

DESCENDANTS of DARKNESS
ALONSO



MARIANNE LACROIX

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“Ah, could...could I get you something to drink—coffee, a glass of wine?” she stammered as she walked to the kitchen.

“I never drink...wine,” he said with a slight chuckle.

She smiled. “A fan of old horror movies?”

“I find some of the films of vampires quite entertaining.”

“Those are my favorites, too. Bela Lugosi was an awesome Dracula, but Frank Langella was much sexier.”

“I liked both of those,” he said, closing the distance between them, the crackle in the air utterly palpable. “Have you ever dreamed of a vampire coming to seduce you into an eternity of love and passion?”

“I think there are many women who dream of a love everlasting.”

He stood so close, she could smell his spicy scent, woods and the clean outdoors. Placing his palm on her hip, he pulled her to him. Her body fit perfectly, his hard planes an intoxicating contrast to her softer curves. His hypnotic gaze melted her against him further.

“Would you want me to be that vampire to give you that love?”

PRAISE FOR DESCENDANTS OF DARKNESS: ALONSO

“This is a tale that speaks of true love in a way that resonates beyond the fairy tale connotation of the concept. Alonso and Jolie can rival any great lovers of literary works through their passion and the connection they share. Marianne LaCroix knows how to create a vampire hero any woman would lust after—and she gives him a heroine worthy of his love. Fans of her vampire fiction have three more books to look forward to in the *Descendants Of Darkness* series. If *Alonso* is any indication of the type of story we can expect from Ms. LaCroix, those who like their heroes on the tall, dark and dangerous side are in for a real treat.”

—Liz Cooper
EroticaReadersHaven

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Christmas Magic

Descendants Of Darkness: Alonso

Descendants Of Darkness: Leonardo

Descendants Of Darkness: Lucius

Descendants Of Darkness: Raije

Dragon Knight

The Gladiator

Lady Sheba

Moonlight Rendezvous With A Vampire

Sands Of Seduction

Who's Afraid Of The Big Bad Wolf?

DESCENDANTS OF DARKNESS:

ALONSO

BY

MARIANNE LACROIX

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To my own life mate, Mark

ALONSO

New Orleans was North America's most haunted city. It was natural for the creatures of the night to seek refuge there amid ghost-laden cemeteries, voodoo rituals and other paranormal phenomenon. Each night, they gathered together in a small establishment deep in the city, hidden from human knowledge. The place was called Devil's Talon and it catered to those with special needs. There, those who were viewed as strange or bizarre were the norm.

One of the patrons was Alonso Santori, an ancient vampire of six hundred fifty-five years. Made during the height of the Black Death as it rolled through Europe, killing millions of people, Alonso lived on as an immortal vampire. Visiting London with relatives, he was there when the plague arrived. He thought he avoided it, having left his home in Italy when reports began of its appearance. He should have known he couldn't outrun flea-infested rats.

So, the time came and he feared for his life. One by one, his family died before his eyes, including his sweet Vanessa.

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Oh, Vanessa. How he missed her serene voice and beautiful face. He stood by helplessly as the disease ripped through her body. She'd vomit blood and her glands swelled and turned black. All he could do was watch and wait for her last breath. Once she died, he had no wish to live further. But life has a sick sense of humor.

While out at a local pub, drowning his sorrows in pints of thick ale, he met the one who would forever alter his life.

The vampire.

Lucius was a devil incarnate. He fed Alonso more alcohol and listened to his rambling of his lost love. Even now, Alonso remembered the cold, ice-blue stare of those eyes. Even his height of more than six feet added to his menacing air. His long white hair, unbound and falling about his shoulders, gave him that eerie sense of the spectacular, but of what? Later, Alonso would learn firsthand what the man held secret.

After he was quite inebriated, Alonso stumbled into the night with his newfound friend, looking for women to bed and ease his carnal desires. Two red-haired ladies of the night fit the bill, and Lucius rented a room for them all. There, debauchery took on a whole new meaning.

They roughly fucked those women, but Alonso didn't care. Afterward, he lay exhausted upon the vast bed, unable to move due to the booze and emotional strain.

Right next to Alonso in the bed, Lucius continued to enjoy one of the women. He was on top of her, bent over her neck, while the other woman came up from behind, moaning as she rubbed her naked body against him. It was most certainly erotic, but something rang sinister...evil about the act. The woman beneath Lucius stopped moving, her eyes turned glassy, and her skin lost its pink hue.

Lucius raised his head, and Alonso saw the trail of red from his lips. "Would you like to join me as my companion?" he asked with an evil grin, his voice edged with vicious glee.

The girl behind him moaned again. Lucius turned, and Alonso saw her fingers playing at her cleft. She was so deep into her own passion,

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she was unaware of the talons of danger that flitted about the room.

In a flash, Lucius tucked her body between Alonso and the dead girl. She screamed in laughter, obviously thinking it rough sex play. Then Lucius lowered his mouth just above her breast and bit down.

Alonso saw Lucius' fangs sink into her willing flesh. She gasped in pain. Fascinated, Alonso couldn't tear away his gaze as the vampire drank her blood, revitalizing his body.

She stilled, her mouth opened in a last silent plea, and her life ended. Just like that, it was over.

Damn! He'd certainly be next.

Lucius lifted his head and licked his bloodstained lips. "Ah, my friend, there is nothing like a woman's blood to make a man feel alive."

Alonso sputtered than said, "How could you?"

Lucius leaned back and pushed the corpses to the floor. They hit with resounding thuds. The vampire laughed, his teeth still red from his meal. Completely unaffected by his own nakedness, he flopped next to Alonso, who stared in amazement. "I've been doing this for a long time, my friend."

"How long?"

"I was made when Vikings were the force of power over the seas."

"But, weren't the Vikings a bunch of pillagers and rapists?"

The man lunged at him, pinning him down with supernatural strength. "The Norsemen were the true settlers of the world. Things you know today wouldn't have been possible without my people."

"I'm sorry," Alonso rasped, his limbs trembled in fear.

The vampire eased his hold and backed away, pushing his white hair out of his face. "I'll forgive you." He paused a moment. "I've been looking for a companion. I believe you will do nicely."

Alonso knew in his heart he had no real choice. If he said no, he would surely die as women had...he being a witness to the ordeal. It was not how he envisioned ending it all. Even though he complained of his desire to end it all, he suddenly had a strong will to live. This

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vampire had him by the balls, and there was only one real choice to make.

“Yes.”

Now...years later, Alonso shook his head to clear away the horrid images of that long ago night as though it had happened only yesterday. Worst of it, Lucius was still out there, feeding off the living. His powers were great, increasing with each century. It was a wonder he made it through those tough years when vampire hunting had been the rage. That was part of the reason Alonso came to America, to the Big Easy. Others of his kind surrounded the city, making him feel not quite so alone and isolated.

It was true, vampires were solitary creatures as a whole, but some did travel together, or even met nightly, as they did at the Devil's Talon. Sometimes, there was safety in numbers, and there were more vampires than any human realized in New Orleans. Popular fiction touched on the legends, hinting at the life beyond the night shadows, but only those who lived it knew the whole story.

Turning down a dark, forbidding alley off Canal Street, Alonso made his way to the hidden entrance of an exclusive club. Invisible to human eyes due to a simple protection spell, the club was visible only for vampires and the like.

Various scraps of paper and cans littered the alley, and moisture from an earlier shower slickened the street. Alonso heard the clicking of his boots against the cobblestones. That, along with the scurrying of rodents and their tiny hearts rapidly beating, were sounds he learned to live with.

The overwhelming bombardment of noises was the hardest thing for him to get used to after being turned. Some would think it was drinking blood. No, it was the thousands of sounds unheard to the human ear. Roaches crawling along the inside of walls, rats gnawing at their fleas, and, the most disturbing, blood flowing with each pump of the heart in every living creature, were among the racket Alonso had to filter

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through his mind. Heightened senses were a curse at times.

Stopping before the large black door, Alonso felt the protective spell. Reaching through with his mind, he called to the doorman, who answered by opening a small peephole. Wood slid back across the hole and the door opened, the spell dropping away to allow his entry.

“Ciao, Jack,” Alonso said as he passed the burly doorman.

“Nice to see you tonight, Mr. Santori.” Jack closed the door, replacing the spell.

Alonso stepped into the club, alive with activity. Techno-beat music pumped over loud speakers. He was surprised the walls didn’t shake on his way in. Obviously the spell also kept the music from giving away the location.

Red, green and blue lights flashed and waved through the crowd, dancing in tempo with the powerful beat. Vampires of all shapes, sizes, colors and backgrounds converged into the club, and many lavished on the freedom to have fun.

“Alonso, honey, long time, no see.” Monique, a Creole female turned only a mere two hundred years ago, pressed up against him. Her luscious curves were tempting, and her naturally Cappuccino-colored skin exotic. Match that with her sultry voice and accent and eagerness to please sexually, it was hard to resist her offers of passionate nights.

“Mon, you’re *magnifica*,” he said, planting a kiss on her forehead. He liked rolling in the sheets with her on occasion, but tonight, he wasn’t in the mood. It was like this every year on this night, the anniversary of his turning.

“Mmm, Alonso, I’d ask to screw you, but I sense your mood.”

“Yeah, maybe some other time, Mon.”

“You bet. Hey, want to join us? Both Leo and Titania are here.”

“Sure.” He followed her to a table located along the far wall from the dance floor.

Titania was a strawberry-blonde vampiress from Ireland who came over during the Potato Famine back in the mid-1800s. Well, she was

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human, then. A rogue vampire had turned her one night on the streets of New York City. It was probably for the best, as the workhouse in which she had toiled was killing her at the time.

Now, she sat talking with Leo, another Italian descendent vampire, made during the Italian Renaissance. He often bragged he was an apprentice to the great Michelangelo, but he never could prove it by his drawings. Leo was tall, dark and handsome in a Mediterranean kind of way, and women naturally flocked to him. He could pick and choose from where his meals came.

“Hey, Alonso,” he said, looking up to him with dark eyes.

“Ciao, Leo, Ti.”

“Ciao.” Leo took a sip of his drink, a glass of deep red fresh blood, the house specialty. “Raife will be here in a bit,” he added as Alonso took a seat.

Raife was the British addition to their group, made in the time when Elizabeth ruled as a “king in skirts.” He was one of her privateers that fought Philip I’s Spanish Armada, and he always had wonderful adventure tales to tell. It was his way to return to the time when he was human and happy to be alive. Nowadays, he had about lost the purpose to his vampire existence. Somewhere along the way he had lost hope to finding a life-mate.

They all longed for a life-mate. Hundreds of years of craving tended to make a vampire cranky from time to time. Many lost optimism of ever finding the mate to their heart, and turned to the darker side of the life. Those were like Lucius, *demoni scuri*, dark demons, as Alonso referred to them. They were of a different mindset, a different race altogether. They were of Satan’s spawn, spreading death and fear in their wake.

“Alonso, you look as if you’re a million miles away.” Monique placed a hand on his shoulder, slightly shaking him.

“*Dolente*, sorry, *mia amica*. This night is always troublesome for me. It’s like that every year.”

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“Ah, *oui*, the anniversary,” Mon said, then took a sip of her Bloody Mary. “Bloody Marys” took a whole new meaning at Devil’s Talon.

“Wonder whatever happened to Lucius,” Leo mused. “He seemed to have just disappeared.”

“He’s out there, somewhere. I can feel it.” Unfortunately, Alonso sensed the *demoni* was way too close for comfort.

* * *

Jolie shuffled the cards as she watched the crowd of bar patrons that were mainly tourists, so she made a good bit of money during tourist season. Of course, Mardi Gras was prime time for readings. She could easily make a grand a night during the celebration.

People visited the city rich with history and magical mysteries, like the Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau. Even today, more than two hundred and sixty years later, people still visited the Voodoo Queen’s tomb, asking for help in finding love and other requests. Jolie had also gone there to make her wish.

Today was her thirtieth birthday, and things looked a grim. Well, as far as her love life was concerned anyway. She had done numerous Tarot readings for herself, and they all ended the same, inconclusive. It was as though the cards wanted to hide her future mate. Desperate times called for desperate measures, so she had visited the Voodoo Queen.

She believed in magic, completely, which was why she took the trip to the cemetery. She made her livelihood reading Tarot and knew the cards never lied. Psychic gifts were always a part of her life, ever since she could remember. Even as a child, her mother swore Jolie was special.

When she was about four, she had a pet pony. Jolie loved the pony like anyone would love a pet dog or cat. This pony, Peanuts, thought he *was* a dog, and even acted like one. They were buddies, and had played every day.

Then one night, Jolie had sensed something very wrong. She cried

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and screamed the night through, driving her mother to the verge of tears. The next morning, they found Peanuts dead, hit by a truck in the street. Apparently, he had gotten out during the night, looking for Jolie. His love drove him to his death.

Since then, Jolie had become more aware of her sixth sense. No, she didn't hear the dead talk to her, but she could sense things before they happened. Naturally, Tarot card reading came easily to her.

She continued to shuffle, concentrating on the cards, shutting out the murmurs and music around her. Her booth was in the back, out of the way, yet gave easy view to the entire room.

Then she saw him. "Predatory" came to mind. Evil. Tall, long white-blonde hair, and piercing blue eyes, unlike any other man she had ever seen. Her inner voice told her to be wary.

Dressed all in black, he carried a walking stick, topped with a silver cast of a...good Lord, a wolf. A foreboding chill crawled down her spine.

He stopped before her and looked into her face. "Good evening, Madam Jolie."

His voice sounded odd, a strange accent in this part of the world. If she didn't know better, she'd say he was British. Equally odd, since she detected the accent was put on. He looked like a Viking...huge, blonde and sinfully gorgeous.

"Sir." She nodded and held out her hand in welcome. "Pleased to meet you."

"No, the pleasure is all mine," he said with a smile, taking her hand in his.

Heat pulsed through his fingers into her own, shooting up her arm.

He took the chair across from her and sat. "I wish for you to tell my fortune in the cards."

She peered into his face, the knowledge of his dark soul overpowering her. Yet, he intrigued her. What was it about him that was so...different? He had his own magic about him, radiating in a

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sinister aura.

“I’m afraid you probably could tell me more than I could.”

His thumb brushed the back of her hand in sensual circles. “Nonsense. Please, I wish to see if love will ever enter my life.”

She pulled away her hand, and instantly missed his touch. He was way too dangerous to find attractive, but she did find him desirable. She shuffled the cards and concentrated on the reading, trying to blank out her reaction to his closeness. Laying the deck on the table, she instructed him to cut the deck in three piles. After gathering them up, she laid out the cards in the Celtic Cross spread.

Her body shook while she absorbed the meaning laid before her. He was truly an evil soul, searching for the meaning, a purpose to continue.

“Tell me, dear lady,” his hypnotic voice washed over her, causing her skin to tingle. “Will I ever find my true love?”

Reading the cards, she nodded. “The woman of your heart is close, though you’ve waited a long time for her to appear. The Empress is the woman you seek. And you should meet her soon, but be patient.”

He snorted a laugh. “Patient? I’ve waited hundreds of years to find my Queen, and you ask me to be patient?”

What did he mean by Hundreds of years? “I’m sorry, but at least your heart’s desire is coming.”

He reached over the table to cup her face. Her entire body reacted to his touch, inflaming her. No, she mustn’t let him gain control. The inner voice screamed caution. Giving into the baser bodily desire would mean death with this strange man.

“Look into my eyes, sweet Jolie. Tell me, can you satisfy a man’s yearning to be loved for this one night?”

Her eyes drifted closed, relishing the tender touch of his hand on her face. All she could do was whisper a plea within her mind. “*Help me.*”

* * *

Help me.

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He heard it in the recesses of his mind. A remote connection to a woman in need. He focused on the voice and zeroed in on her surroundings.

Lucius. The bastard had indeed returned.

“Sorry, I have to go,” Alonso said, jumping up from the table.

“What is it?” Leo asked.

“Lucius. He’s here. Close. And a woman is calling to me.” How could that be? He wondered. Did she have some special power?

“I’m coming along,” Leo said, rising.

“Let me face him myself. If I need help, I’ll call.”

Alonso raced out of the club, leaving behind his friends and the pounding music. In the alley, he began to transform. His body shifted, changing size and shape, into a golden eagle. With a flap of his grand wings, he lifted into the air, homing in on Lucius.

He had a blood bond to the *demoni*, and could sense everything Lucius felt. He could use that connection to find the vampire in the vast city. Soaring above the historic buildings that lined the streets of New Orleans, he closed in on Lucius. He was on Bourbon Street in a human dance club. Deep in the heart of the French Quarter. Alonso traveled as fast as the wind to head off the imminent danger.

There was something to be said of a strange woman calling to him. What could her calling mean? He hoped he had the chance to find out before Lucius made her his next meal.

Bourbon Street was alive with nightlife activity. The perfect place for a vampire to seek out a meal. At least, a vampire wanting to take a life with his meal.

Not all vampires were the same. Alonso didn’t drink to the death. He merely sipped, then moved on. It would take four humans to satisfy his hunger, but at least he didn’t kill. Only the *demoni scuri*, like Lucius, murdered for their meals. There were others like him, and Alonso tried to keep clear of them. Once a vampire killed, they became more distant and isolated. Independence was their way of life. Crossing

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one was always dangerous.

Below, within the Razzoo—a popular Bourbon Street pick-up bar—he felt Lucius, the enemy. Lucius hadn't gotten the girl outside yet. Alonso wasn't too late. He landed in a dark shadow cast from one of the nearby buildings and shifted back to his human form.

Inside the crowded club, the smells of sweat, perfumes, body odor and alcohol assaulted him. Hundreds of human hearts beat wildly to the rock music pumping through huge amplifiers. Sexual excitement laced the air as men and woman flirted and made their choices for the night in an attempt to satisfy their primal needs.

Making his way through the crowd, several women threw themselves against him, rubbing their bodies against his. If he hadn't been there to confront Lucius, he may have taken them to a dark corner for a few sips of their delectable life fluid.

In the corner, he spotted the ominous long white hair of the *demoni*. Carefully, he approached the table, where Lucius held a woman's hand. She looked into his face.

He felt as if the air had been sucked out of the room. Those eyes, so dark and lovely, pleaded with him. Her creamy complexion was to perfection, and her dark raven-black hair was swept up into a mass of elaborate curls and waves. She wore a velvet shawl of black, with swirls of jewel-tone reds. She looked like a palm reader, or...

A psychic? Could that be why he had heard her call? But why him?

"Ah, Alonso," Lucius said without turning. "How nice of you to come, my old friend and companion. Sit and meet the lovely Jolie. She was just reading my fortune as told by the cards."

"I don't think so."

Lucius gazed up at Alonso. The intense cool-blue calculation in the vampire's eyes struck him. Lucius wanted her for more than a night's meal. He wanted to mate with her.

Alonso swore he wouldn't allow anyone to have her. He wanted her for himself.

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He extended a hand toward the woman. "Come with me, now."

"Careful, Alonso. I saw her first."

"But you won't have her."

* * *

Lucius rose from his seat and stood eye to eye with Alonso. Both being of great height, they looked like a pair of warriors about to battle. Jolie needed to get the hell out of Dodge before either one decided who would get the spoils of their battle—her. She was not about to give in to either of their macho antics, even though the dark-haired newcomer seemed familiar. As though he had walked out of one of her dreams. An erotic dream, that is.

Not only was the one called Alonso tall and handsome, he had gorgeous, long, straight black hair, and a solid-looking body. He wore black dress pants and a white Oxford shirt, open partly down his chest, giving her a nice view of golden skin covering toned sinew. He could be Aries, a war god, from the way he stood, matching height and strength with the Thor-like Lucius.

Not wanting to stick around for the outcome, she gathered her cards and shoved them in her bag, along with her table cover and candles. No time for neatness. She slipped out of the booth and edged away from the men, now talking in hushed tones. Probably whispered threats, judging by the way they sized up each other.

Odd how this stranger had showed up only minutes after she felt herself in deep trouble. Unable to see how she could break free of the menacing danger lurking beneath Lucius' smile, she had pleaded within her mind for help. She never figured anyone would come to her aid.

Was it coincidence or had he hear her?

No one ever had that kind of connection to her, except her younger sister, Mirabelle.

She got to the club doors and left, unwilling to look back in case they realized she had gone. Out on Bourbon Street, she blended in with the night crowd of club patrons.

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She hailed a cab. Once inside, she fell back onto the vinyl seat and breathed relief. At least she got out of that one.

Thinking back, she wondered about the dark man. Looking at him, her inner secret fantasies had popped to life. She *had* seen him before in a vision, but had only passed it off as a fantasy. He was definitely reality. A man didn't have the right to look so sinfully sexy. One look from those dark eyes, and her body had quivered in excitement. Her heart skipped a beat and her breathing had become labored. Even the juncture of her thighs had moistened at the sight of him. She had ached for his touch the moment she saw him. It was criminal to be so instantly attracted to a man!

About ten minutes later, the cab drove up to her apartment building on St. Charles and she got out. After climbing the stairs, she made it inside her small apartment. Decorated in mystic jewel tones, it was her comfort zone. Here, she felt safe and secure.

But was she really?

Those men looked beyond dangerous. Actually, meeting up with the large Italian one would be a pleasure. Hell, she'd be up for a night of rumpy-bumpy with him anytime.

* * *

"She's gone."

Lucius smirked. "I know. I sensed her slip away. No matter. I will find her again."

"Stay away from her," Alonso growled.

"Why? You staking claim to her?"

"Yes."

Lucius chuckled, a deep ominous sound. "Really, Alonso. Do you think after all this time you found your mate?"

Alonso couldn't explain it. He had felt it the instant he saw her. There was a connection, a unexplainable link between them. Just thinking on her delicate beauty made him hard with want. The urge to seek her in the night to bind himself to her body grew overwhelming.

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Letting her leave the club had been torture, but he knew it had been for the best. She needed to escape Lucius' intents, if only temporarily until Alonso could properly protect her. He'd find her with their mental connection once again.

Since when had he ever taken to any female so quickly? Her dark beauty had mesmerized him at one glance. On the spot, he recognized her as his life-mate. He couldn't let Lucius near her.

"I claim her. That's enough for you to leave her be. Don't come near her, *demoni*," he said with a snarl.

Lucius sat at the table, casually examining the silver tip of his walking stick. "It's getting harder and harder for me to face each night. Somehow, I know something is out there waiting for me. Hunting me."

"With all the evil you've done over the centuries, I'm not surprised something hunts you."

Lucius looked up and smiled. It was not comforting in any way. He had devious plans going on in that twisted mind. "Go find her, my friend. If she is not marked by you tomorrow night, I will proceed to make her my own."

"I'd kill you first."

"Then go to her now."

As Alonso left Razzoo, he wondered why Lucius allowed him first chance with the woman, which left him wondering what he was up to.

Sniffing the air, he picked up her faint scent of vanilla musk and woman. God, he ached for her.

Would she let a complete stranger into her life? He had to at least see her again and talk to her. Only then could he know if she was the one.

His life-mate. Could it be, after all these centuries, he had finally found her?

Ducking into the shadows from the view of the drunken partiers, he changed once again into his alternate form. The golden eagle leapt into the air and soared over the Big Easy.

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No wonder it was called thus. Humans and vampires alike found partners for whatever their fancy, be it a blood meal or sexual gratification. And at the moment, Alonso wanted both. And only the woman, Jolie, would do.

At St. Charles Street, he sensed her nearness. From an apartment building, the scent grew stronger. She was inside. Flying on the night wind, he circled the building, zeroing in on which apartment. On the second floor, a light went on. He saw her through the window, framed by white frilly curtains.

After landing, he shifted back to his human form. Her scent permeated his nostrils, driving him insane with need. He longed to see her, touch her. The short glimpse of her at the club was not enough.

He picked up a few pebbles from the street, then lightly threw one against the window.

She stopped and looked, then went back to brushing her black hair.

He tossed another, and she pulled back the curtain and gazed out. Spotting him, she opened the window. "What in the world are you doing here? How'd you find me?"

"I followed you."

It was sort of true. He *had* followed her scent. Her hair looked soft around her shoulders, and she wore only a thin, white, cotton nightgown. He saw the dark aureoles of her breasts against the thin fabric. Her nipples strained against the flimsy material.

His cock twitched. Sniffing the air once again, he could smell her excitement. She was beautiful and desirous, and he knew she wanted him, too.

"What happened to Eric the Viking?" she asked with a laugh.

"Who? Oh, you mean Lucius. He's back at the club."

She seemed to consider something, and he hoped she'd invite him up. What kind of woman would invite a total stranger into her apartment in this day and age?

"Want to come up?"

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Damn, his woman would! “Thanks. What’s the number?”
“Two-Ten.”

* * *

What the hell was she doing, inviting a strange man into her apartment? But something about him appealed to her. It wasn’t just his handsome face or the broad expanse of his shoulders that made her mouth water. Something she couldn’t put a name to made her want to know him more. Her body hummed to life at the sight of him, and she knew instinctively she could trust him.

She hoped her instinct was right.

A knock at the door, and she shuddered. When she opened it, there he was—tall, dark and tempting. His long straight black hair fell loose about his shoulders and she craved to feel its silky texture through her fingers. A jolt of sexual awareness shot through her body, ending at the apex of her thighs. Her intimate muscles contracted in animalistic recognition. The word “mate” skittered across her mind as she gazed into his dark eyes. She could easily sink into those brown depths.

“*Ciao*,” he said with a warm smile. “I’m Alonso.” His accent, obviously Italian, washed over her senses.

“Jolie,” she offered. “Come in.”

He entered the room with an air of supreme dominance. The spacious apartment seemed much smaller with his presence. She closed the door and watched him move about the room, examining the decor.

“Unusual apartment, but it suits you. I like it.”

“Thanks. Make yourself at home.” She stepped toward him.

He gazed at her with an intense heat in his eyes. Sex. Hot, passionate sex. The look told her, loud and clear. Could she give herself to him for a night of lust?

Hell, yes.

“Ah, could...could I get you something to drink—coffee, a glass of wine?” she stammered as she walked to the kitchen.

“I never drink...wine,” he said with a slight chuckle.

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She smiled. "A fan of old horror movies?"

"I find some of the films of vampires quite entertaining."

"Those are my favorites, too. Bela Lugosi was an awesome Dracula, but Frank Langella was much sexier."

"I liked both of those," he said, closing the distance between them, the crackle in the air utterly palpable. "Have you ever dreamed of a vampire coming to seduce you into an eternity of love and passion?"

"I think there are many women who dream of a love everlasting."

He stood so close, she could smell his spicy scent, woods and the clean outdoors. Placing his palm on her hip, he pulled her to him. Her body fit perfectly, his hard planes an intoxicating contrast to her softer curves. His hypnotic gaze melted her against him further.

"Would you want me to be that vampire to give you that love?"

She encircled his neck with her arms, and whispered, "Only if you make love to me, Alonso."

Her body felt on fire. Her thin nightgown became a barrier to her would-be lover. She wanted to bare all before him. How could one throw all caution and cares to the wind with a complete stranger? She knew him for all of ten minutes and already she ached with need for his touch, for him to fill her body with his, bonding them together as true lovers.

"I will," he breathed against her lips before brushing them lightly in a gentle kiss.

Melding of lips in soft kisses quickly turned demanding, hungry. At the first touch of his tongue against hers, she thought she'd explode. Her hands traveled over his strong shoulders, mapping the rippling muscles beneath her palms. To bring him closer into the devouring kisses, she pulled down his head, running her fingers through the long, silky threads of his hair. God, it felt better than she imagined. She groaned against his mouth as their bodies rubbed together, his bulging erection brushing the sensitive apex of her thighs.

"Take me," she rasped when he broke the kiss to nibble her earlobe.

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Tiny shivers rose along her skin.

Alonso lifted her in his arms as though she weighed nothing. He carried her to the bedroom and eased her down among the clean white bed sheets. He backed away a step and unbuttoned his shirt. Her hips had a life of their own as she wriggled upon the bed, aching for his touch. Once his shirt was off, her fingers itched to touch him, memorize his body, each and every inch. And she would.

Unzipping his pants, he lowered them to the floor. His shaft stood large from a thick nest of black hair. No man had the right to look so sinful naked. But then, it was for her only tonight.

Only tonight? She suddenly didn't want only one night. She wanted more.

She stripped away her nightgown to reveal her nakedness. He moaned as he stood beside the bed, while she traced her body with her own hands. She cupped her breasts and flicked the already taut nipples, and her hips moved in rhythm, tempting him to touch her nether region.

Her bud ached for his touch, and she needed it *now*! She spread her legs and dipped a hand to cover the trimmed patch above her cleft. Brushing a finger over her clit, she gasped.

He crawled onto the bed between her legs. Grasping her thighs, he lowered to her nub and tentatively licked it once. She bucked, and he chuckled. "Sweet Jolie, *mia amore*, don't rush. Enjoy our first time. And it is only our first of many."

"Only the first?" she gasped between breaths.

He lightly licked her once again. "We're lovers for the rest of eternity. You are mine."

Then he plunged his mouth into her pussy, devouring her, drinking her juices flowing from his touch. She couldn't think on his words as the world shattered around her in rainbows of colors. She screamed with each wave of her climax, and he continued to lap at her channel, his tongue filling her passage and tasting each drop of her essence.

The rolling spasms ebbed, and she lay drained of energy. She was

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vaguely aware of him sliding up her body and lying next to her, caressing a breast with his palm. Then slowly, her mind began to work again. Did he say she was his? Hell, she'd go for that. He gave her the best orgasm she'd ever known. For that alone, he was a keeper. Damn, what would his cock do to her once he filled her? She'd probably pass out from the pleasure.

"Jolie, *mia amore*, are you okay?" he asked with some concern, because her eyes were still closed.

Moaning, she turned to him and nuzzled his neck. "I'm better than okay, you Italian stallion. How can I find you so desirable after knowing you for only a short while?"

"We're life-mates. I knew it the moment I saw you." He ran his hand through her hair, keeping her close.

"I like the sound of that." She licked the salty skin of his neck and nipped him along his collarbone. He inhaled sharply at her teeth grating along his skin. "I want you inside me, Alonso." Her voice went husky and seductive when she added, "Fill me."

He pushed her onto her back and slid on top of her. His sheer weight was not only arousing, but comforting. He was the man she'd waited for all her life. The man she'd dreamed of finding. The man she thought only fantasies created.

Nudging apart her legs, he paused before her opening. The engorged head of his cock rubbed against her clit, covering him with the juices of her desire. She moaned and widened her legs, thrusting upward to take him.

He entered her in a swift stroke. She called out his name as he filled her completely. After nearly pulling out, he thrust back inside. Torture. Pleasurable pain. She needed him to move faster, but didn't want to rush the exquisite feeling of him moving in and out.

The tempo was slow and relishing. They bonded with each thrust, each connection. Jolie felt their bodies become one. Souls uniting. Hearts beating in unison. Minds melding together. She worshipped the

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incredible mating of her own self to Alonso. It was unlike any other experience in her life. She was no longer one person without him, and he the same, incomplete without her.

He licked the skin around her neck, tasting her as he moved within her channel. Above her left breast, a sharp pain pierced her, ripping through her body as an intense orgasm hit them both. Her muscles squeezed around his cock with each climactic wave, and he spilled into her with their mutual joining. Milking him, she rode out the rapturous contractions, long and cherishing. He broke his hold on her skin and screamed with his climax.

Nothing mattered in the world other than this moment. Jolie wondered at the thousands of visions passing before her mind's eye. Nights to come within his arms, giving her body and soul to this man. There were many other visions of a distant past with Alonso mourning over a blonde woman, deadly looking with blackened skin. In that climactic moment when he joined his body to her, she learned all about him. Everything.

Including his secret.

* * *

Hours later, with his arms enwrapping Jolie, Alonso felt complete for the first time in more than six centuries. He never thought any woman could take the place of his lost Vanessa. But he had found his life-mate.

Could he bring her over to his existence? Could he damn her to a life of a vampire?

It wasn't that being a vampire was completely unpleasant. He didn't mind it, on a whole. The loneliness of yearning for the one life-mate had been the worst part. But now, she was bound to him. So would all eternity be so bad?

She slept soundly, but he felt the dawn approach. Slipping her out of his embrace, he loathed the break of contact. With her he felt complete, all his pieces joined in perfect harmony. Leaving her before

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the morning's light would be difficult, but he'd find her tomorrow night. At least, he had marked her so Lucius couldn't have her.

Would that keep the *demoni* from trying to claim her? Tonight, he'd make sure he was there so Lucius didn't.

After pulling on his clothes, he leaned over her naked figure and tugged a blanket over her. Dropping a kiss on her forehead, he whispered, "Until tonight, sweet Jolie. I'll come for you."

Passing a hand over her forehead, he snatched away the painful memories of his past, transferred to her during their joining. Not until she was fully ready could he let her remember such dark moments in his history.

He left the apartment and raced outside. Changing into the golden eagle once more, he flew away from his mate.

Within the historic St. Louis cemetery was where Alonso found rest. He detested slumbering in a tomb, but it was the only way to be sure of no sunlight entering, and any humans disturbing his peace. The door weighed a couple hundred pounds, and no mortal could easily lift it.

Alonso had bought the tomb under the guise of his death when he arrived in New Orleans in the 1800s. It was convenient, especially when burial underground was not the practice. New Orleans was built below sea level, so digging a grave would be likened to digging a well. It filled with water within minutes. So, the Cities of the Dead sprouted up. Aboveground tombs lined the cemeteries and past residents of the city rested there, from politicians to pirates, Voodoo Queens to shopkeepers.

Not to mention the hundreds of vampires using them as their resting places, like Alonso.

After opening the door to his tomb with the wave of a hand, he stepped inside and settled in for the day. Just as the sun began to peak over the horizon, he shut the door and climbed into his coffin. He fell into a peaceful sleep, dreaming of the woman who held his heart and

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soul within her hands.

* * *

Jolie awoke later that morning, missing Alonso's welcoming heat next to her.

Why did he leave her alone? Men were always doing crap like that and she hated it. Wham, bam, thank you, ma'am.

But then, Alonso seemed different last night. Had he spoken the truth? When they'd had sex, it seemed more than a mere physical bond—it was as though she had bonded her soul to him.

"Don't worry, sweet Jolie. We are life-mates."

She heard him within her mind. Somehow it didn't spook her. After all, she had called to him the night before. He did answer her call, right?

"Yes." His dreamy deep voice resounded in her mind.

"We need to talk more next time, Alonso. I have so many questions to ask you," she said mentally to him.

"Tonight, I will answer your questions. Right now, I must rest."

"Okay."

Then the link was broken. Yet, she still felt him in the recesses of her mind. She had always been psychic, but she never was able to talk to someone through her thoughts. This was extraordinary. Was he psychic, too, or something completely different? Niggling in the back of her mind, the vision of a vampire crept along the edges of her consciousness.

Getting up, she threw on a robe and walked into the living room. After grabbing her bag from a nearby chair, she rummaged through it to find her Tarot. She pulled out the cards and her table cover, then proceeded to set up to do a reading on herself. She often did her own spreads on the coffee table before the couch, but today, she knew the Tarot wouldn't be so unclear.

While shuffling the cards, she concentrated on Alonso and their future. After cutting them into three piles, she gathered them and cast

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down a Celtic spread. There, within the cards, she saw clearly the question of her heart. Alonso was the King of Cups, which meant he was a new love, a man determined to be everything she could ask for—a loving husband.

The other cards, however, concerned her...the Tower matched with the Lovers card. Would there be much trouble ahead for them from a dangerous man, portrayed by the Magician?

Then it hit her. *Oh, God, it's the man from last night—Lucius.*

Shaking, she stared at the Magician, evil and wanting to cause chaos. Was it some personal reason Lucius wanted to hurt Alonso? What was the history between the men?

Old, ancient souls. They weren't mere men. She felt something more in the air about them. Something sinister and magical...and menacing.

She padded into the kitchen to make coffee and breakfast. If she was to be prepared to meet with Lucius and Alonso that night, she wanted a clear head.

* * *

When the sun went down, Bourbon Street was already abuzz with activity. Jolie passed through the crowd, clutching her bag to her chest. Dressed in her typical mystic dress and velvet shawl, she felt ready for an evening of Tarot readings. She really didn't know what to expect, though. In the air hung a sense of danger, and it seeped through her pores. Tonight her entire life would change.

At the Razzoo, a large muscled bouncer with a shaved head waved her inside. Just a look from him could deter drunks from getting out of line. Jolie wondered if he could match off with the powerful Alonso or Lucius.

There was definitely something different about those men. After last night's passionate encounter, she at first thought it was just psychic. Then she had seen the marks above her breast when she stripped for her shower. They looked like vampire bite marks. New

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Orleans was rumored to be a favorite haunt of the supernatural, and she believed in many of the tales of ghosts and magic, so why not vampires, too? Maybe Ann Rice had it right.

So, she was falling for a vampire. Okay, no normal man for her. She should have known. Her vision of a vampire that morning now made complete sense.

Alonso the vampire. He had given her a clue last night before they made love—“*Would you want me to be that vampire to give you that love?*”

She had thought it was just a part he played because they had talked a bit about Dracula. But then, he had an aura of power, dark and mysterious, emanating from him. As he looked into her eyes, she had felt it intently. It drew her to him like a deprived woman.

Could she live with the fact her lover was a vampire? He had bit her last night—did that mean she’d become one?

Images of them slick with sweat as their bodies slid together, perfectly matched, filled her mind. Liquid heat gathered between her thighs at the remembrance of him within her, moving in tempo to their building passion. He filled her like no other ever had, and her body hummed even now. She wanted to have him right now, pounding his cock into her.

“Mmm, nothing like the scent of an aroused woman,” a deep masculine voice said from behind.

She turned to face the white-haired devil. “Leave me alone,” she said, trying to make her way through the club.

“Oh, Jolie, you know by now what I am, along with the dark Alonso.”

She approached her usual table and set down her bag. “I know,” she whispered, then faced him. “Why are you following me?”

He stepped closer, towering over her. She smelled his expensive cologne, a scent intoxicating and masculine. “Because I want you for myself.”

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His striking blue eyes gazed intently into hers, and she found this powerful vampire invading her mind.

He laughed low, grasping her upper arm and pulling her to him. “Don’t fight me. Give into your feelings. Your body wants mine.”

“No.” She shook her head, trying to break the curling effect on her mind and body. She wasn’t going to let him influence her. “I belong to Alonso.”

“He is nothing compared to me. I can give you an eternity of pleasure, making you the Queen of my existence. I’d screw you like no other ever could. Night after night of my worshipping your body over and over. Picture it, sweet Jolie.”

His words matched the images of them in ecstasy, rolling in satin sheets as he fed off her body, caressing her every curve with his skilled hands, tasting each inch with his tongue.

It was almost too much, his hold over her mind—so strong, it was draining. She didn’t want to give in. As she wavered and her eyes fluttered closed, he leaned in and hungrily kissed her.

The kiss was nothing like what she had experienced with Alonso. This vampire, tempting with his tall, powerful essence, didn’t raise her desires to the level she wished. She wanted her dark lover, her Alonso.

Within the recesses of her brain, she heard him cry in the distance, a menacing call of outrage.

Lucius broke the kiss, and Jolie knew he had also heard Alonso’s angry scream.

With a swift wave, he cradled her in his arms and carried her through the club. Patrons parted the way like the Red Sea for Moses. At the door, the bouncer tried to stop him from taking her. An invisible force flung aside the mountainous man like a feather.

In the busy street, he carried her, determined to take her, her meager struggles nothing to him.

“Please, let me go. Don’t do this,” she pleaded.

“You’re mine. I’ve waited too long for a worthy mate.”

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With supernatural strength, he sped through the streets. The speed dizzying; Jolie squeezed her eyes shut. They must have moved so fast, no human could see them pass.

When he stopped, she opened her eyes and glanced around. It could be any number of cemeteries throughout the city. All aboveground tombs looked so similar, with the exception of Marie Laveau's, littered with the graffiti of believers.

"Here, I will make you a creature of the night, and bind you to me for all eternity."

"He'll come for me."

"Not before I'm through. You'll be *my* life-mate, no other's."

"Why are you forcing this?" She placed a palm against his face.

He closed his eyes, inhaling her scent.

She asked gently, "Why, Lucius?"

"Because I'm lonely. I need a woman to love." His voice lost the power and revealed the vulnerability within.

"But I saw a woman in your future. She's coming. What if you make me your mate, then you meet her? Will you toss me aside, ruined in heart and soul? Can you live with the fact that I'll forever see another's face in place of yours? My heart will always belong to another, no matter how much you wish it differently."

He released her from his hold, letting her stand on solid ground. The darkness encircled them within the City of the Dead. Only the sounds of insects cut the silence. She could understand why he wanted companionship in this isolated place.

Turning away from her, he lost some of the menacing aura surrounding him. "I've been alone for centuries. More than six hundred years ago, I met Alonso wallowing in his sorrow over a dead woman. I felt a connection to him and turned him that night. We traveled Europe for a century, feeding off the living, until he had enough of me. He had a different view of this existence, and that caused ripples in our relationship. We split, but I deeply felt the loss of his friendship. So, I

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vowed to never let anyone hurt me again. But now,” he sighed and looked back at her, “I need a life-mate.”

“You won’t take mine,” Alonso said, stepping from the darkness. Wrapping his arms around Jolie, he kissed her forehead and whispered, “You okay?”

She nodded. “Just a bit shaken up.”

“Lucius, you ever try something like this again, I swear, I’ll drive a stake through your heart and leave you to burn away in the morning light.”

Lucius began to walk away, but his sad voice echoed through the increasing shadows. “My friend, I may one day *ask* you to do just that.”

There, in the midst of the cemetery, Jolie clung to Alonso, the danger gone. “He’s very lonely and his heart yearns for love.”

“As all vampires eventually do. Finding our life-mate is the one purpose to our existence. If we don’t find them after so many centuries, we lose hope.”

“Like him.”

He tipped her chin so she could gaze into his face. “And I found my life-mate. Jolie, will you sacrifice your mortality to come with me?”

“Become a vampire to love you for all eternity?”

He nodded.

“Hmm, hard question to answer.” She broke away and began to pace, humor touching her voice. “Let me see. Nights filled with passionate sex with a sexy vampire for all time. Oh, sounds like torture to me.” She turned to him. “Bring it on.”

He laughed and scooped her into his arms. “Woman, I’m going to start those passionate nights tonight.”

“Oh, so what was last night?”

“A trial.”

* * *

Back at her apartment, Jolie came to the conclusion she’d never get used to vampire speed. It left her lightheaded, but then, Alonso nibbling

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on her neck did that, too.

“So, what happens to make me a vampire? Will I have to drink blood and all?”

Settling in bed after they stripped away their clothes, he took her into his arms. “I drink from you to the point of completion, then you drink from me. It can be a sensual bonding between a male and female.”

“How was it with Lucius?”

His hand stilled on her hip. “I was given little choice at the time. It was not a bonding of hearts like ours will be. I have a blood bond with Lucius, but not a life bond.”

“And the drinking blood?”

He groaned and rolled her atop him. She straddled his hips, his cock poised at her wet entrance. “I don’t think I like the idea of you drinking from any man but me.”

Leaning over, her erect nipples brushed his chest hair, coursing tiny thrills through her veins. “Mmm, I get to have you on my lips each night to survive?” She moved down his body, nipping along the way. She teased one nipple to tautness, then the other. He was delicious, and she wanted to taste all of him.

“Ah, sweet Jolie. I’d love to fill you each night.”

She giggled as she nuzzled the valley between his nipples, the hair teasing her nostrils, filling her senses with his clean outdoor scent. “Are we talking sustenance here or something else?” she asked, playfully running her fingernails down his sides.

His entire body jumped under her fingertips. His breathing turned ragged and shallow. “Anything you want. I’ll give it to you.”

Slowly, she moved lower, and his breathing became louder. He brought his hands to her head and gently held her between his palms.

“I want to drink from you in every way. I need to taste you.”

She grasped his stiff length and caressed it. A small bead of moisture sat on the tip of the large purple head. Leaning over, she

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caught the drop with her tongue, and Alonso moaned in ecstasy. She glanced toward his face, his eyes closed and his mouth open, completely under her control.

The feeling of power over her lover intoxicated Jolie. She loved to see him give himself over to her. Bending down to the satiny covered rod of hot steel, she closed her mouth over his cock and began to suckle. The salty taste of him made her drunk with want.

He held onto her head, guiding her to continue her loving. She teased his balls, testing their weight with her one hand. He inhaled sharply at her movements, and she knew he was getting close. She took him deeper into her mouth and sucked harder. He screamed her name as he climaxed. She drank from him every drop, relishing the salty taste. He grasped her hair between his fingers as each wave of liquid sex shot from him.

Once his body drained, he released her head, and his arms flopped down upon the bed. She licked away every trace of his desire, then positioned herself next to him. She draped her arm over his chest, playing with the dark hair that feathered him there.

The sound of his calm breathing was all she could hear. He held her teasing hand, keeping it steady. "Thank you. I've never experienced such euphoria as that."

"It's only the beginning, remember?" She led her hand down his abdomen and to his cock, already recovering and coming to attention once again. "Seems he may be ready for more."

In a flash of movement, he rolled her onto her back and pinned her arms above her head. "You're so fucking perfect for me." Then, a tenderness passed over his features. "I love you, Jolie."

"I love you, too." She moved her hips beneath him. "Make love to me and make me eternally yours."

"There may be some pain. But, I'll be here to see you through."

"Okay."

She spread her legs wider, and he entered her in a slow thrust. She

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gasped and tugged at her arms, wanting to hold him closer, but he steadily held her arms above her head. He moved in easy, relaxed strokes, building the fire in an unhurried tempo. This wasn't just sex. It wasn't anything dirty or obscene. He made love to her and worshipped each leisurely penetration of her slick canal.

He stoked the flames, and Jolie thought she would die of the wondrous sensations building within her soul. She loved this man, this vampire, with all her heart. Her soul recognized him as the mate for which she had yearned. As the inferno began to flicker out of control and her body spasmed, he bit into her flesh above her left breast, sending her over the edge. She screamed his name and saw her world spin out of control with her orgasm. Alonso drank from her, and she welcomed it. He pumped his seed into her body as he took her life fluid.

Darkness and fear began to engulf her, and she was helpless to fight it. Colors turned to black, and she felt her life drift away. Pain coursed through her body, and she thought she could not fight the encroaching dark.

Then, a salty, metallic liquid touched her lips. Tasting the fluid, she welcomed it, drinking it into her mouth. Gulp after gulp, the warm substance renewed her strength.

When the source pulled away, she heard Alonso in the distance. "That's enough for now, little one."

She licked her lips and opened her eyes. Gazing down at her with dark eyes was the man she loved. She raised an unsure hand to his face and traced the slight stubble along his chin. "I love you," she whispered.

He leaned over and brushed his lips over hers. "I promise to love you forever."

They sealed their new beginning with a gentle, loving kiss.

* * *

Sitting on the roof of the tomb of the Voodoo Queen, Lucius knew

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the moment Alonso turned Jolie. He still wished she was his. But, she had been right. What if the one destined to be his mate truly was still out there somewhere? Hundreds of years of waiting, and how much longer did he have to wait?

With a fingernail, he carved three Xs into the stone roof and knocked, the rumored way to make a wish to Marie Laveau. “Grant me my wish, bring me love everlasting.”

A howl rang through the air. Lucius glanced up, then closed his eyes, inhaling the scent of a beast in the distance. With his ultra-sensitive senses, he picked up the trail of a female wolf, hunting in the far-off bayou. A wolf in the swamps of Louisiana? Alligators, he could understand, but a wolf?

She howled into the night once again, a call of loneliness cutting through the dark. His heart ached for the beast, knowing all too well the pain she felt.

There was something odd about her scent. Something strange. He zeroed in on her location and watched her with his mind’s eye. She sat upon a log underneath a great cypress. Magic and mystery surrounded her body, and she howled at the full moon yet again.

Could it be this was no ordinary wolf?

As if sensing someone watching her, the beast turned and loped off into the black cover of twisted trees.

Lucius stood upon the roof of the tomb and gazed out over the city toward the distant bayou.

Jolie had been right. His mate *was* out there...

And she was a werewolf.

MARIANNE LACROIX

Author Marianne LaCroix aka Shaylee O'Hara dreamed of becoming an author ever since her parents gave her a little typewriter as a child. Luckily, her parents supported all of her creative outlets, be it oil painting or creative writing. When it came time for college, she majored in English and took art classes on the side.

In 1994 Mari earned her BA in English, married and moved to Georgia from her childhood home in New Jersey. There she worked in an office for about two years before feeling restless. She made a dramatic move and quit the desk job, then returned to school for nursing. She earned a diploma in Practical Nursing then went to work in her local hospital, and eventually to a nursing home. Each night when she got home from caring for others, no matter how tired, she'd sit down and write tales of ghost pirates or roguish vampires.

When Mari got pregnant with twins, she said goodbye to nursing for a while. The twin girls were born in March, 2002, and Mari has been a stay-at-home mom ever since. When the girls would go to bed, Mari would get on the computer and write. She also worked hard on starting and establishing the review site, *LoveRomances*. Then in early 2003, she decided to write romance seriously, not just as a pastime. Her break came with *Lady Sheba*, closely followed by *Another Chance*. Both books have received glowing reviews, and *Lady Sheba* has been a *Road to Romance* Reviewer Choice and a selected group read for the Erotic Readers Haven Yahoo Group.

What can readers expect in the future? Marianne's erotic romances are filled with everlasting love and hot encounters, and Shaylee's romances are brimming with action, adventure and love. More tales of the paranormal with vampires, ghosts and fairies are on the way!

You can visit her website at: <http://www.mariannelacroix.com>

* * *

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