again, and I knew he'd been hit as well.

"Defense," I said, turning my magic inward, drawing it around the two of us in a protective shell. I anchored us to the ground, having found out the hard way that even if the demons couldn't breach my protection, they could snag the entire package, and take me away anyhow.

They surged forward in a black, seething wall of fury, relentlessly pounding away at our shields. I felt Sean's energy weakening, and knew that my strength would start to falter soon.

The first ones came within range of my knife. I screamed, and slashed my way through their bodies like a berserker. Sean stumbled against my back, but I was too far gone, my arm steady even at the contact.

But I didn't have enough. Not enough energy, not enough arms. I'd taken my dagger in my left hand, and even working both blades, I was getting hit, hurt. My energies were draining faster and faster. And still they came.

Sean crumpled to the ground behind me, and all I could do was pray he wasn't dead. His dropping left my back completely open, and it was all I could do to keep the horde from simply swarming over me.

I could no longer feel my arms, then my shoulders, even as my blades flew and found their targets. My vision started darkening at the edges, and I knew my time was running out.

I would go down fighting. That's how I'd always planned it, should I ever face the day. That's how I was implementing it, now that that day had arrived.

By force of will alone, I kept my knives moving. Dropping my enemy as my vision grayed. Not feeling their strikes against my arms, my back. Knowing nothing but to stay on my feet, and keep fighting.

Then my sight turned from gray to black, and the ground beneath my feet fell away.

Nick! I shouted into the darkness, and then I was gone.

* * * *

"We have the vessel." The voice was a deep rumble that bounced painfully around inside my skull.

"Understood." The sounds of movement, the slosh of water.

I couldn't open my eyes, and I wasn't sure if I wanted to. I'd been here before, or somewhere very like this place.

The image of the room flashed into my brain. Carved out of the rock, the floors wet with an inch or so of saltwater. The tall, black creature with the spiky head.

At least I didn't hear the snuffling sound of its pet. Small comfort.

The wet slap of footsteps grew closer, then a cool, damp hand touched my face.

"You are awake." Just a statement, but I noticed that it didn't hurt as bad to hear him speak.

Then his hands were working my shirt up over my head, and my jeans off my hips. I almost laughed, thinking he meant to fuck me.

Later, I wished that was all he'd intended as I was strapped to a wall, spread-eagled, the sound of countless others shifting through the room.

I jerked as water was dumped over my head, drenching my hair. Then my face was roughly scrubbed with a coarse cloth. It freed my eyes, and I opened them slowly, pausing when they were only slits as the sight before me took my breath away.

There were hundreds of them, crammed side by side, and every last one of them was looking at me. One of the creatures moved to stand before me as a grinding sound filled the air. My legs were raised and spread painfully wide as my ass levered away from the wall. The creature in front of me grinned. His arm moved, drawing my eyes downward. He was stroking the biggest cock I'd ever seen.

"Each and every one of us in this room is going to fuck you," he said, his voice bouncing off the walls.

"Unconsciousness won't save you from this fate, nor will death. Know that, if you know nothing else." He stepped towards me, pre-cum casting a shine over the head of his dick. "First we'll fuck you, then we'll start impregnating you.

"It is time to begin," he shouted, then he placed his cock at my opening, and with powerful thrusts of his hips, he drove his way in.

* * * *

A roar filled the air. Suddenly the demon between my legs was jerked away from me, and sent flying into the sea of others.

The entire mass surged forward and a man braced himself in front of me. It was Dawson. He raised his arms wide, and started chanting in a different language.

The darker power of the creatures sparked in the air as they started firing off blasts at him. The two powers clashed with a hiss and sizzle, and the distinct scent of ozone.

Power swelled around Dawson, and I squinted harder as he blazed inside the energy he'd called forth. Then he swept his arms together, and the magic shot away from him in a tidal wave, engulfing all in its path.

Within moments, every last creature in the room was gone.

"Touch these people again, Varuna, and I come for you!" he yelled.

Then he spun around and came to me, gently touching the side of my face.

Just like that, he'd released me from my bonds, and brought me home.

I pulled him into a hug. "Thank you," I said, my voice muffled against his chest.

He hugged me back, then eased me from his body, and turned me towards my bed.

"He needs you."

Nick was lying there, far too pale and still.

I flew to his side, touching his face, his hand. He was cool to the touch, and not responding.

“What happened to him?” I glanced over my shoulder at the Adivar.

“He went in your place to Pete the Wrapper’s. He’ll have to tell you the details of that encounter, when he can. Just know that he’s in there, somewhere, but you’re the only one who can bring him out again.”

“Gareth? Sean?” Had we lost anyone?

“They’re fine,” he assured me.

I turned back to Nick, and curled up against his side.

“Oh God, Nick, I don’t know how to help you.” But the glimmer of an idea was starting to form in my head.

Instead of trying to reach inside of Nick, I delved into myself. I searched as I had before for anomalies, finding all the places he had touched, changed with his bonding. Using my earth magic, I linked these sites together as I went, forming a chain of sorts.

When I had all the spots connected, I fed my magic through them. I felt them come alive, with a crackle of energy that had nothing to do with me. The separate sections started migrating towards each other, joining, melding when they met.

I relaxed as I let the process run its course, thinking back to the night that Nick first made love to me, all those years ago. He’d said something then, something that had stayed in my mind ever since.

“Of all the people I have ever met, or will ever meet, there is only one that I’d trust completely with my life. You. Only you.”

As the mass I’d linked grew larger, Nick’s essence became stronger. He’d literally trusted me with his life, left enough pieces of himself imbedded in my soul, to bring him back to us now. No wonder my body had attacked other men. The part that was Nick was simply pissed, and defending what was his.

Laughing, I placed my hand on his forehead, as I felt the last bit merge. Then, in a heady rush of power, the mass shot out of me, through my hand, and into Nick.

His body shuddered, then he opened his eyes and turned to look at me. A smile spread slowly across his face. “Only you.”

Then he reached for me, and I dove into his arms.

Epilogue

The sun was shining brightly and a light breeze teased the ends of my hair as I faced the target across the back yard. My new throwing knives had come in, and I was giving them a trial run using colored water to show me when and where the liquid was dispersed after penetration.

Nick strolled out the back door with the phone to his ear, the light bringing out golden highlights in his dark brown hair, and my heart hitched in my chest at the beauty of it, of him. He glanced up at me, and flashed his teeth in a welcoming smile. My heart turned over as the love I felt for him filled me.

"It's your mom." He held the phone out in my direction, his eyes sparkling with amusement.

I grabbed the phone, rolling my eyes. "Hi, Mom."

"J.C., what in the world are you doing spending so much time with that Corellis boy? I've told you before he's a bad one; only one thing on that boy's mind and it isn't about making an honest woman of you."

I was tempted to tell her I'd slept with the vampire she'd fixed me up with, too. Or that I'd had sex with both of them at the same time.

"I know you didn't call just to warn me off of Nick." I winked at him, wondering what all she'd said to him when he'd answered the phone.

"Well, I was calling to tell you to be here for dinner at six tonight."

I had to put a stop to this. I put my hand over the mouthpiece so she wouldn't hear me. "Nick, we've got to tell my parents something. Mom's got another date lined up for me tonight."

The evil grin that spread across his face set off alarms in my head. "I know."

"That's it? You know? What's that supposed to mean? What am I supposed to tell her?" I glared at him, wondering what he was up to now.

"Tell her you'll be there."

I wanted to wipe that annoying smirk off his face.

"Uh, mom? I'll see you then." I started for the kitchen.

"Wear something pretty," my mom said before she hung up.

"Wear something pretty," I muttered under my breath as I stomped up the stairs and through the door. "I'll wear something pretty, all right," I snarled as I slammed the phone down and continued through the house to my bedroom.

I threw open the closet doors and rifled through the items until I found what I was looking for. It was the sluttiest dress I owned, the neckline dipping almost to my navel, the hem so short if I wasn't careful it would roll to my waist when I sat down.

I found a pair of four-inch heels. I hated the things because they hurt and were hard to walk in, but I had a point to make. I laid the items on the dresser and added a thong and thigh highs.

Happy with my selection, I went back outside to take out some of my aggravation on the target, and maybe Nick's ass.

Lucky for him, he kept his mouth shut as I fired blade after blade into the packed paper, until my arms were buzzing from the abuse.

Gathering up the set, I rested a moment with my hands on my knees, my head hanging down, my breath sawing in and out of my lungs. Sweat ran freely down my face, and I didn't have the energy to wipe it away.

I felt much better.

Ignoring Nick, I walked past him into the house, and headed for the shower.

He joined me in there, and soon I found the two of us rolling around in bed, all hands and lips and tongues as we attacked each other in a frenzy of passion.

"Nick," I moaned when he entered me.

He sucked and nipped at my neck as he dug his hands under my ass. He stabbed his cock into me, then ground his pelvis against mine. My sheath clenched, and he lost control, hammering away at me with a powerful, brutal force that sent me over the edge, and kept me there.

Screaming, I came, and came again, my pussy grasping his shaft, sucking him in. He sank his fangs into my shoulder, his cock swelled, then a white light detonated in my head as he started spewing his seed inside of me.

When the tremors faded, he licked the wounds closed where he'd bitten me, then took my mouth in a slow, deep kiss. When he raised his head from mine he looked down at me with those warm brown eyes, and I felt the urge to tell him I loved him.

"You'd better get ready. You wouldn't want to keep your date waiting." His lips twitched as he suppressed a smile.

"You are such an ass." I shoved at his shoulder, trying to get him off of me.

He did smile then, chuckling softly as he slid his cock out of me and moved off the bed.

I focused on getting myself ready, eyeballing the outfit when I was fully dressed, wondering if I really wanted to go through with the look after all. I decided it would be worth it, just for the look on Nick's face, and the thought of it driving him nuts while I was gone this evening.

I did up my hair and makeup, added a hint of perfume, then strolled casually out into the living room.

Nick's eyes lit up when he saw me. He looked rather tasty himself in black jeans and a soft navy shirt. He circled around behind me, and when he came back to the front, I noticed the bulge that was pressing against his zipper.

"Guess I'd better get going." I smiled at him.

"Uh huh." His eyes were glued to my cleavage.

Shaking my head, I grabbed my keys from their peg above the counter, and opened the door.

"Don't wait up for me." My smile widened, then I turned and trotted into the garage.

He followed me. When we neared the pickup, he snatched the keys out of my hand, popped the passenger door open, and motioned for me to get in.

I raised an eyebrow at him, but didn't argue. He shut the door, then went around and climbed into the driver's seat.

"What are you doing?" I asked as he backed out and turned the vehicle into the street.

"Coming with you." He shifted into drive.

"Excuse me?" I could see it now. My parents were going to shit.

"I'm not about to let my wife go on a date without me."

"I'm not your wife." I snapped. No, I was more than that.

"You've got a point." He turned the corner, glanced over at me, a thoughtful look on his face. "We can take care of that tomorrow."

"What?"

"We can go to the justice tomorrow."

How romantic.

"I'll have to think about it." I looked out my window, wondering how it was I'd gotten myself into this stupid conversation.

"J.C.," Nick said, the warning evident in his voice. "As far as my family is concerned we're already married. As far as I'm concerned you are very definitely my wife."

"I know." I did. "But my parents think I'm only using you for sex."

"Now there's a new one." He snorted. "Let me see if I've got this right. They're okay with your fucking me, but God forbid you should marry me?"

"They're not real happy that I'm fucking you, either."

"Promises to be an interesting night," he said as he pulled into my parents' driveway and put the car in park.

He caught the back of my head before I got out, and pulled me to him for a kiss. "I love you," he whispered when he let me go.

"I love you too, Nick," I replied.

He placed his hand in the middle of my back as we walked up the path to the front door. I rang the bell, then went in, calling out a 'hello' as I did so.

Mom came trotting out of the kitchen, then froze as she caught sight of Nick.

"Oh. This won't do, this won't do at all." She turned, and disappeared into my father's study, the two of them coming out moments later.

Dad scowled at Nick. "Corellis, come with me." Then he went back into his sanctuary.

Nick shrugged, and ambled after him.

"J.C.," my mother called out, sounding impatient, so I hustled into the kitchen, preparing myself for a load of grief.

She didn't disappoint me. "How could you? I have a perfectly nice young man coming over to meet you, and you bring that man along? He'll just have to go, that's all there is to it."

"I don't think he will, Mom." I checked out the pots on the stove, happy to see a dish of apple crisp cooling on the side.

"You're father is taking care of that right now," she huffed.

I opened the fridge, found a bottle of white wine, and poured myself a big glass of the stuff.

Dad poked his head through the door. "He's here." Then he disappeared.

Mom, looking flustered, grabbed my arm, and dragged me out to the living room to meet my date, never once commenting on my outfit. Guess I couldn't compete with the Nick factor.

The guy she'd roped into this wasn't too bad to look at, though I was as tall as he was, in my heels. He had steel gray hair, cut short and parted on the side. Gray eyes under black eyebrows, eyes that widened as he took in my outfit. His body was beefy, but not flabby, a small bulge appearing in the front of his pants as I watched.

“Martin Bekin, I’d like you to meet my daughter J.C.,” Mom cooed. “J.C., this is Martin, he’s just taken over as production manager at Markson Products.”

“Hi.” I wanted to get back to my wine.

He grinned at me, and I noticed one of his eyeteeth was crooked.

Mom cast furtive looks at Dad’s study, then ushered Martin to the dining room and had him sit.

I helped her load the food onto the table, noticing that Martin had tucked his napkin into the top of his shirt.

“Go see what’s keeping your father,” she hissed at me under her breath.

“Dinner,” I said as I opened the door, and found the two men watching a motorcycle race on TV.

Nick got up and bussed my forehead. “Good, I’m hungry.” He set off towards the other room.

Dad followed more slowly. “Your mother is going to kill you.” His expression was grim.

“We were going to tell you,” I insisted.

The doorbell rang as we were passing through, and Dad veered off to answer it. I kept going, dreading what I’d find in the dining room.

Nick sat across from Martin, the table bare of any plate or silverware in front of him. I shot a look at Mom, then got a service out.

Dad wandered in, followed by Gareth and Dawson. I gaped at the two men as I grabbed additional place settings for them. By the time I’d laid everything out, Dawson was sitting next to Martin, with Gareth beside him, closest to mom. I sat next to Nick, nowhere near my supposed date.

“Well,” Mom said.

I made introductions while her face turned increasingly red.

“What brings the two of you here?” I asked Gareth.

“Nothing that can’t wait until after dinner,” he replied.

I started the potatoes, and for the next several minutes the food was passed, and the tension in the air rose.

“Martin,” my father started after he’d taken a healthy slug of his scotch, “sorry to tell you, but I just found out tonight that my daughter is—engaged—to Mr. Corellis.”

Mom issued a half-strangled “eek.”

Martin shot dad a look, then slid a glance at Mom, his gaze coming to rest on me.

“Sorry to hear that.” His eyes dropped to my chest.

Nick dropped his hand on my thigh, and squeezed. My pussy twinged in response.

“You’re what?” Mom blurted.

“Engaged to Nick,” I told her, hiding my smile behind the rim of my glass.

Nick slid his hand higher, teasing his fingers under the hem of my dress.

“But, but...” she spluttered, “wouldn’t you rather have someone like Martin, or Gareth?” She grabbed the vampire by the arm, drawing him closer to the table. “Didn’t the two of you get along?” She was practically screeching.

Gareth winked at me. “I enjoyed the hell out of her in bed, and she tastes like heaven, but I’m not the marrying kind.” He gave Mom a genuinely serious look.

She blinked at him. Then blinked some more while her mouth worked but no sounds came out. “You slept with her?”

“Of course.” He nodded solemnly.

“So did I,” Dawson threw in. “I’ve got to agree with Gareth. She’s a wild one in bed.”

“And out of it.” Gareth shared a look with the other man that spoke volumes.

Mom fell out of her chair in a dead faint.

Martin groaned. “Damn, I should have taken her up on her offer when she asked me to dinner a month ago.”

Dad finished his drink, left the room, came back with the bottle, and four additional glasses. He filled them all up, including his own, then passed them out to the men.

I stared down at mom where she lay sprawled on the carpet. “Shouldn’t you do something with her?” I asked my father.

“Why?” He raised his glass in a toast to the room in general. “Not that I really want to know,” he said after he’d taken another sip, “but did you really sleep with J.C.?” He asked Gareth and Dawson.

“Yes,” they answered in unison.

“In fact, Nick and I have taken her together,” the Knight supplied.

“Damn,” Martin muttered.

“More than I needed to know.” Dad looked decidedly uncomfortable.

“I’m her link, Bob,” Gareth said, relenting.

“Oh.” Dad did one of those slow blinks. “I keep forgetting—about stuff,” he finished lamely.

Mom groaned, and we all looked in her direction.

“At the same time?” Martin asked the vampire.

“Yes.” Gareth grinned wickedly, and winked at the man.

Nick feathered his fingers over my pussy, and I squeaked, and jerked in my seat. Everyone looked at me.

“Damn,” Martin repeated, his breathing decidedly elevated.

Dad studied his food.

Nick was working his way under the side of my panties, and I couldn’t figure out a way to stop him without drawing even more attention to myself. He traced a path between my labia, then sank a finger into my vagina.

I slugged my wine.

Mom sat up, and everyone turned to look. “Nick Corellis, take your hand out of my daughter’s underpants.”

He stroked me a few times before he complied, brushing over my clit on his way out. I closed my eyes and wished the evening was over.

Gareth rose, and helped mom back into her chair, patting her head like you would a child’s. “There, there, everything will work out.”

We finished the meal without further incident or revelation. It came as no surprise when Mom didn’t serve dessert.

Dad saw Martin out, the man giving me one long, hot look before he left. Then he returned to the dining room where we all sat sipping our drinks. Mom was on her second glass of wine by this time, her eyes glancing off the men, then me.

As soon as Dad sat back down again, Mom went off. “What the hell are you doing, J.C., having sex with all these men?”

Either I’d had enough to drink, or I’d just had enough. “Enjoying myself?”

Her mouth flapped, and her eyelids fluttered, but she didn't faint.

"Cora," Dad warned, "she's a grown woman."

She glared at him, snapping her mouth shut.

Nick cleared his throat and leaned forward, looking at Mom, then Dad. "See, it happened this way..." Then he proceeded to summarize the events of the past few weeks.

"So you're already wed?" Tears trembled at the edges of Mom's eyes.

"Yes," Nick told her, softly.

"Welcome to the family, son." Dad thrust his hand out, and Nick smiled as he shook it.

"I insist you two get married the human way." Mom's tears dried up, and she straightened her back.

"What do you say?" Nick looked down at me, his mouth quirking in a grin. "Will you marry me?"

I studied him, letting my eyes roam down his body to his lap. Then I took a moment to scan Gareth and Dawson. "Any other takers?"

"I'd take the honeymoon, but I'll pass on the wedding," Gareth said.

"I'm with him." Dawson tipped his head in the vampire's direction.

I looked back at Nick. "Guess you're it, then." I leaned in for a kiss, but he stopped me.

"Was that a yes? You're going to marry me? Just me?"

A smile spread across my face as my heart skipped a beat. My mouth went dry as I looked into eyes that I'd seen so many times above me filled with passion, and so much more. I loved this man, and I wanted nothing more than to spend the rest of my life letting him know how much.

"Yes," I whispered, and then louder, "only you."

The End

About the Author:

Lisa Andel was born in Iowa City, Iowa. When in grade school, her family moved to Illinois, where she found she had a knack for telling stories.

Most of them got her into trouble.

It wasn't until she had lived in Ohio for several years before she finally found a constructive outlet for her creativity.

She lives with her lover, two mentally challenged dogs, and an ever-changing number of freshwater fish.

Lisa writes contemporary erotic romance that features vampires, shapeshifters, dragons, demons, sorcerers, gods, and beings that you've never dreamed of before. You'll even find some humans. Visit her online at www.lisaandel.com

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In Ashley, Illinois the answer is false. Only demons intent on harming humans deserve to die. That's a good thing, too, since their most powerful hunter, Dylan Vaughan, is full of the dark magic of the netherworld.

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Find out what happens when dark and light magics, werewolves, and other supernaturals join forces to keep humans safe.

And what the demons are doing in your town, when the sun goes down.

Prologue

There was a time in my life when I would have said that I was happy just being me. I was young, filled with energy, and an eagerness to learn about everything. I had two older brothers that I idolized, and a younger sister that idolized me. My parents were happy, affectionate people, who raised us to be happy, affectionate people as well. We lived in a scenic, peaceful suburb, in a big, beautiful house. Life was bright and shiny and perfect.

It was all a lie.

I found out about it on my fourteenth birthday. My parents were throwing me the party to end all parties late that afternoon, and I'd gotten a really cool outfit that morning to wear to it. There was even going to be a live band.

I was running up the stairs to my room, excited to be getting ready, when the most incredible pain I'd ever known, sliced through me. I missed a step, crumpled to the floor, and bumped my way back down to the bottom. By the time I'd come to a stop, I was barely aware of my surroundings, too dazed to move.

My father found me several minutes later.

But it didn't end there. Virtually locked inside my body, I felt the burn of a thousand fire ants crawling through my veins. A shriek echoing inside my skull while the burning grew worse. Then a horrible, blinding flash of light exploded in my head, and I knew no more.

* * * *

When I came to, I was lying on my bed, drenched in sweat, but the pain was gone. I tipped my head to the side, and found dad sitting tensely beside me. I opened my mouth to ask him what had happened, when I felt myself dissolve.

I slipped through the mattress, through the floor, and kept on falling until I smacked into the concrete floor of the basement.

Stunned, I lay there a moment, then started wiggling my toes and fingers, followed by my arms and legs, and when I was sure that nothing was broken, I rolled to my feet, and started to climb the stairs back up to my room.

My father was standing, staring at my bed when I walked through the door. He didn't hear me, until I blurted out behind him, "What the hell is going on?"

His face was ashen when he turned around to gape at me. Then he slumped down on the bed, and hung his head.

"I didn't want you to find out this way," his voice broke as he spoke.

My heart hammered against my ribcage as fear flooded into my system. "Find out what?"

"You came to us as a baby, your mother begged us to raise you as one of our own. She said your life was in danger. That you were special, and that your father's people were trying to take you away from her. She didn't want you to be brought up by his people, see. She said he was the devil."

I dropped into the chair that my father had been sitting in earlier.

“The devil?” I raised a disbelieving eyebrow at him.

“Devil, demon, something like that, something that was dark and evil, that could vanish in the blink of an eye, reappear the same way.”

“So what was she?” I asked, a blessed numbness filling me.

“Said she was a witch. Powerful enough to call the devil, strong enough to spirit you away from him. But not mighty enough to keep him and his minions from getting their hands on you if they really concentrated on doing so.” The sorrow on his face nearly made me cry.

“You believed her? You never said witches and demons were real, but you believed her?” I didn’t think I believed her. *Well, not much*, I thought as I glanced at the center of the bed.

“Yeah. She turned me into a dog for a couple of minutes before I was convinced. But the experience made me a believer.” At least this brought a touch of a smile to his lips.

“So what does that make me?” *Devil-spawn?*

Dad grimaced. “Dark-witch is what she called you, or something like that. Said you’d have the use of both types of powers. Said you’d come into your—magic—when you reached maturity. I just never dreamt that meant fourteen.”

“Huh.” Hell of a birthday present. I hoped there weren’t any more surprises today like the ones I’d had so far. Frankly, this was all a little too surreal for me.

The golden glow of sunlight in the room suddenly dimmed. The air around us dropped in temperature until we could see our breath puffing out of our mouths. I moved to my father’s side, and he wrapped an arm around me as a chilly wind began blowing through the room.

A black, swirling mass of smoke appeared between where we sat and the door. Then it drew in upon itself until it formed the shape of a man. The figure shook, and the darkness fell away, revealing a human enough looking guy except for his bright red eyes.

“Daughter, at last I’ve found you.” The eerie looking guy said to me. “I’m here to take you home.”

I clung tighter to the man I thought of as my father. “I’m not going anywhere with you.”

He let out a laugh that sent chills skittering along my spine. “Of course you are.”

I felt myself being wrenched from my father’s arms, as my bedroom disappeared.

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