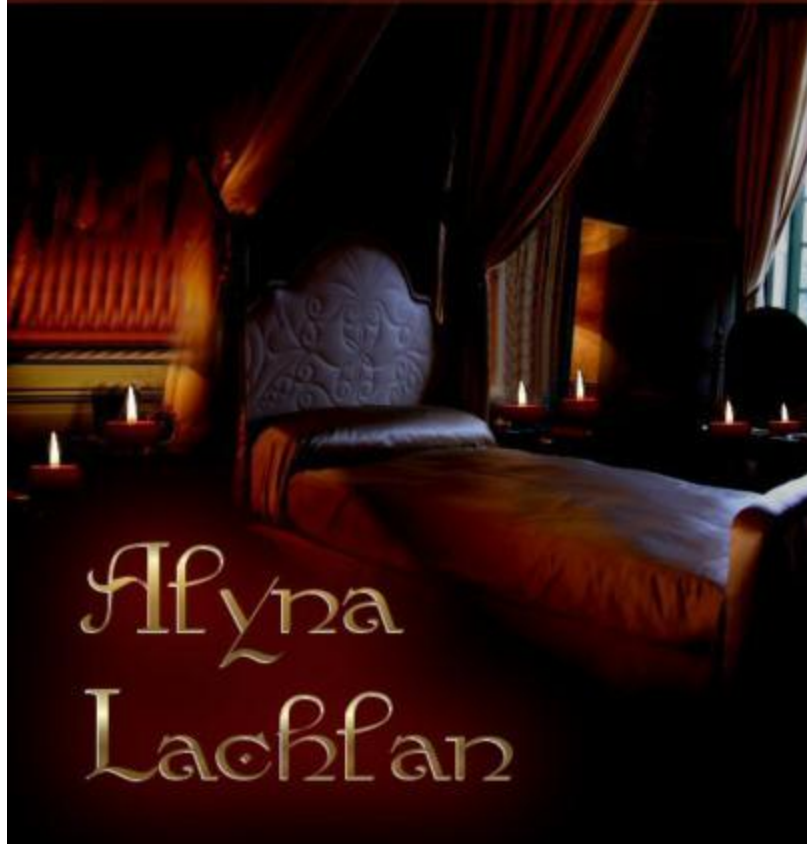


SATIN CHAMBER

VENUS PRESS

# Satin Chambers



Alyna  
Lachlan

*Alyna Lachlan*

# **SATIN CHAMBER**

**By**

**Alyna Lachlan**



## **SATIN CHAMBER**

The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal, and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, places, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

## **SATIN CHAMBER**

Copyright (c) 2005 by ALYNA LACHLAN

ISBN: 1-59836-048-5

Cover art and design (c) 2005 by Sable Grey

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any form without permission, except as provided by the U.S. Copyright Law. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

For information, you can find us on the web at  
[www.VenusPress.com](http://www.VenusPress.com)

*Alyna Lachlan*

## *Chapter One*

### Victorian England

McLain opened his eyes and drew in his first breath of the evening. The stench of the long dead and the dank smell of mildew filled his lungs as he lay on the cold, slab floor of an ancient crypt.

He glanced around cautiously; letting his gaze roam about the four, gray, rock walls, encasing him in a tomb. No windows were cut into the rock to let light in. Only one unlit torch sat in an iron sconce near the door.

With a whispered word, the torch flamed to life, casting flickering golden shadows around the small room. For the moment, the light would chase away the dark abyss from his soul.

An old skeleton sat with its head bowed against its sunken chest, its arms stretched above in irons, chained to a carved stone table that held the body of the crypts unknown owner. The walls were darkened in spots where moisture seeped through the cracked stone and green moss grew thick.

Ancient script covered the ceiling as well as three walls. He didn't take the time to read it as yet. Escape loomed as the first objective. The unmarked wall held a sealed iron door that teased of freedom. The hinges looked rusted as well as some of the design around the curved handle, but it was the way out.

Staying where he lay, he searched inward, taking inventory of himself. His jaw hurt like hell where it had connected with the bastard's fist the night before. McLain raised his hand to his face and groaned as pain revealed itself along his arm. His left shoulder and both fists were scraped and sore, and a sharp pain in his side made him wonder if he had a broken rib. All in all things were not too bad, because he still drew breath. But, he knew his hours were numbered. His crime in taking the life of a True Blood would be his death.

## SATIN CHAMBER

He had been such a fool to step between an ancient and what the vampire wanted, but he would do it again if the choice fell to him. He was bred to be a killer and all vampires knew it and feared him.

So, this was to be his prison for the crime committed. The place was definitely not a suite at the palace, but he'd been in worse places, and for less. How long would he be here before death claimed him? And who would be the axe man?

Gnawing hunger gripped his belly, causing his fangs to lengthen. He had no way of knowing how long he'd gone without sustenance, or how many hours he'd lain on this cold floor. McLain guessed no more than twenty-four hours or his strength would have shriveled and faded away with each hour that past. He tried to ignore his discomfort and read the words on the ceiling. They ran in the ever-crossing loops of a Celtic knot. What he read didn't bring comfort but finality.

"Be damn."

He had been sealed in Menippus's crypt, a powerful ancient, prophesied to awaken with the next full moon. He sighed. He now knew his executioner and the hour of his death. Finally, there would come an end.

McLain slowly pushed himself to a sitting position. Holding a hand to his side, he swallowed a groan and pushed his hair back from his eyes.

*So, be it.*

Thinking back on what he had found the True Blood doing, anger poured like molten steel into his gut. He would have killed the bastard again even knowing it meant his death.

The smallest scrap of leather against the sandy stone floor caught McLain's attention. He was not alone.

Jerking his head around to peer deeper into a darkened corner, he saw the outline of a huddled form crouched between the stone table and wall.

He reached out with his senses, hearing the rapid heartbeat, the rush of blood, the sweet scent, causing his innards to twist in hunger. Human, not vampire. What was a human doing in this crypt?

"Who are you? Come out. I would speak with you."

"Do you always speak to your meal before you consume it?" a soft female voice answered.

*Alyna Lachlan*

That lifted his brow before laughter rumbled in his chest. This person knew what he was and didn't scream with hysterics. His curiosity pricked. Others of this kind loved terrorizing victims, but that had never set well with him. Blood could be taken without the donor's knowledge. Fear of his race was already prevalent. Besides, in taking blood when the heart is pumping fast, there was a danger of taking too much and killing the human.

"In this case, I do, unless you wish for me to skip conversation and go right for the main course." Silence greeted his off handed remark. "Sorry, the joke was not well done of me."

A soft laugh from beneath the tattered cloak caught him by surprise, and a smile curled one corner of his mouth. Even with his night vision, he could make out nothing of the woman's features or form. Yet, her strength of character and sense of humor pulled at something buried deep within his black heart, an old memory of a lost life best forgotten, rained like golden coins through his thoughts.

"I know why I'm here." Her voice came soft, gentle. "Why are you locked in this place?"

"A difference of opinion. I killed him for it." McLain stood up slowly, holding his side and moved over to examine the iron door, running fingers along the seam and hinges. After checking to make sure the door was locked, he reached down, raising his pant leg and pulled a blade from his black boot. He shoved the side of his knife between the pin and hinge, trying to work them loose.

"What difference of opinion?"

He turned to glance into the corner where she sat, concealed. "You ask a lot of questions. Take care...people kill to keep their secrets buried."

"If I am meant to die in a matter of moments, there is no harm in telling me. I'm curious to know why a man would kill another over an opinion. There must be more to this."

The woman was perceptive and quick. Her voice rang clear and soft, bringing a calm to his turmoil.

"How old are you?" He turned back to the door. "You sound young. Why do you think you will die?"

"I'm in a crypt with a hungry vampire. I am to be the blood sacrifice to see you restored to full strength."

## SATIN CHAMBER

“Did you volunteer?” A sneer supplanted his smile. The thought disgusted him, but surprising enough, many wished for immortality and power, giving up their lives in hope of getting the everlasting curse. Very few vampires granted that gift and gladly took the lives of their victims.

“No, I was given little choice in the matter.”

He turned back toward her, catching a whiff of lavender, a soft fragrance with a high price. The expense of the perfume didn’t match the tattered cloak she wore.

“What is your story? How did you get here?”

“Wrong place at the wrong time.”

“A mystery. Somehow, I knew you wouldn’t share. You conceal your secrets as well as yourself. Don’t you trust me?” A mischievous smile lifted one corner of his lips.

“I trust no one, even one as charming but deadly as you.”

“Young and cynical. You intrigue me. How do you know of my race?”

“I healed one of your kind a few years ago. I came upon him in the forest late one night, bleeding and in pain. I thought he would die, because he had serious wounds. In his fever, he spoke many truths. I have kept my silence, and will continue to hold it. So do not ask me his name.”

McLain raised his knife to the torch light, running a thumb over the blade, searching for nicks.

“You are prickly and defensive. I would say you have been harmed a time or two in the past.” He wiped the flat of his knife on his pants then slid it back in his boot.

“Only cautious. All I have is my life and word, and I’m not going to lose both. Even if my life is taken, I gave my word no one would know his name. I will keep it until he wants it known. Do you have a loved one waiting for your return? A companion?”

“No. My soul is too black, my crimes well known. No one would have me. I’m meant to walk alone.” He lifted a brow and shrugged his wide shoulders. “What about you? Do you have a husband, family?”

Carmen thought over the last few weeks. The murder of her mother by her half brother started it all. The attempts on her life soon followed. It had been a trusted maid that helped her escape before his evil plans came to pass. He would never give up searching for her. His lust for power would see to that. She had loved her brother and had looked up to him and his strong will, but the murder changed all that.

### *Alyna Lachlan*

However, more pressing issues proved uppermost in her mind at the moment, like being locked in this crypt with the rare masculine beauty of the man standing before her. It was perfectly safe to find him attractive, she decided, because nothing could ever come of it. They were too different. He was a creature of the moon. She was of the sun. When one rose, the other set, never to occupy the same time.

“No. No one I can count as family.” Carmen had tried not to panic when he awoke, but now she tried not to wish for things a maiden had no right to wish for.

He had aristocratic features, high cheekbones, strong jaw, and straight nose. His only flaw was a purplish bruise along his right jaw line. His tousled long, ebony hair lay soft over his shoulders, but that was the only thing soft about him.

From beneath her tattered hood, she glanced over his lean, muscular body as he examined the doorframe, having discovered the hinges wouldn’t budge. His dark clothing moved with each tightening of a muscle. When her gaze slid up to his face, she caught his intense stare, examining, searching, for something in her. His eyes were so dark they appeared black in the low torchlight.

His smile was seductive and somehow knowing, as if reading her thoughts. He leaned back against the door, folding his arms across his chest. The white shirt he wore pulled open, showing his darkly bronzed flesh, hard and smooth. She wanted to touch him, feel the heat of another person, the comfort of a gentle caress, but she could never get that close to him. If he knew what she was capable of, he would turn on her as well. It was safer to hide, even though she was a woman with needs and wants like any other.

Carmen’s gaze met his. It was a mistake, because his penetrating eyes robbed her of her concentration. She couldn’t breathe. Her body grew heated. Why was he here if not to take her blood or her life? What game did he play? Was he telling the truth about being here as punishment?

The man exuded danger. She sensed the predator in every smooth move he made, every sharp glance. Nothing escaped his notice, that certainty was more terrifying than the idea that he would kill her. Her secrets must *never* be revealed.

In the relaxed stance he presented, he never betrayed the coiled predator ready to strike. But with every breath, she feared he would.

She kept still, afraid to move. There hung an energy about him that called to her. The last thing she wanted was to draw attention to herself. Her face and form were a



## SATIN CHAMBER

curse, and what lay beneath her skin even more so. She must stay concealed or cause herself even more trouble.

“What is your name?” His deep voice compelled her, pulling answers out when she had no wish to give them.

“Carmen.”

Names were personal, a way to grow close to someone. She couldn’t afford closeness. Things happened to everyone she knew. Bad things.

“Carmen? No surname?”

“And what is your name, my lord?” She knew it was wrong to ask, but deep down she needed to know. A small connection, if only briefly, grew like a hunger in her heart.

“McLain Dubrinski.”

“A good strong name.”

He gave her an elegant bow. “You are most kind, my lady.”

A devilish twinkle passed over his dark gaze. “You have examined me from head to toe, might I not see your face so I have an image to go with so lovely a name?”

Carmen felt heat crawl up her neck to spread across her cheeks. He had felt her appraisal of him. The rogue was used to having his way. No doubt with that charm and handsome face, women lined up to give him everything he desired.

“‘Tis best I stay where I am. Please be content. I’m not much to look at.”

“Again you intrigue me. Were you burned, have large scars, or disfigured at birth? From where do you hale?”

“Please, my lord. I’m not worthy of your notice. My scars must stay hidden, buried beneath this tattered cloak.”

McLain pushed away from the door, his long strides moving toward her. When he stood close enough to touch her, he stooped down, his forearms resting across his knees, his large hands dangling between his muscled legs. His head tilted slightly as if to see past her hood.

Carmen pressed back against the wall, able to go no farther. Her breathing quickened and her hold tightened on her cloak, clutching it closed at her throat.

McLain closed his eyes, leaning toward her and inhaling, pulling her scent deep within his being before his intense gaze burned through the material again. An inner fire brightened the dark orbs of his eyes.

*Alyna Lachlan*

Her body stirred with its first taste of passion, dark, and hungry, causing her hips to rock slightly, needing comfort.

“You are a maid, no male scent touches you. You are young, in your early twenties. Though you have not shown me your fear, it is there in the rapid beat of your heart, and the breath that is drawn quickly across your parted lips. Is this fear of me or something else—a budding desire to taste a man’s first kiss, perhaps?”

Blooming heat filled her cheeks and a shiver of awareness caused her nipples to harden. His words alone could bring a response to her body. What powers did he hold that she moved to his words?

“Stop. Please look no farther. I would hold my secrets just as you would hold yours. I too could know you if I looked into your thoughts, but I will not pry.”

“You have the gift, then?” His brow lifted. “I don’t sense the hunger of our people in you, so it must come from another source.”

Panic slithered along her spine. He was coming to close too the truth. She must escape before it was too late.

A loud thunk against the door, from the outside, caused both of them to start and glance toward the entrance. McLain instantly grabbed for the knife in his boot, placing himself in front of her.

Carmen unconsciously reached out, grabbing McLain’s arm. She cried aloud, releasing him instantly as painful dark images crowded her thoughts.

McLain sucked in a deep breath, his gaze swinging back to hers in surprise. His gaze narrowed, a frown pinched between his brows. His jaw clenched in anger.

“What the hell?”

He stumbled back from her just as the door opened and fresh night air spilled into the dank cavity of the tomb. A tall dark form stood in the archway, silhouetted by the moon. A wraith on a devil’s purpose.

## SATIN CHAMBER

### *Chapter Two*

The wraith-like form waved them toward freedom. “Carmen, I come to repay my debt. Go quickly while the night is young. The guard has been dealt with.”

Carmen stood, keeping herself concealed. “‘Tis good to hear your voice once again and see that your health is restored.”

The man stepped into the light and bowed, standing to one side so she might exit. His blonde hair was held back by a queue. Sharp blue eyes sparkled with fire and sat under arched brown brows in a strong square face. “And it is good to see that you are unharmed.”

When Carmen made to walk out with the stranger, McLain stepped in her way. “Carmen, don’t move.” His command came hard and deadly. His gaze centered menacingly on the man in the opened door. This was too easy and Slain, the vampire hell lord, would never come to a maid’s rescue unless there was something in it for him. McLain wasn’t going to take that chance.

“She goes with me, Slain. I have given her my protection.”

The offer of protection slipped from his lips without thought. Why he should care about this unknown, unseen woman confused him. It was unlike him to care about anyone, let alone a human. But the offer was given, and he would stand by his word.

“My lord...?” she started.

“No, Carmen. This man is vampire and I feel his hunger. He has not fed this night and you are a sweet treat. That makes him dangerous and I will not leave you unprotected while in this place when he is near.” His voice was harsh because he wanted her to understand the danger she stood in. Vampires attacked quickly and without remorse. She was too trusting with Slain. He also wanted Slain to know he would have to go through him if he wanted Carmen. McLain was almost overwhelmed by his need to protect her.

*Alyna Lachlan*

“You have not feed either, my lord, yet you have done me no harm.”

His eyes narrowed, but he never took his gaze from the man in front of him. “We also need to discuss what just happened between us.”

“McLain.” The visitor interrupted. “I have no quarrel with you. You have three days before the ancient awakens. I leave you to do, as you will. But if you intend harm to this woman, you will find my blade through your black heart.” His gaze fell to Carmen again. “My debt is paid in full, Carmen.”

She nodded, then he turned, disappearing into the night fog covering the ground like bed linen, leaving the door open for their escape.

McLain turned to face her, irritated to see nothing but cloak. “You will stay with me until we can talk about what happened a moment ago. We will also talk about your connection to Slain. That vampire slayed his own mother. Let us leave this place before he or others return.” He waved her through the door first, following close behind.

The night air, as well as the taste of freedom, rejuvenated his spirits. He would be a hunted man within hours. Every moment of life was a gift, and that gift of time, shared with this mystery woman, became more interesting by the moment, yet as deadly for it became a warmth he longed to explore.

The fog thickened, growing over their heads, becoming hazardous as they wove their way through the maze of tombstones and crypts. An unseen open pit, grave robbers, or a hunting vampire could see their escape delayed...all perils he wished to protect her from. McLain kept them to the trees and thickest fog, grateful for his night vision.

It was too dark for any human to see, but for him, his vampire gaze saw the moonlight streaming like sunbeams between the tree branches, showing every detail, clear and sharp.

The large oaks creaked and groaned as the breeze far above pushed the top limbs to-and-fro overhead. Their twisted roots poked through the ground to trip the unwary. The faint clip-clop of horse’s hooves on cobblestone roads echoed off to their left and a barking dog in front of them caused McLain to lead her to the right along the marsh.

The ground grew soft, sucking at his feet in places. Carmen tripped once and McLain put an arm around her waist, pulling her up tight along his side. Again, energy buzzed between them, but this time he ignored it. They didn’t need a twisted ankle and her satin shoes were not made for hiking in the swampy bog. He could carry her if he

## **SATIN CHAMBER**

didn't think they would be attacked, but he needed his hands free if the unexpected happened.

The strong smell of wet earth and rotting vegetation filled the air. Several splashes deeper within the marsh eerily spoke of creatures on the move. Glowing eyes peered out of the thick fog and shadowy branches. An owl screeched loudly and a sudden sense of eyes watching their progress touched his thoughts.

After an hour or more of walking around gnarled trees, careful to avoid a hole or slithering creatures, Carmen broke the silence. "Where are you taking me?"

"There is a boardinghouse on the edge of this marsh that takes any boarder, without questions, for a fee. I'm getting a room so you will be safe while I feed. I want us to talk."

He turned to face her only to growl and turn back to the muddy path. He was going to rip that tattered hood from her head and off that body as soon as he returned from his hunt. He wouldn't talk to a wall of cloth any longer, no matter how scarred she might be.

A soft glow through the dark forest of trees, and wall of fog, showed like a beacon as they neared a shadowy building. The rough wood exterior had turned gray from all the moisture, causing the rooming house to blend into the surrounding. Water dropped from the slate roof to dig a small trench in the earth where it hit repeatedly. One torch stuck in an iron sconce marked the entrance. The flame hissed and sputtered in the damp night air. Whispered voices came from inside the open doorway as they neared.

McLain leaned close as he spoke. "Stay close to me and do not speak."

The warmth of his breath stirred her hair through the hood, causing a quiver of pleasure to slide along her neck before she nodded in agreement. His brow pinched together over his dark gaze before turning back to the entrance. He led her through the door and into a fire lit room with many rough wood tables and benches. The smell of smoke and unwashed bodies hung heavy in the small room, mixing with the odor of spiced stew and frying pig fat. Half-melted tallow candles sat in the center of each scarred table. The tallow had run out of its tin cups to harden in puddles over the wooden surface.

Coats and hats hung on iron hooks beside the door. A stone chimney sat above a blazing hearth where fire licked and danced along the bottom of a large black caldron. A bubbling brown stew popped and hissed in the pot with steam roiling above.

*Alyna Lachlan*

A few unsavory men sat eating and drinking near the blackened stone hearth. Most all the patrons looked like cut throats. Their blades reflected the fires light. Their features pinched, wrinkled, and frowning, dirt smeared over cheeks and chin. Only one man was well dressed and seemed out of place as he sat in the corner of the room. His deep-set gaze centered on McLain.

She laid her hand on his back in warning and felt the tightening of his muscles as a current passed between them. Though McLain looked relaxed, he appeared to notice everything. He kept his body between hers and the well-dressed man and did it without seeming to.

Carmen marveled at his smooth command. He smiled at the woman behind the long, wooden counter, using his charm to get one of her best rooms. She handed him a key.

“There be no charge for the night, handsome. ‘Tis honored I am you choose to stay with me. I get off at three. Times can get lonely. If you need company come get me.”

There was a seductive hint in the woman’s offer and Carmen found a tug of anger swirling about in her belly that made her frown. Instantly, she didn’t like the woman.

“I’ll remember that beautiful. Thanks for the room.” The smile that McLain gave the owner didn’t help cool that anger. Carmen felt the urge to slap the back of his head but tightened her fist instead. Whom he courted was his business, but he could do it without her. She made to leave but McLain’s strong hand gripped her arm, holding her in place.

McLain kept himself between her and the others even as they climbed the stairs, turning right at the top and moved down a narrow dark hallway. A candle burned at each end, giving only minimal light. The floorboards creaked under McLain’s feet as they moved along the hall. At the last room, he inserted the key and opened the door. “Step in quickly.” His gaze stayed focused on the hallway until he stepped in after her, closing and locking the door behind them.

“The well-dressed man in the corner was a vampire, was he not?” Carmen turned, watching McLain glance about the room, inspecting everything.

“Yes, but I wouldn’t worry...he didn’t notice you. It was me he was watching.”

Two hunters in the same area couldn’t be good. “Will there be trouble?”

### **SATIN CHAMBER**

The mischievous smile that was his alone tilted one side of his lips. "I always expect trouble. It's the way of life. Make yourself comfortable. I must go out, but I won't be long."

"Where are you going?"

He stepped close to her, and she took a step back.

His gaze again tried to pierce the material of her hood. "Do not leave here, Carmen. It is not safe outside this room."

She wondered if he was going to meet that woman downstairs. Would he be holding her in his arms as he sampled blood from her neck or breast? The thought angered her again, yet why she cared made no sense. Carmen wanted to stomp her foot and yell but kept herself controlled. Ladies didn't show emotion. People would consider them unbalanced and uncivilized. Ladies must conduct themselves demure and graceful in any situation.

"I will stay, because I am tired. Do...as you must." Her anger rang loudly in her voice, but she couldn't help that.

"Your obedience is gratifying." His rich laughter filled her head with warmth. She liked the sound of it.

She smiled, giving tit-for-tat in a smart reply. "I am honored you think so."

McLain walked to the window, checking to see that it was locked then turned toward the door. "Open this for no one. When I return I will use the key. I will be gone at most thirty minutes."

She nodded and watched him leave. The click of the lock echoed in the small room, signaling she stood alone in a strange place once more. This time inviting thoughts of a darkly handsome man warmed her until she remembered where he would be going.

Why did McLain have to be so handsome? That long, black hair hanging across thick, broad shoulders, dark eyes that glowed with a heat every woman wanted to share. She may be a virgin, but she knew what happened between men and women. A friend told her all the gruesome details, but this was the first time she found herself interested in kissing and touching a man.

She sighed, knowing it could never happen. Taking a closer glance around the room, she noticed the sparse furniture. One bed, a candle-lit writing table with washbowl and pitcher, and a chair set before the cold grate. Towels lay folded on the table and a

*Alyna Lachlan*

stack of wood sat near the cold hearth. The planked floors seemed well swept and the bed coverings made up, so the stay wouldn't be unpleasant.

Suddenly, Carmen froze. Unease ran along her spine and down each limb. It was as if a dark shade had passed through her soul to steal her warmth. Dread curled her fingers into fists but with effort, she loosened up and stooped down to start a fire. What would come would come.

The premonition of danger grew strong. The inky darkness was slithering down the hallway toward her. Had her brother found her? She reached out with her senses. There was nothing there but a dark hole. What came...was not human.

Nothing changed fate's plans. If she was to die, she would.

The dry logs caught and snapped, causing her to jump in fright. Her palm flattened over her heart to keep it from leaving her chest. The firelight spilled warmth and light about her just as she heard the latch on her door rattle. She made sure the hood of the cloak concealed her features as she faced the door, waiting. Her heart raced in fear as she backed slowly into one corner of the room.

A black finger of smoke slid under the door, crawling up its wooden panel to the latch. The click of the lock brought panic to tighten her throat closed. The door swung open, revealing the well-dressed vampire. His gaze burned as he searched the room.

"Where is McLain?"

Carmen held perfectly still not willing to give her position away deep in the darkened corner.

"Answer me human, or I will tear out your throat and drain you dry."

The vampire's gaze glowed red, evil power emanated from him to crowd the space between them. She felt its taint and knew she was marked by it.

When the vampire slowly stalked her, she answered. "He stepped out and will return within the moment. Please be a gentleman and wait downstairs for his return."

A wicked leer and a tight jaw revealed to Carmen that the vampire never wanted McLain, but what he held. At this moment, it was she.

As the man moved in on her, the corner, once a refuge, now became a trap.

"Touch me and it will mean your death."

"I don't think so," he sneered. Then with the speed of a striking serpent, he grabbed for her. She struck out, catching him by surprise. He ripped her hood off and she kicked at his shins, her fist hitting his ear. He only shook his head and his eyes grew



## **SATIN CHAMBER**

wider. Her small efforts couldn't stop his superior strength. A ripping pain sliced into her neck as he bit through her flesh, a scream frozen in her throat as he drank deep. She squeezed her eyes closed as the pain rocked her frame and weakness invaded her limbs.

"McLain!"

\* \* \*

McLain didn't go far to find what he needed. He stood in the shadows as two men walked their horses into the stables. Using his heightened senses, he made sure no other would be about to interrupt him. On silent feet, he moved into the dimly lit interior to hear the two men talk as they unsaddled their mounts. McLain stepped from the shadows, drawing the men's gazes, then waved a hand in front of them, giving a command. "Sleep."

The two men slumped against the walls and slid to the hay-covered floor. Hunger pounded at McLain, his gut twisting in knots. He'd gone too long without nourishment. His strength was somewhat diminished. Even so, he took care not to drink too much or leave any wounds on the men's neck with a reckless feed. The men were young and healthy and McLain felt his powers returned with each swallow. Vitality sang through his cells and he took a deep cleansing breath prior to stepping back into the shadows before someone walked in and caught him.

McLain planted images of the two companions drinking together in friendly barter so upon waking, they would have a reason for feeling weak and disoriented. He checked each man's heartbeat. Then he wiped images of himself from their thoughts. He called the men to awaken, staying near yet unseen in the darkest shadow, making sure of their welfare before returning to his room and Carmen.

Now well fed, he was in control once again. His attraction to her had been only a weakness from his lack of food. Carmen was just another human among many that he would use to entertain himself until his life was taken.

However, to be honest, she was different from other women he had known. There existed honor in her heart and she cared for others, having healed another vampire without thought to herself. Carmen had strength and a stubborn streak in her nature. That flaw amused him. No other woman had stood up to him. They all ran screaming. He found Carmen's actions refreshingly honest. She wasn't trying to impress him or cower away. Odd, but he felt more relaxed in her presence.

***Alyna Lachlan***

Returning to the boarding house, he quickly scanned the room for the vampire and found him gone. There had been something about the man he didn't trust. An underlining menace McLain had come up against in the past.

*'Tis a relief to have him gone.*

McLain quickly ordered some food to be sent up for Carmen at sunset that evening. He was sure she had not eaten today and would be hungry. Once upstairs in the hallway, he saw the door to his room stood open. Unfamiliar fear twisted in his gut and a roaring filled his head. He leaped down the hall in a single move of speed, pictures of an injured Carmen ripped through his heart.

The scene that greeted him was not what he expected.

The vampire he'd noticed from downstairs earlier now lay tossing and turning on the floor. Foam bubbled from his mouth and nose—he was choking to death. His body convulsed with sharp jerks. A wild gurgling filled the room only to die on a long sigh.

## SATIN CHAMBER

### *Chapter Three*

McLain quickly searched for Carmen and found her huddled form in one corner bright red blood smeared across one shoulder of her concealing cloak.

He closed and locked the door, ignoring the dying vampire and went straight to Carmen.

“What happened? He stooped down beside her and reached for her cloak.

“No, leave me. Please, leave me, I’m fine.” She slapped at his hand.

“You’re not fine.”

McLain ignored her protesting hands and pulled the material from her clutch. He was not going to have this cloth between them again.

She struggled to hold onto her security, but McLain was stronger and determined. He tore the hood from her head then pulled it off her shoulders before gently pushing her hair back and taking a good look at the injury. It was a nasty tear, a cruel and vicious wound. He could only imagine the fear and pain she had endured. Anger began to weave along his nerves until he lifted his gaze to really see her for the first time.

Carmen’s hair was long, well past her hips and raven’s wing black. It fell in waves along her face and across her small shoulders, but it was her eyes that held him spellbound. They were large on a gentle face. Soulful deep brown like a doe. They pulled one in, capturing the heart and mesmerizing the soul. She had a small nose and full, pouty pink lips, yet he was drawn back to her compelling eyes. The light of the fire danced within their large depths, seducing one to come closer. The fear reflected there brought out his need to protect, as well as his want to touch her. He pulled her into the shelter of his arms. His hand splayed along her lower back and felt her warmth seeping through his clothes to scorch his flesh.

Heat pulsed between his legs as he became aroused. His gaze dropped to her barely clad breasts as they rose and fell with each rapid breath above the sky blue

*Alyna Lachlan*

serviceable blouse. Her flesh, creamy and soft. A need, strong and heady, beat through his body. Carmen was more beautiful than any woman he'd known, even his once beloved Catherine, who'd lived two centuries before. That unexpected thought came like a splash of icy water, stirring anger to resurface.

Panic crossed her gaze before Carmen closed her eyes and turned her head away. "Will you now speak sonnets to me and give me your undying love, or pull a blade across my throat so no other will fall under my spell?"

He blinked, narrowing his gaze.

"Hell no," he growled.

When she looked up sharply, he refused to meet her gaze. Instead, he pushed her head to one side, examining the wound in her neck once again. What the hell was the matter with him? His school days were lost centuries ago. Darkness claimed his soul so what were these emotions? "It has stopped bleeding and seems to have sealed nicely."

"Have you nothing else to say?"

"Oh, I have plenty to say and most of it would burn your innocent ears."

"You're angry?" Her eyes widened, lifting both gently curved brows.

"Bloody right."

McLain stood, moving over to a washbasin and wet a cloth. As he moved back to her, he kicked the dead vampire in a spurt of anger and it crumbled to a pile of dust. Stooping down next to her again, he wiped away the dried, crusted blood with gentle strokes.

His anger came more from his own reaction to her. The raw possessiveness he held for her wasn't wanted, and his lack of discipline was appalling. She stared at him with a confused expression on her face. He wanted to kiss her, putting a dreamy glint in those large eyes. Instead, he grumbled.

"You have some explaining to do, and I don't mean about your scarred face."

"My face isn't scarred."

"Glad we got that straight," he underscored.

"My beauty angers you?"

Carmen was shocked. Her looks had never inspired that emotion in a man and she wasn't sure how to handle it or the fact that he was so near. His touch brought quivers of pleasure along her limbs and between her legs. There was a heaviness in her belly and her nipples grew sensitive and irritated by the shift she wore. The warm

## SATIN CHAMBER

masculine scent of him stirred an unknown desire. Too many new emotions had turned her control to turmoil.

He had no right to smell so good after traipsing through the marsh, but he did and his touch, as he cleaned the blood off her neck and shoulder brought a shudder of pleasure. Her stomach fluttered as well as her heart with his nearness. She had to stop staring at him. That wasn't helping matters. But she loved watching him move, the strong expressions on his face, the power emanating from him drew her gaze.

"Hell yes. How will we disappear or blend in with features like yours?"

Carmen's mouth dropped open. "'Tis a curse I bear. One given by the gods, so stop grumbling."

"I don't...grumble."

McLain was furious, though only with himself. To care brought overwhelming pain. The kind that rips the soul from the man so that he contemplates running a blade through his heart. There was no way in hell he would grow close to someone again. This woman was dangerous with those soulful eyes and soft, creamy skin. She brought out every protective instinct he had, a need to keep her safe, and that meant disaster.

"Sounds like grumbling to me. Have you looked in a mirror lately? You're not a hunchback with three eyes, McLain. Your looks draw every woman's eye within a two block radius."

A wicked smile touched his lips, but he ignored her statement and demanded instead, "Tell me what happened here."

Finished with cleaning her wound, McLain threw the damp cloth toward the washbowl then offered her his hand to help her stand. As she slid her fingers into his, tiny sparks of energy passed between them. McLain closed his larger hand over hers tightly, refusing to give in to it and pulled her up to stand in front of him.

"He broke in and attacked me."

"Did he say anything or do anything else? Did he drink or eat something in this room? The man is dead. Something killed him. I don't want any danger to us here."

She reached up with her other hand and pushed a stray hair from his brow to his temple. Then realizing what she had done, she quickly dropped her hand and glanced toward the hearth.

"A black trail of smoke came from the crack under the door to unlock it. He stepped in asking for you by name. When he found you gone, he attacked me. Within

*Alyna Lachlan*

seconds, he was rolling on the floor, holding his stomach, and foaming at the mouth. That is all there is to tell.” She turned away, taking her hand from his.

Carmen pulled the cloak back up her arms and slid the hood over her head.

McLain jerked the cloak off again. Her eyes widened as he took the offensive material completely off and threw it toward one corner to lay discarded on the floor.

“Don’t cover yourself again in my presence. I’ll no longer talk to your cloak.”

“I covered myself so you wouldn’t be angry.”

He took her face in both hands, raising her gaze to meet his. “I prefer your face to the cloth, and will know the pleasures of it. Am I understood?”

A smile lit Carmen’s features and it moved something in his heart of stone. He wanted to kiss her. His thumb slowly rubbed across her lower lip and her tongue came out to taste his finger. He dropped his hands away and stepped back.

*Damn! What was the matter with him?* Returning to a safer subject, he asked, “Did you hit or stab the vampire?”

When she shook her head, he frowned. This was not right. She was withholding something from him. The events didn’t add up. Surely, she at least fought him off. “Perhaps it was something he ingested downstairs. I don’t like mysteries.” McLain stepped to the hearth. He laid his arm along the mantel, kicking a glowing ember back into fire with the toe of his boot before turning toward Carmen again.

“Speaking of mysteries, how do you know Slain? I would like to know why a slug like Slain, who did nothing to help his own mother when she was attacked, would come to your aid. It’s said he toasted her murder and shared in her blood. What debt did you hold over him? Slain is without conscience or heart. He kills easier than he smiles.” That Slain and Carmen shared something secretly didn’t set well. He didn’t like it. Any association with that man would hurt Carmen.

“Do you remember me telling you how I learned about vampires?”

Carmen walked over to the bed and sat down on its soft surface. She spread her palm over its worn quilted covers.

“Slain was the vampire I found in the woods mortally wounded. I brought him to health. That is what he meant by repaying a debt.”

“That is all there is to it?” She lifted her gaze to meet his, a spark of anger flashed within her brown eyes.

## **SATIN CHAMBER**

“My lord, you are a bit high handed. I am no relation to you sir, so I don’t answer to you. I will go my way in the morning, and you will go yours. If there was something more, it would be none of your business, so don’t use that tone of voice with me.”

McLain dropped his arm from the mantel, a burning need bellowing through his chest. He moved straight to her. His stride never wavered.

Carmen’s heart raced as she sensed the predator in him stalking her. Flames moved behind his dark eyes, hypnotizing, compelling, and moving her to answer their call.

As he slowly neared, she raised her hands to hold him back but he didn’t stop. Her palms pressed into his chest as she was pushed backward on the bed. McLain leaned over her, his gaze intense, mesmerizing, an arm planted beside each one of her shoulders, caging her in, pressing his body into hers.

“You will go no where until I have all the information I need. Don’t play with me, Carmen. I am not a smitten youth out to win the bell of the ball. I have no soul, no mercy. I prey on the weak and am more dangerous than you can imagine.”

His fingers fisted in the hair on both sides of her face as he drew in her scent. “I’ll be damned if I fall for someone like you.”

His words came out on a harsh whisper, before he took possession of her lips.

A tingling sizzle moved from her lips to his, slightly painful at first, but he refused to let up. His kiss became demanding, coaxing, and teasing.

He groaned when her long fingers fanned into his hair and along the back of his neck. She held him, meeting his kiss with her own. Her mouth was wet, warm, and so addictively sweet.

As they touched some form of energy passed between them. He was compelled, driven to savor more of her flesh. She tasted of sweet fruit and smelled of honeyed lavender.

He slid his hand down the column of her throat then along her flesh to the curve of her breast. His large hand cupped her, his thumb brushing across her tight nipple. She moaned, arching her back, pressing herself into his touch. He growled low in his throat.

May the gods help him...he wanted to possess her. As soon as he realized he wouldn’t be content until he was resting deep between her thighs, he pushed himself away with a groan of regret, to lie beside her without touching. Both remained side by side still breathing heavily, unwilling to break the silence.

*Alyna Lachlan*

“Carmen?”

“I wish you wouldn’t.”

He turned to face her closed eyes, her lips slightly parted. “You know what I would ask?”

“Yes. And I am too tired to explain.” She brought her arm to rest across her forehead.

“I need to know. What happened when we first touched back at the crypt?”

Carmen sighed, running her hand across her chest.

He turned, propping himself up on one elbow, leaning toward her and taking her hand in his. “What is this tingling energy that passes between us when we touch?”

She opened her eyes to meet his and saw hard determination. Carmen lowered the arm from her brow. “I don’t know. It happened only once before. A load of information is shared between two people, your past and mine are exchanged, but the mind cannot catalogue it all in one lump, so over time it becomes clear piece-by-piece, a deep sharing of our experiences.”

“So you now hold all my secrets?” His gaze narrowed, his jaw tightened, as did the hold on her hand. It grew almost painful.

“I have no idea what facts were shared.” She turned into the shelter of his chest. “Hold me. I’m cold.” His muscular arms wrapped around her, pulling her close and once again his touch gentled. His fingers stroked a figure-eight along her spine.

She pressed her face into the curve of his neck, inhaling the warm male scent all his own. It brought a kind of comfort unfamiliar to her, more deeply moving than any she had received from her brother.

“Who was the other person you shared your thoughts with? If you say Slain, I’m going to kill him.”

The sharing of memories had been with her half brother, Brom, shortly before her mother’s murder, and look how that had turned out. To have it happen again with McLain stirred a growing panic. The knowledge she held would be a great weapon for good or ill. How would he use it?

“I am tired, McLain.” She brushed her fingers over her eyes before meeting his gaze again.

He frowned, taking in every detail of her face and she wondered what he saw. “Sleep then. I will hold my questions for another time.”



### **SATIN CHAMBER**

“What about the sun through the window in the morning?”

“This is the marsh. Large trees are thick and dense, very little light will reach this room’s soot smeared window.”

“You’ve been here before?”

“A time or two.”

She glanced toward the door. “What if another of your kind comes knocking?”

“I have magical traps woven across every opening. No one can enter. I wish I had thought to do so earlier. Be assured, I’ll not be slack again.”

“Thank you.” Her voice trailed off as she relaxed.

McLain knew the moment she fell asleep and placed a command to deepen her rest so she wouldn’t awaken until he brought her up. Even as tired as she was, her last thoughts were concerns for him. The unselfish act stunned him. She was a beautiful woman and any man would notice, but that beauty ran deeper than skin. He lay there watching her for a long minute.

She was holding things back. He could take her blood then pluck any information he chose from her thoughts. The idea grew tempting, but he knew in the end he would not drink from her unless invited. Yet, it was his duty to keep her safe. She must share everything with him if he was to see this through to the end. In three days, the full moon would rise, and if he was to meet his death, he wanted to take this time of sharing with him and know she was cared for.

*Alyna Lachlan*

## *Chapter Four*

Two men entered the boarding house the next eve through the rain. It had stormed all day, slowing their arrival. They were to meet someone that had news of a vampire's hideout in the city. Yet, the tallest man of the two had another reason to find the vampires. Carmen was with them or so the whispers went. He meant to have her.

The man's sharp gaze missed nothing of what was going on around him as he took a table in one darkened corner. His companion slid into the seat across from him just as the door opened again. Another younger man entered, glancing around, then smiled. He moved over to a group of three others near the hearth's heat, slapping another man on the back in greeting. One of them handed the new arrival a mug, and he lifted it to his lips. *Had he ever been so trusting?*

"Brom."

Hearing his name, he pulled his gaze from the reunion to glance toward his companion. The man had red hair, and its shaggy wet strands clung to his ruddy cheeks and across his bushy brow. His green eyes shifted from place to place. He had a weak chin and looked as if his head had been stepped on, pushing his features out to the sides.

"What?" Brom pulled off his rain soaked cloak and threw it over one of the empty chairs. He raked his fingers through his wet hair, pushing it back from his face. Water from his hair ran down the back of his neck and he shivered.

"You're doing the right thing, so stop frowning before you chase off the bar maids. We have to wipe those blood suckers out."

His frown deepened. "And if my sister is with them?"

"She won't be your sister anymore. You know this. They'll suck the blood from her and turn her into one of them. A monster."

Brom's gaze sharpened on the man seated across from him. It took every ounce of discipline he possessed not to let his rage take control. His traveling companion was a

## SATIN CHAMBER

fool. No one could touch Carmen's blood and live. She had power from the gods. Yet, when he thought of others touching her and causing her pain, guilt and frustrated anger consumed him. He alone would make the decision for life or death when it came to Carmen.

"You're not to touch her, Roy. Leave that pleasure to me or I will gut you. Is that understood?"

Roy shrugged his shoulders and waved a serving wench over to their table.

The blonde, buxom wench came to stand before their table. "What can I get you, both? We got some good sausage stew and hot ale to warm your innards on this cold, wet evening."

"Make mine a big serving." Roy said, his grin extra wide as his gaze slid over the woman.

"What about you, gent?" She turned toward Brom. Her smile slipped a little as her gaze heated. "Mayhap a soft bed and a warm woman?"

"Not tonight. Just stew and ale." The words came out clipped.

A pout formed on her lips and her brow lowered in a frown. She turned to leave but Brom reached out taking hold of her arm.

When she turned back, meeting his gaze, he made things right. "Another time, I might take you up on that offer."

The smile once again curved her lips as he let go, watching her disappear into the kitchen.

Glancing at Roy, Brom wondered again, what he was doing here with him. The answer came. This was his only lead to Carmen or his mother's lover, Jayce. Brom knew Jayce was looking for Carmen as well, but he was determined to find her first. There had been three attempts on her life but all failed. The forth one could succeed.

He was certain Jayce knew of Carmen's secret. They weren't close enough for Jayce's inquiries as to her whereabouts, to be concerned for her health. His lips curled in a sneer.

Now with Roy's connection to this group of assassins, who called themselves vampire hunters, they had gotten word that his sister resided in the company of a vampire. What damnable luck she had. They were to meet a man here that would take them to her.

"So where is this informant?"

*Alyna Lachlan*

Roy shrugged his shoulders. "He said he'd be here."

The serving wench brought a platter, carrying two bowls and two pints, placing them on the table before each man, along with wooden spoons. The spicy scent of the soup warmed his senses and the steam curling above each mug brought a satisfied smile to his lips.

"Will there be anything else?"

"Perhaps you can help us," Brom interrupted, glancing up from the meal to meet her warm smile. "We are here to meet with a man that should have arrived last night. I was wondering if you or someone here noticed a man who could have been expecting someone?"

"There was a fella' in here, a gent like yourself. He was well dressed and sat in the same chair you are. He waited here most of the night then just before dawn, he left. His evil gaze gave me a fright."

"Did he say where he was going or when he'd be back?"

"Nay. To tell the truth I never saw him leave. Mayhap he got a room upstairs. Want me to check for you?"

Brom smiled and gave her bottom a pat. "That would please me."

The wench giggled, flipping her hair as she left.

"Damn, what luck." Roy picked up his spoon and shoved stew between his lips.

Brom picked up his mug of warmed ale, twisting it around in his hands. "Yes. Isn't it?"

If this turned out to be a dead-end, he would have to follow Roy back to the underground to the vampire hunters in hopes of picking up another lead. That would mean more time lost, and Carmen was out there somewhere alone with a murderer searching for her.

He lifted the mug to his lips, taking long deep swallows of the heated brew. The rain had soaked through his coat. The cold seeped into his flesh and a shiver ran along the back of his neck. He snarled, hating cold wet weather.

A rumble of thunder made Brom take another long swallow of the warm ale, feeling it slide down his throat to lie in his stomach and melt the chill along his limbs. He spotted the serving wench coming back from over the rim of his mug. He set the pint down, waiting.

## SATIN CHAMBER

“There were two well dressed gents in here last eve and one of them took a room. It be the last room on the right, end of the hall. He hasn’t checked out as yet. Would you like me to take him a note?”

Brom smiled. “There is no need. Once we are finished, we will visit his room. I thank you greatly for your assistance.” If this was the man, Brom didn’t want to forewarn him of their visit in case the man had changed his mind or was trying to double cross them in some way. This boarding house and the march out back, was the perfect place to see someone disappear. Brom pulled a silver coin from his pocket and slid it across the rough wood table to her.

Her eyes lit up and she grabbed it quickly as if afraid the offered coin would be withdrawn. She slipped it down her cleavage; a smile of pleasure lit her face.

“If there is anything at all you might need, ask for me, Sue.”

She turned to leave and Brom watched her well-rounded behind swing back and forth. A warm body pressing to his sounded good at the moment, and she had the assets a man could enjoy. But finding Carmen came first.

“So we are in luck.” Roy’s voice grated on his nerves. The man was spoiled, bored, and rich; playing in dark things he had no idea about. Roy would end up dead within five years if he didn’t open his eyes and ears, then close his mouth. The only reason Brom stayed with him was because he knew the people Brom needed information from.

“Will you know this informant if you see him?” At Roy’s bulging cheeks, Brom prayed the man wouldn’t try to speak until he swallowed.

Roy nodded in answer.

“That’s good.” Brom leaned in toward Roy, his gaze narrowing on his target. “We wouldn’t want to share information about the vampire hunters with just anyone.”

The man swallowed then swallowed again. “I agree.”

“Then if you are finished with your meal let us go upstairs.”

Brom drained the rest of his ale and stood, leaving his stew untouched. Not waiting for Roy, he moved to the stairs.

Roy yelled. “I ain’t finished yet. What’s the hurry?” Then came the scrape of the chair against the planked floor.

Brom smiled as he took the stairs two at a time and heard Roy climbing behind him. Finding the last door on the right, Brom took the candle from the hall’s wall sconce.

*Alyna Lachlan*

The hot wax spilled on his hand, but he gave it no mind. He wanted to see the face of this man and know if he spoke the truth about Carmen's whereabouts. No one would keep him from her.

## SATIN CHAMBER

### *Chapter Five*

McLain came awake at the sunset hour, drawing in a deep breath to stir his body to life. He opened his eyes to a darkened room. Lightning flashed and he caught the view of the rough timber ceiling over his head. Then thunder followed roiled against the building walls.

“Carmen.”

He turned, seeking her out in the dark. With one word, the candles on the nightstand flared to life and the fire in the hearth snapped and crackled into a blaze. With the soft light, he glanced at the beautiful woman lying beside him. He raised himself on an elbow, leaning over her. Using one finger, he pushed an ebony curl off the curve of her cheek.

She still slept under his command. McLain ran a finger across her lips, then called her to awake.

Her dark lashes lifted and she brought her fists up to rub her eyes. Then her hands fell away so he could see her large brown eyes. They were sultry, still heavy from sleep. A smile curved her bowed lips and he felt his heart shift.

“Good morning.” Her voice was a gentle caress, blowing warm across the icy plain of his existence.

“I fear ‘tis evening, my lady. We slept the day away.”

The smile fell from her lips, and her brows became pinched.

“It’s not a bad thing,” he remarked, not understanding this change of expression.

“No, it isn’t that.”

Fear slid across her gaze and her fingers closed around his arms in a death grip. “Someone comes,” she whispered.

Just then, a hard pounding sounded on their door. She jumped, her gaze swinging to the door.

*Alyna Lachlan*

“Don’t let them in. Please, I’m scared. Tell no one I am here.”

“Another secret is revealed. Who is at the door Carmen? Should I kill them?” His gaze narrowed and he ground his teeth, his jaw tightened. He wanted to remove the fear in her gaze.

“No. I will have no one’s death on my hands.”

“It will be my hands, not yours. Tell me who it is and why I should not kill this person that causes fear to cloud your gentle gaze?”

McLain took note she still had a tight grasp on his arms. He wasn’t sure she even knew she hung onto him. His thumb brushed back and forth along the slender column of her throat, hoping to give comfort.

He wouldn’t let anything happen to her, and whatever stood outside that door terrified her.

“Carmen, who is at our door?”

The heavy knocking came again making her push deep into the covers. Carmen didn’t meet his gaze but studied his chest as she answered.

“My brother. He has come to murder me.”

McLain raised his brows. The information she gave was a little frustrating. He wanted details, some history, to know why her brother wanted her dead, but it didn’t look forthcoming and he accepted that for now.

He didn’t ask how she knew her brother stood beyond the door; there was too much he didn’t know about her to be surprised at any ability she possessed.

“Carmen, look at me.”

Her glance slowly moved up his throat, past his chin, to hold his gaze. “I’ll get rid of him. Pull the covers over your shoulders and lay with your back to the entrance. For no reason move because it may break the illusion I will lay over you.”

“Don’t underestimate him, McLain. He is very cunning. And I don’t want you hurt.”

A smile slid along his lips. Was that concern for him? He liked the feeling it gave him.

“As you wish. Now let go of my arms, beautiful, so I can answer the door.”

She bit her bottom lip and let go. “Now turn over, facing away.”



## SATIN CHAMBER

She did as he asked and McLain pulled the quilt up over her shoulders, pushing her long dark hair under the concealing blanket so nothing but the top of her head showed.

McLain left the bed just as the knocking came again, more persistent and with a heavy hand.

With a few low spoken words, he placed an illusion over Carmen. Anyone that looked would see the back of a red haired woman, sleeping peacefully.

McLain pulled the blade from his boot, moving it to the waistband of his pants. He would take no chance with Carmen's life. She hadn't shown fear when locked in a crypt with a vampire, but feared the man she called brother. Why? The storm still raged outside and lightning would illuminate the room behind him in short, blinding, bursts. With knowledge of these visitors, and the lightning behind him, he would have the advantage.

He waved his hand across the door, removing his spell and the door opened just as he stepped up. McLain's muscles grew tight as he met Carmen's brother face-to-face, waiting for the tall man's move. McLain was tall but this man stood three or more inches above him. There was a deadliness about him that he recognized in himself.

Dark wet hair had been pushed back over his forehead to fall straight down his back. His eyes were a deep brown and a long thin scar ran across his throat. The man's jaw was clenched and made his cheeks' hollows more pronounced. He would be considered a handsome man, McLain figured, but now, he was more concerned of what the man's first move would be.

McLain waited for him to speak, never taking his gaze from the man's dark eyes. If he were to attack, McLain would see it in the man's gaze first.

The tall man reached for someone just out of sight and pulled another man into view. "Is this the man?" He waved toward McLain.

The shorter man squinted his small round eyes, then shrugged his shoulders. "I don't think so."

Carmen's brother sighed. "Pardon, sir, we were to meet a gentleman here last night but the weather held us up."

The faint scent of lavender passed McLain's senses, and he groaned to himself. He watched the brow of Carmen's brother pinch and his eyes narrow. *Bloody hell.*

"Are you alone, sir?"

*Alyna Lachlan*

McLain's jaw tightened and he planted his feet. "Not that it's any of your business, but my sister and I came here to rest. I am not this man you seek." He focused on the man's thoughts. The taller man's mind was guarded but the shorter man was easy to read.

He belonged to the irritating sect of vampire hunters, a group who gave themselves a religious right to murder anyone who even looked like a vampire. Most often, they killed the innocent. They had come to meet the vampire that lay in ashes near his hearth. That vampire had set a trap for both these men, but McLain wondered if the taller one would have fallen so easily.

He saw something within the larger man's eyes as they scanned the room behind him. This man would mean trouble.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you and your sister. Let us make it up to you by paying for your evening meal. I will not take no for an answer. Shall we say thirty minutes?"

McLain raised his brow. So, he would draw them out. "I shall speak to my sister when she awakens. You are kind to offer, but she has been unwell so I will leave the decision to her."

"I am skilled in healing. Perhaps I might ease her illness and speed her to health."

The shorter men frowned, glancing back and forth between them. "Brom, what are you doing? This is not the man we seek and we have not the time to play nurse maid to some ailing woman."

When Brom turned hot eyes on his companion, McLain took advantage of the distraction.

"I can see that you are both in a hurry, so I will decline your generous offer. Good night, gentlemen." McLain backed in and shut the door before the man, Brom, could step in again. McLain slid the bar into position and waited, listening for their retreating footstep's and Brom's three curt words. "You bloody fool."

They would no doubt wait downstairs. As long as Carmen's brother did not have proof that she was with him, he couldn't act.

As McLain moved over to the bed, an image flashed through his thoughts. He staggered at its intensity, wondering where it had come from until he realized he was seeing the image through Carmen's eyes. He sat down beside her on the bed and she turned, searching his face. Her brow was pinched, her gaze full of concern.

## SATIN CHAMBER

“Are they gone?”

“Yes, but they will stay downstairs, waiting for you. Do not worry over them further.” There hung a pause between them, as the pictures of her past filled his thoughts. “Carmen, I’ve seen something from your past.”

“What?”

Her brown eyes widened as she waited for an answer and he felt her body stiffen beside him. “I see this brother of yours standing over an older woman who had features like yours. Her throat has been cut. He is holding the bloody knife and screaming like a demented mad man.”

She shook her head and closed her eyes tight as if seeing the images all again. “I walked in on Brom with his hands covered in her blood.” Carmen met his gaze. “He looked right at me and yelled, ‘I’ll kill you.’”

“Who’s the woman?”

“She was our mother.”

“That is why you are hiding?” At her nod, he frowned. “Are you sure he killed her?”

Her brow lifted. “Why do you ask? If you saw what I saw, could there be any doubt? He threatened to do the same to me. He never says anything he doesn’t mean.”

Carmen had reason to fear, but something bothered him about her brother’s eyes. They seemed empty and over-bright, not dark and malevolent. McLain knew a cold-blooded killer when he saw one and Brom could kill but a cold-blooded killer—he didn’t think so. Yet, he didn’t know the man well enough to stand firm on that opinion. Moreover, Brom’s threat to Carmen condemned him in McLain eyes.

“After that there were many attempts on my life. I fled to survive. I have no proof, but I believe Brom wanted to silence me for what I had seen. The only problem is that nothings rational about the murder. I’ve tried to find some reason for him to kill my mother and there isn’t anything.”

Whether it was Brom or another who murdered her mother, Carmen was smart to leave, but he feared the murderer would follow to see her silenced, no matter where she went. She was a loose end. “And how did you get locked in the crypt?”

“I ran into an unsavory man late that night. He said I was to be your last meal before you were executed for your crime.”

*Alyna Lachlan*

He raised one brow and she glanced away. "I would say you have had a run of bad luck."

She sat up in the bed, pushing her hair out of the way then shrugged her shoulders. "More than my fair share, but I play the hand dealt. What now, McLain?"

He put a finger under her chin, lifting her gaze to his. "You are a strong woman."

Her eyes widened slightly, a smile touched her lips. "Thank you."

"'Tis pleasing to me. Strength is rare to find."

Carmen felt a deep stirring in her heart. No man but her brother had ever taken the time to look beyond her face and form to see who she really was. To know McLain admired part of her personality, made warmth bloom in her chest, filling the emptiness she tried to hide. Without thought, she ran her fingers up along his neck and into his hair behind his head and pulled him down to kiss him. She closed her eyes and brushed her lips across his, softly, innocently.

When she pulled back to meet McLain's gaze, her breath left her lungs. His dark eyes burned, heat poured from them to bring a tremble of response.

He ran his fingers through the hair behind her ear and pulled it forward to lie along her neck and across her breasts. Lowering his head, he brought his lips across hers, a tender taste. Then his mouth claimed hers, aggressive, demanding, and she opened to him, allowing his exploration, his tongue hot and sweet against hers. She gave no thought to resisting, but instead grew just as aggressive. He pressed her back into the covers and she continued sampling his mouth.

New sensations and emotions converged, as his large hands ran down her neck and across her breast. The weight of his hand, massaging the hardened nipple through the fabric brought a tingling need between her legs. She gripped his hair and sighed into his mouth. Her leg came up to lie over his thigh, sliding her feet along his.

"I love the passion in you, Carmen. I sensed it from the first, buried under society's rules. Your passion is what makes you beautiful. For anyone can have a pleasing face, but few have a true inner fire for life."

"I have found I want to please you."

This time McLain groaned as his tongue stroked hers, scorching, moist, and sweet. A hunger to taste the erotic flavor of her blood began to burn in his thoughts as his hand moved over her bottom. The hunger had a different need. It was more of a want to bond, to share something deeper than making love.

## SATIN CHAMBER

The sudden knock on the door came loud and startling, causing Carmen to pull away with a quick indrawn breath.

Knowing that the moment had disappeared, McLain fell to her side with a growl only to hear a barmaid's voice. "Room service."

*Bloody hell.* He had only himself to blame for this interruption. He had forgotten that he ordered a meal sent up at sunset.

"Did you order food?" Carmen asked.

"Yes, this morning I put in an order for you."

"That was kind."

"I'm not kind."

He quickly left the bed, striding toward the door. "A person must eat to keep up their strength."

McLain opened the door and took the tray from the woman before shutting the door with a swift kick, not caring if she thought him rude.

Carmen sat up and he placed the tray across her lap. The tray was loaded with seasonal fruit, fresh baked bread, boiled eggs, and roast boar.

When she glanced up, she saw McLain slipping into his boots. "There is plenty of food here. Will you not share it with me?"

"No, sweet. I am in need of sustenance of a different kind. I will seal the door and windows. Don't touch them. You will be safe while I go feed. When I return, we need to leave this place. Answer the door for no one."

She hated him going out every night, knowing he was sharing those warm lips of his with another, to know he tasted others' flesh. She wanted them on her, she admitted guiltily. Images of him holding other women wrapped in his arms in some dark corner, his lips sliding along her neck his hands moving across her breasts, brought jealousy to twist her stomach.

"Where will we go?"

"My home. I have some underground chambers that will keep us safe for a day or two. If you are going to make it through the next few days, I will need you to tell me everything." McLain narrowed his gaze. "And explain all these experiences of your life that are going through my head. Are you up to a dance in the moonlight?" He moved to tower above her.

"A lady never turns down a gentleman when asked to dance."

*Alyna Lachlan*

“Ahh, but then I am no gentlemen.” His lazy smile and dark flaming gaze heated the very core of her. She traced the line of his brow with her finger. He grabbed her wrist and kissed the soft underside.

“What about my brother? He will be waiting downstairs for us.”

“I have my ways to see us secreted out. Be ready when I return.”

## SATIN CHAMBER

### *Chapter Six*

Their time to leave had come. McLain took her hand and they moved to the corner of the stairs leading down into the main room. As he feared, Carmen's brother and friend sat at the last table in one corner, which gave Brom a clear view of anyone on the steps.

"Your brother sits waiting for us."

"How will we leave unseen then?"

"We are going to walk out. I am going to conceal us, just don't let go of my hand or the illusion will be gone. Do you trust me?"

"I believe you asked me that once before."

A wicked smile curved his lips. "So I did."

"I will do as you say and trust you in this."

"It's a start. Now walk at a gentle steady pace. No sudden moves and don't speak. They will not see us."

Carmen nodded, following McLain down the steps with her brother in plain sight. Cold fear crawled up her spine. To walk by close enough to touch him and believe he couldn't see her took blind faith. They stopped short when a barmaid nearly walked into them with a loaded tray.

Roy shivered visibly when they passed. "Someone just walked over my grave."

"Yes, I felt the chill myself." Brom glanced up the stairs, then with a narrowed gaze, looked right at them. Carmen held her breath and stopped walking, as if that would help keep her hidden. McLain pulled on her hand to keep them moving toward the exit.

Once outside, she continued to wait for the alarm to sound with someone shouting, but all held quiet. The rain let up but dark clouds hung low, covering the starry sky. The ground was soft from being well soaked and their feet sunk in with every step. The wet leaves shined in the changing eerie glow but the air smelled fresh. As they

*Alyna Lachlan*

traveled through the night Carmen kept looking over her shoulder. McLain had let go of her hand and moved ahead, breaking their trail. They weaved their way back and forth between trees, leading north until they came out on the main road heading into town.

“Cover yourself with your cloak and I will wave down a hack that can take us home. I fear your face is as unforgettable as your spunk.”

Carmen smiled and pulled the cloak’s hood up over her head concealing herself, then kept her head lowered as she walked behind McLain.

He took her hand, giving a gentle squeeze and his touch gave her reassurance. The abandoned building and houses looked dark and forbidding. The porch of one building had collapsed; most of the windowpanes were broken, seeming like glass teeth open in a deadly snarl. This part of the city held cutthroats; pick pockets, and abandoned humanity. Desperation hung heavy about the area. They walked two blocks and turned right around a building before spotting a coach and driver for hire. Carmen’s heightened senses felt others moving in the shadows, waiting for any opportunity to take what they needed.

McLain raised his hand and got the drivers attention. The hunched over old man moved his coach to the edge of the street. “Ya be needin’ a lift, governor?”

“Yes. And there is a gold piece in it if you make it swift, stopping for no one.”

The driver pushed back his cap, and nodded. “Where ya headed?”

“Travel the north road, then about two miles outside of town, turn right on Meadow Lane. My estate is on Rockford Street. Dubrinski mansion.”

“As ya wish.”

McLain helped Carmen up into the coach then stepped in, closing the door. He sat down beside her on the cracked leather seat as the coach took off with a gentle rocking. He drew the curtains over the windows so no one could see in, then pulled the hood off her head.

A small, lit lantern hung on the door, giving them some light in the gloomy interior. It swung with every bump in the cobblestone road, but it gave some warmth to their rain splattered legs and feet.

“How far is your home from here, McLain?” Carmen pushed her hair back from her face and leaned toward him.

He turned from the window to run his gaze over her. “I would say twenty minutes by horse and thirty minutes by coach. This would be a good time to tell me why



## **SATIN CHAMBER**

you think your brother is trying to kill you. Is there anything else I should know about your past? Can you give me a motive for his behavior?"

She frowned, then surprised herself by asking the question that had bothered her since leaving the boarding house.

"Who's Catherine?"

His dark gaze widened for a moment before it narrowed. A spark of anger glowed bright within their depths. There grew a heavy silence between them. Yet, she held his gaze with a spark of determination.

She hoped he would trust her with one of his secrets.

"How do you know of Catherine?"

"With all the memories you shared with me. It became clear as we ran through the woods. I saw you stumbling to her and pulling her into your arms as she died. You screamed your pain to the heavens. Was she your wife?"

McLain tore his gaze from hers, glancing into a darkened corner of the coach. He saw nothing, yet felt again all the pent up emotions he had experienced with Catherine's death.

"I have never talked about it." McLain took a deep breath, feeling the weight of that instant in time. "It seemed life, at that moment, slowed down so every detail that transpired, took a permanent hold in my mind. We had been talking about our betrothal supper. We had signed the contracts the night before and looked forward to the gathering that evening. I had followed her to the village baker and afterward she had a last minute altering for her gown. She was born a lowly servant, so the dressmaker refused to go to her humble home for the fitting. I wanted to set the woman straight, but Catherine laughed it off as nothing. I kissed her hand, bowing to her kind heart and watched her cross the street.

She turned to glance my way one last time, a joyful smile on her face as she waved to me. Catherine stepped out onto the road and I remembered the scream of horses, the yell of the knights charging their mounts through the village. Her face lost its smile and terror filled her eyes as the warhorses hit her, stomping her body under their hooves.

"I stood frozen. I could do nothing but stand there, knowing my life ended at that moment. After the knights had ridden on, people came running from all directions, surrounding her. Then I moved on wooden legs. No one dared touch her without my

***Alyna Lachlan***

permission. I yelled for them to move away. When I knelt beside her, I picked her up, holding her to my chest where my torn heart lay in shreds. I wanted to make everything all right and I told her...I would.

“She smiled and with one scraped and bleeding arm, she put her palm to my cheek in a caress. “You have made me so happy. My life has been wonderful knowing you. Forgive me, love. I know you wanted a son.” Her last words were a whisper before her spirit left this realm.

“She left me to a darkened world. I drank to numb myself, growing oblivious to all around me. I walked the streets with hell in my veins, hoping someone would step out and challenge me so I could cut their throat. I was deranged. I know that now.

“Then one night in a dark alley, I found the dark challenge I sought, or it found me. The thick mist formed into a vampire. He said he saw vengeance in my eyes and murder in my heart. He transformed me and left me to make my way. I have lived this curse for two centuries.” McLain could still hear the vampires taunt. “*Take what is mine, human, and live to suffer for eternity.*” Hatred had burned in the vampires gaze.

“The ironic part was, shortly afterward, I found out the vampire who transformed me was the demon the knights had been chasing the evening that Catherine had been trampled. The very person that caused her death made me into the same kind of monster he was. I have lived with a need to hunt and kill that vampire.”

McLain noticed the softness of Carmen’s hand, as it lay over his. She brought his hand up to her lips, kissing the back of his fingers in a gentle caress. “You have been through much. Loss is never easy.”

The sensation of her warm lips, moving across the back of his hand brought him back to the present with shivers of pleasure. She was becoming to mean more to him than he would have liked. He had told no one else about Catherine, and somehow in the telling, all the emotions he held tight faded away to become nothing but a distant memory. Even the images became dull, and only Carmen’s beauty of spirit filled his thoughts. Now, with this woman, he was sharing some of his darkest secrets. With her innocent responses, in reaching out to him, understanding the pain he suffered, she brought a need and warmth he craved.

“Beware, Carmen, you’re playing with fire. I don’t know how long I will refuse to take what you offer.”

“Then don’t refuse. I give myself to you.”

## **SATIN CHAMBER**

McLain moaned, reaching out and pulling her gently into his lap. He leaned close and kissed her with all the force of his need. The taste of her brought a rise to his groin. The scent of her arousal stirred his senses into a growling beast. Her grip on his shoulders tightened, returning his kiss with a desperation of her own.

This time he was not satisfied with touching her through her clothes. He pulled the sleeve of her dress down and off her arms, freeing her rounded breasts. He took his lips from hers to nibble along her smooth throat and across one shoulder before fastening them about a taut nipple and the familiar tingle of energy sizzled along his lips. She gasped, throwing her head back, fisting her hands into his long black hair, holding him to her heart.

He reached for her ankle, sliding his hand up her skirts, baring her legs to run his large palm up her calf, and along her thigh. She squirmed as his fingers climbed closer to the heat between her legs. Carmen's hold clenched and she shifted her hips on his lap, bringing his palm over the soft curls between her legs. The musk of her sex drove him relentlessly to take more.

She quivered and moaned, nearly crying out as he worked his fingers beneath her pantalets to the hot wet folds. He left her breast to whisper in her ear. "Spread your legs for me Carmen, that I might touch the very core of you."

Slowly, she let her legs fall apart and his fingers spread the folds to find the entrance to her desire. He took her lips as he inserted a finger, his thumb sliding over her sensitive nub. Carmen's fingers fisted in his shirt and her body grew wet and slick, the tight passage sucked at his fingers when he moved them in and out, matching the rhythm with his tongue. Her body jerked and she whimpered as he moved his fingers circling and thrusting in a steady rhythm, always teasing the hard nub with gentle caresses until her body stiffened, pressing against his stroking hand. She reached the pinnacle of pleasure quickly and climaxed around his fingers. The warm liquid heat poured over his receptive touch as she cried against his lips. His gaze shone hot and intense as he watched her climax to his touch. She leaned over placing her head on his shoulder in a euphoric state of bliss.

Her hand moved slowly between them to stroke the hardness between his legs. Carmen needed to touch him. "I would please you, McLain. I would learn the touch of you as you have done to me."

"Loosen my belt and take hold of me."

*Alyna Lachlan*

Carmen moved slightly and his fingers slipped from her. Unsure how to release his pants, she was relieved when McLain did it for her. She reached into the shadows between them to find his hard length. The rounded tip was already wet. She was surprised at how soft the skin was about his steel blade.

“You have worked me up, lady, with your sweet response. I am near to bursting from the scent of you.”

Her strokes were unsteady but with her breasts at his lips and her bare legs still spread; he felt the rise of hot desire as she played with him. He moved back to suckle the curved smooth flesh of her breast, running his tongue across the hard nipple. His fingers once again pushed deep between her legs. Seeking, feeling, exploring her hot core, and as she came again at his touch, his own release followed. He threw back his head, stifling his cry for fear the driver would hear what they shared. Instead, a low rumble came from his throat as his hot seed spilled from him onto Carmen's coaxing fingers.

Carmen was his, and he wouldn't share even the sound of their lovemaking with another. He was possessive when it came to Carmen. She was his and nothing would change that.

Meeting Carmen's sated gaze, as she lay against his shoulder, brought forth just how soul shaking their encounter had been. Carmen had become very important to him. Heaven forbid he should start spouting sonnets. She would think he had lost his mind. McLain smiled at the thought and she smiled back.

“We will be there soon.”

He removed his fingers and pulled the sleeve of her blouse up, covering her breasts, before helping her clean up.

When she turned away and pulled down her shirts, he placed a finger under her chin, turning her to face him. “You, Carmen, are most pleasing in your response. You have moved me beyond words. I thank you for this gift.”

A smile curled her kiss-swollen lips. “I find you most satisfying too, my lord. I would like to learn more.”

Her coy response caused him to break out in laughter. “Oh, yes.” He pulled her up closer to him unwilling to give up this moment.

“Almost there governor.” The driver announced from above.

Carmen groaned, not wanting to leave the warm glow she was feeling, yet knew it must end. She adjusted her blouse and skirts, then stuck her head out the window to see

### **SATIN CHAMBER**

the manor house where McLain lived. The tall towers stood like iron posts high in the moonlit sky. The dark windows told of an empty home. She could make out three stories, a tower on each corner. No servants marked his arrival as they pulled up before the large double doors. It seemed as if death climbed over the stonework, choking the life from the house.

Carmen turned to McLain. "Are you alone here? Do you have servants?"

"I need no one. Come, I would show you where you will stay." Stepping out first, he helped her down from the coach then pulled coins from his pocket and handed them to the driver. Carmen noticed he was very generous with his money and that surprised her. From just the time spent with him, she found that he was honorable and thoughtful, even if he tried hard to push people away.

The driver tipped his hat. "I thank ya, governor."

McLain nodded.

With a flick of his reigns, the horses and coach made the circular drive and disappeared through the gate. McLain waved his hand and the iron gate swung closed.

McLain took a key from his pocket and unlocked the double doors, pushing them open, then closed and locked them after they stepped through. He spoke a word and the candles on the tables and wall sconces all burst into flames, lighting the area. A feeling of sadness fell across her shoulders, for the house held no life. There was no laughter, no warmth, no pictures of family, only barren stone walls and a wooden floor.

"You are a man of wealth, McLain. I have heard the Dubrinski name whispered about by the ton. Have you fallen on hard times?"

McLain stopped and turned around to look at her. His eyes narrowed. "Does it take coin to impress you, Carmen?"

"No, I was only looking after your comfort. The place seems cold, lonely, without emotional warmth."

He nodded as if agreeing, then led her deep within the house. He came to the stairway and went to a secret panel under the steps. He pushed in the iron sconce and the panel unlocked and slid open. Steep, narrow stairs, leading down soon disappeared into the dark. He spoke and lanterns flared to life along the passage. Taking her hand, he descended farther into the dark hole. Carmen shivered as the temperature dropped. Down, down they went, traveling along a hallway to another door to the right. He opened the door and spoke. Light instantly poured through the large entrance. When she

*Alyna Lachlan*

stepped through, she was astounded to see all the wealth in this one room. Warmth and comfort lay everywhere. Rich carpeting covered the floors, red velvet curtains hung around a massive bed. Its sheets, red satin. The stone walls were draped with ancient tapestries, depicting landscapes in vivid colors. Gold inlay decorated the mantle as well as the marble face of the hearth.

“Here is my bed chamber.”

“You live underground?”

“Yes, it’s a safe place for me. I have every comfort. Please make yourself at home.”

She moved over to the hearth, holding her hands out to the heat. She was still chilled from running through the wet woods and the speedy coach ride. The cold seemed to fade as warmth seeped through her clothing to her skin. When she turned to warm her backside, she gasped.

“What are you doing?”

McLain had removed his clothes and stood naked with his back to her. He poured water from a pitcher into a bowl on the nightstand. He cupped the liquid in his palms, splashing it over his face then ran his wet fingers up into his hair, slicking it back from his face.

“I am bathing.”

She knew she shouldn’t watch, but she couldn’t help glancing over his hard, angled muscles. His back was broad and strong, tapering, down to firm buttocks. His arms bulged at the biceps and she had the urge to run her hands over the solid muscles. Their time in the coach had only wetted her need to touch him again. She wanted to see where she touched, to know of his pleasure, and watch him run his hands over her body. He moved the wet cloth over his shoulders and across his chest before rinsing it out and sliding the cloth across his ridged stomach.

She found herself growing attached to him over these last two days. Carmen realized at that moment, that he was her heart, the one she had dreamed of all her life. Both of them had already been through so much. Carmen knew Menippus would rise tomorrow eve. Their time drew short and she wanted every moment the fates allowed. She would reach out to grab what pleasure she could with McLain. There had been so little in her life. Her heart yearned for him, yet she understood he might accept her body but refuse her his heart. Even so, she could not let this time pass. Carmen took a step

## **SATIN CHAMBER**

away from the fire's heat, moving toward him. When he brought the cloth to his back, she took it from him.

Carmen slid her gaze over his back and with smooth strokes, she ran the cloth along his skin. McLain turned, meeting her gaze, yet spoke not a word.

He seemed surprised at first but then leaned over, planting both fists on the washstand, allowing her to wash his back. His muscles smoothed then bunched under her hand. Hard steel covered in warm wet skin. The firelight danced over the angles and plains of his back and she breathed faster. As Carmen moved the wet cloth lower on his buttocks, he turned, catching her wrist. His gaze was striking, like hot coals, burning a fire through the depths of her soul.

"I would have you, McLain. Show me what it feels like to feel you deep within me."

He was pleased she was able to be honest with him. He liked her boldness, her directness. She was unique and she had burrowed deeply within him.

"Is this truly what you want, Carmen?"

"Yes. I would know all you can teach me, during our short time together."

"Undress for me."

Holding her gaze, he saw her hesitate with uncertainty before she undid the buttons down the blouse to her waist, then pulled the sleeves off each arm and over her breasts. The material fell past her hips until it slid along her legs to pool around her feet, leaving her bare to the waist. She shivered and dropped her gaze from his. McLain could feel her innocence slowly worming its way up to choke her desire. He couldn't allow that, so he sharpened the nail on his index finger and inserting it into the waistband of her pantalets. With one quick tug downward, he sliced through the material. Carmen gave a startled cry as the fabric fell away, baring her completely to his hot gaze. He had wanted to wash the cloth over her body as she had him, but it would have to wait until after this first time.

He scooped her up into his arms and carried her to the bed. She was mistaken if she thought he would let her go after this. He would claim her as his. McLain let her body slide along his length as he set her down by the bed. Unconsciously her hands came up to shield herself.

"Why are you hiding from me? You know you are beautiful." She was exquisitely formed, from the top of her dark head to her dainty toes.

*Alyna Lachlan*

Carmen had very few inhibitions when she was with him. She could even say she was aggressive but now she stood fully exposed and couldn't meet his gaze.

"I have never been this fully exposed. Only with your arms about me do I feel secure."

McLain stepped closer, pulling her against his chest once again. The heat of his flesh chased away her chill and Carmen pressed her cheek into the curve of his throat.

He leaned down, kissing her, a deep demanding kiss that left them breathless. His tongue passed her lips to taste the sweetness she offered. The familiar sizzle as they touched was always there.

She put her arm around his neck as he cupped her bottom. A low growl of satisfaction came from the back of his throat as she grasped his hair, holding him close and twirling her tongue against his.

He liked the little moans she made, the whimpers of ecstasy. Picking her up, he laid her across the red satin sheets, then followed to lay over her. McLain held her gaze, watching the pleasure darken her eyes as he cupped and fondled her breasts. Her hand came over his, holding his palm against her. Her other hand raked into his hair, clutching a fistful to pull him down so she could taste his lips again. His thighs rubbed against her softer smaller ones. His knee wedged between hers until she opened her thighs where he could rest, snuggled between them. She raised one bent knee to slide it against his side, opening herself more fully. He grabbed her raised thigh and ran his large hand along its smoothness until his fingers rounded her bottom and found her moist heat.

Carmen whimpered as he toyed with her. Her kiss became more aggressive, more frenzied. McLain's other hand move to the hair behind her neck, grabbing it with a growl as he met her kiss with ravenous lips. He pushed his fingers deep within her sheath as his tongue pushed in to taste the sweet essence of her mouth. The passion intensified, growing desperate and hungry. A crackle of energy sizzled about them, growing with the rise in their passions.

Not wishing to wait any longer to possess her, he replaced his fingers with his hardened staff, pushing through her wet folds to reach the very core of her. The energy splashed into a curtain of blue light. It circled them in a cloak as they made love. Every thrust brought a cracking of intensity, but McLain's every thought centered on Carmen, the feel, and smell of her. Being deep inside...connected to another like he had never been before. The joining felt right, complete.



### **SATIN CHAMBER**

With every retreat to thrust forward, he felt Carmen grasp at his hips, holding him within. McLain plunged deep. She gasped, doing so with each slow invasion of his hard body. Carmen raised her hips to meet every plunge, his body slid over hers again and again as a fine layer of sweat coated their flesh.

“Ride me, sweet Carmen. Hold me.”

Her cry of ecstasy drove him over the edge. His seed burst forth deep within her very core. A roar of release and satisfaction rumbled from his soul to echo about the chamber and the blue glow disappeared.

McLain pulled her tight against him, burying his face against her throat. The sound of life beating where his lips rested brought a strong primal urge to take her essence. His fangs lengthened and he scrapped them across her soft flesh. The beast demanded and McLain struggled, as Carmen lay submissive. Then she sighed and moved under him and he growled, tearing himself away from the temptation. He sat up quickly, pushing both hands through his hair. The need for her was powerful.

When he felt her hand slide up his back, he turned to her and gave a command.

“Sleep, my love.”

Carmen’s hand fell away and her eyes closed in deep peaceful slumber. McLain sighed; he would explain things to her tomorrow evening. He was too emotionally tired to have spoken of sharing blood this night, the temptation too strong. He didn’t have the patience to answer all her questions. Her innocence on intimate matters was hard to deal with. He lay back down beside her, covering them both with the satin sheets and a down filled comforter before slowing his heart and slipping into a deep sleep.

*Alyna Lachlan*

## *Chapter Seven*

“Wake up, fool.” Jayce kicked the man lying on the floor. “I have found the woman.”

The man groaned and rolled over. “What the hell are you talking about? A person shouldn’t be rudely awakened so early in the day.”

“Get up. I know who the woman is that is said to carry the power of the gods in her veins.”

The man sat up, rubbing his red swollen eyes. “I thought that was a myth.”

“Well, it’s not. We have to get the others together. She’s to be killed before the full moon or the vampires will take that power.”

“I don’t kill women. There’s no sport in it, so before I work up a sweat to do your bidding, tell me why you think she has powers.”

“I heard the truth from her mother’s lips. The bitch screwed a god and found herself breeding.”

“You have drunk too much wine. No one believes in the ancient gods any longer. Now you’re telling me that they exist? Mayhap the woman only told you she laid with a god because your manhood lacks muscle.”

“Shut up fool, before I take your tongue.”

He held up his hands. “All right, all right...so where is this woman?”

“I had spies placed everywhere around the city, and she was spotted near a boarding house in the marsh. My lookout informed me that she and another man ran through the woods to the city’s edge and there hired a hack. He followed them to the Dubrinski mansion.”

“What are your plans?”

“I plan to take her.” Jayce felt the pressure building behind his eyes. The urge to taste her power became a sharp pain in his head. “She must be moved to the sacred ring

## **SATIN CHAMBER**

for sacrifice. I will have her powers.” He rubbed his hands together then felt an itching in his palms that he dug at with vigor. “Have our men surround the estate and wait for any opening to steal her. If this person she is with gets in my way...no...he is already in my way. Lord Dubrinski will be eliminated. I want all traces covered carefully so that Brom is not able to tell who took his sister. Invade the house, take what you want, but kill Dubrinski. He has attached himself to Carmen and she is following. I can’t have any connections. Her power must be mine.

\* \* \*

Carmen woke up hungry. McLain laid next to her still and cool to the touch, as if in death, but she knew from Slain that vampires all rested like that until sunset or some sense of danger brought them forth.

Besides, she was not used to others waiting on her, so she slipped from bed and dressed. There had to be food that she could fix within the kitchens.

Taking a candle, she made her way back up the stairs to the main floor, closing the hidden panel behind her. She took the time to explore some of the mansion until she found the kitchen. As she moved through the room, she saw again like the rest of the house that everything was very clean. She wondered if McLain had a spell over the manor. There was no dust or dirt anywhere. But more importantly, she found no food. Carmen moved to the pantry. With him being a vampire, she suspected the larder to be empty as well but she had to look. Her hunger ravaged her stomach, and it growled with impatience.

Pulling the door open, she found nothing but empty shelves in the large storeroom. Clean glass jars, and crock-pots sat empty on the shelves. No sacks of grain or wheels of cheese lay propped on the bottom racks and large hooks in the ceiling where smoked meat once hung told that days of plenty had been great in the past.

With a sigh, she closed the door and the hollow sound echoed through the room. Glancing out a window over the wash sink, she spied an abandoned garden. Overgrown weeds covered fruit trees and bushes of flowers or berries. Here stood her chance for food. She moved to the back door and stepped out. A barren apple tree grew in the center of one stone garden surrounded below by unkempt herbs; both would be tasty at the moment. Her mouth watered for the imagined fruit.

*Alyna Lachlan*

Glancing about to make sure no one notice what would occur, Carmen walked one row over, broke off a thorn from a bare rose bush, and pricked her finger, bringing forth a drop of bright ruby-red blood.

Carmen approached the apple tree, and with her finger, she smeared a circle upon the rough tree trunk with her finger. She whispered softly the words of life. "Take freely from my blood and bring forth fruit. I gladly share my circle of life in exchange for sustenance." She stepped back and waited again, glancing nervously about.

The ground trembled, causing the pebbles about her feet to jump. The tree swayed and shook, a glow coming up from its roots. Its golden beams shot forth from the earth, casting the light along the trunk and within the tree's heart until it radiated out through its branches. First leaves and flowers burst forth in thick foliage then the flowers became buds to grow into full size green apples. Within minutes, the color of the fruit changed to a bright juicy red in the evening sun.

Fully ripe, Carmen reached out and plucked the luscious fruit, biting into it. She closed her eyes as the sweet juice slid down her throat to satisfy her hunger and quiet her stomach. This trick had always been her secret. Carmen kept it hidden from even her mother. She had stumbled onto it when she was younger. She tripped over a stone along the river's stony shore and scraped her knee. As the blood touched the ground, flowers appeared, growing about her in a ring of reds, pinks, and yellows. She got so excited about the blooms, she forgot about the wound. That was when she started to experiment and found that her blood could actually renew life.

However, it wasn't until she lost her favorite dog that she realized the potency of her blood. Her pet dog licked a cut on her elbow, and he suffered a horrible death. She cut her finger and tried to revive the beloved pet with blood given freely, but it came too late. She couldn't give life to the dead. If blood, the vital force of life, was taken without her consent, it killed violently but in the offering and accepting of it, life grew strong. Her powers only went so far, so she buried her beloved pet and retreated from life fearing accidents, for with accidents came questions. She knew then she had to bandage and take care of her own wounds.

She reached up for another apple, biting into its white flesh, consuming it with pleasure. She walked around the forsaken garden. At one time, these plant beds had been beautiful. Marble sculptures lay hidden and rejected among the weeds and

## **SATIN CHAMBER**

overgrown bushes. The mint and rosemary perfumed the air bringing a peace to her soul. Carmen could close her eyes and see it the way it had been once long ago.

It reminded her of the garden she had played hide-and-seek in as a child. Brom always pretended he couldn't find her as he searched all around where she huddled. However, as she got older, she became good at hiding. Now the game had become a matter of life and death.

Even at a young age, she knew if the knowledge got out about her powers, her life was forfeit. She had an understanding far beyond her years. That was why the betrayal ran so deep when her brother murdered their mother. For she had looked up to him, and would not have guessed he was capable of such violence against a family member. Carmen wondered if somehow he had discovered her secret.

McLain filled her thoughts. She was learning to love him. What would happen if he found out the truth? He was a good man even though he tried to hide it.

Walking back to the apple tree, she took another red fruit. Her hunger pains were gone. She closed her eyes and bit into the juicy fruit just for the enjoyment.

Suddenly, she was grabbed from behind. Carmen choked on the bit of apple as a hand covered her mouth and an arm wrapped tight around her waist. Another pair of hands quickly tied her wrists behind her back. The apple she held fell from her numb fingers to roll along the dirt path. She kicked out and yelled. Her cry muffled beneath the pressing palm of her attacker. Fear widened her eyes, taking in everything happening around her. Her breathing came in loud short pants through her nose. She fought, kicking and twisting to find release from the two men who had their faces covered in masks. They started pulling her away from the house when she saw other masked men breaking into the back door, swords, and wooden stakes in their hands.

"McLain!" They meant to kill, him. Images of a stake shoved through his chest, breaking ribs to pierce his gentle heart, along with the flash of a blade, slicing through his neck to sever his head from his shoulders brought terror and panic to converge like a thick cloud upon her thoughts.

With every fiber of her being, she screamed out to McLain, hoping it would reach some part of him as he slept below ground. A sharp pain exploded at her temple and her world went dark.

*Alyna Lachlan*

## *Chapter Eight*

McLain's eyes snapped open as he drew his first breath. Something had disturbed his sleep. Unconsciously, he reached for Carmen and found her side of the bed empty. Fear pressed down on his chest. He reached out with his senses, searching for her inside the house then outside around his manor. She was nowhere around. However, there remained a disturbance in his house. The violence left an oily evil skin, a calling card for him.

Scanning outside, he found a warning hanging about his garden. The warning came from Carmen. She had pulled him from his sleep, and now she was gone—taken.

Three men still plundered his house above and he felt the beast grow within him. Letting loose the dark powers he normally held in check, he rose from the bed with the fires of hell dancing between the fingers of each hand. He would kill the man who took Carmen. He dressed quickly then transformed into smoke, racing up the steps. Sliding through the crack at the bottom of the panel, he emerged near the stairs on the main floor.

He floated above the room like an ominous presence, waiting for his victims to blunder into his grasp. One of the intruders, dressed in black with a mask concealing his face, moved around the stairwell. McLain took form just behind him. He grabbed the invader around the neck, twisting his head with a sickening crack. He exposed the man's throat then fed on the corpse, draining it before throwing it to the floor. His hunger was appeased but his wrath only grew.

McLain touched each of the other men's minds, and found nothing of Carmen in their thoughts. Yet, he knew they were part of those men that took her. They worked as a pack, so a leader reined. They were cowards, working together to boost their lagging morals.

He vanished into vapor and flew swiftly from room to room until he found his next victim. This man, he took form in front of, watching the fear grow in the attacker's

## **SATIN CHAMBER**

eyes through the holes in his mask. McLain bared his fangs in a snarl as he stepped forward, ripping into the man's throat, draining him until the last beat of his heart. McLain threw him against the wall. The attacker slid to the floor in a pile of limp bones.

The power grew in McLain and he embraced it. He would need all his strength and wit to find Carmen. Rage still boiled and rolled in his chest and in his mind. The anger turned into a red haze, threatened to devour him.

He quickly found the last intruder, cornering him near the back entrance. "Tell me where she is so your sins will be forgiven and death quick. Who has taken Carmen from me?" He stalked the attacker, slowly moving closer.

The man cowered and whimpered, looking frantically for a way out. "He goes by the name, Ram. That is all I know. Let me go."

McLain gave a wicked bark of laughter. "You have chosen this path—not I."

He used his speed to reach the troll and snapped his neck, ending the man's suffering. He refused to drink this man's weak blood. The other two had left a foul taste in his mouth.

In quick work, McLain carried all three corpses out of the house and commanded the earth to open. A deep hole gaped in the rich soil and he threw them in. Then with a swift jerk of his hand, red flames flew from his fingers, incinerating skin and bone. He closed the dirt over their charred remains.

Mentality, he ran over possible suspects reckless enough to have taken Carmen. Brom came to mind. McLain wondered if Carmen's brother had succeeded in following them, if he now held her, chained somewhere in the dark. Was she alone or were others torturing her?

He took to the air, changing into a bird of prey, his tormented screech echoing over the woods. His emotions swirled in turmoil. Anger warred with fear. The beast within him snapped and snarled for vengeance. How could they have gotten to her? Whoever had her, or whatever power they used, nothing could shelter or hide them now.

Retracing his steps toward the boarding house, he found Brom and Roy on horseback headed his way just inside the city limits. They both carried lanterns and Brom was leaning over his mount's neck, examining the road.

Fog had formed early within the city. Its wispy fingers crawled out among the trees and would soon surround the country grounds as well.

*Alyna Lachlan*

McLain flew low and transformed into his human form just as he stepped through the fog and past the tree line into the rider's ring of light. The horses, startled by his presence, jerked and pranced away. Brom's stallion reared, but he brought him under control. The horse's body quivered and he patted his mount's neck no doubt to reassure.

McLain met Brom's gaze. "Where is she?" His voice rumbled like thunder, deep and threatening.

Brom's gaze narrowed. "I want the return of my sister, McLain. You don't know what you have stepped into."

"Are you saying you don't have her?" Thinking on it, Brom wouldn't have had time to hide her securely then end up here, returning to his estate. Someone else had her, but whom?

Brom's eyes darkened, his lips tightened over his clinched jaw. "Are you saying you don't?"

"I'm saying she was taken from my home by a band of men in masks. Three assassins were left in her place. I removed them, and set off to find her. I gave my word to protect her and I will do so at any cost."

Brom raised his brow, his gaze intense. "I wonder if you know just what you bit into with that vow. I would guess it doesn't matter, you are now involved." He sighed, shaking his head. "I don't have her, but I'm almost sure who does."

Roy turned to Brom. "Would you be thinking Jayce has her?"

"I would."

McLain snarled. "Perhaps you should enlighten me farther."

Brom signed. "We were headed to your place. I would suggest we meet there. Outside ears must not hear what is said. I will tell you what you need to know."

Brom turned to Roy, pulled a gold piece from his pocket, and flipped it to him. Roy reached out and caught the coin in midair. "What's this for?"

"Go buy yourself a feast. I'll let you know of our plans within the hour. I must speak to McLain privately."

Roy nodded. A frown wrinkled his brow and his lips pinched as if he'd eaten something sour, but he didn't bark any objections. "I'll be at the Boars Head Eatery. If I don't hear from you in an hour, I'll be sending a group to McLain's residence." Roy turned his horse about, trotting back toward town.

Brom faced McLain. "Do you need a lift?"



## **SATIN CHAMBER**

“I have my own way back. I’ll meet you there. Don’t be late.” The sly remark caused Brom to smile and nodded.

McLain stepped back into the darkness and transformed into vapor. Moving rapidly through the branches, he staying close to Brom, insuring he didn’t turn to leave.

Brom rode his stallion with the ease of a master. McLain found much to admire about the man. He was confused by Carmen’s fear of her brother, but tonight he would have his answers even if he had to take the man’s blood to get them. The longer Carmen remained missing, the greater the chance he would find her dead. The thought drove his anger. Catherine’s pale features passed through his thoughts as he had held her lifeless body. But her face changed to Carmen’s. Hard terror knocked the air from his lungs as if a charging horse had hit him in the chest. McLain slammed the door on the image. He would find her. There was no other outcome he would permit.

Brom found the road ahead carpeted in thick mist, yet eerily deserted. The trees heavy branches hung low over the road in a canopy of knurled claws. McLain was nowhere to be seen. The speed of his horse threw up the fog in parting clouds as he raced down the path. To have been so close to Carmen last night, yet have her slip through his fingers once again was frustrating. He would have his answers about Carmen tonight.

McLain was different from any other man he knew. He was hard pressed to explain some of the things that occurred around McLain. Brom feared he had found a vampire, but he wouldn’t ask to confirm, not with men like Roy about. A smart man would keep his mouth shut and his eyes open. Besides, McLain seemed to be involved with Carmen, trying to keep her safe. Moreover, at this moment, he needed all the help he could get, especially if Jayce now had her.

When Brom reached the dark mansion, the double doors opened in an eerie welcome for they moved of their own accord. He dismounted and tied the reins to the horse-head hitching post, then climbed the entrance stairs, and walked inside. He followed the candlelight in the wall sconces that illuminating the hall until he came to a sparse looking study. It held one desk, three chairs, and what looked to be a liquor cabinet. A fire burned in the hearth, warming the cold, stone walls and the bare, wooden floors.

He moved in to spot McLain seated in one of the chairs, a crystal goblet of ruby liquid in one hand. Another goblet filled with amber liquid sat near the empty chair across from him in invitation.

*Alyna Lachlan*

Brom sat down, ignoring the drink. "Tell me what has transpired," Brom asked, sitting forward, his elbows planted on his knees.

McLain's eyes seemed to glow red behind piercing black pupils. "As I slept, a group of assassins came in and took Carmen. I killed the three that were left behind to slay me, but gleaned no clue as to who had taken her. If you don't have her...then who?"

"His name is Jayce, my mother's lover, but first I would know what your feelings are for my sister."

"She is my mate. And my feelings will not help find her," he growled.

Brom held up a hand. "Don't get touchy. It's time for hard truths. Since I am her only male relative, I stand in my father's place, and want to know your intentions."

McLain's nodded. "She will be my wife."

"I take it that you are vampire."

McLain lifted one brow. "I'm not here to speak of myths or any other immortal fable. The longer I wait for information means the difference in finding her dead or alive."

"Do you love my sister, McLain?"

McLain snarled, unwilling to be forced into sharing his heart. Yet, the question made him think about what he felt. He was possessive, knowing he would keep her with him forever. He could not think of being without her, and yes, he cared more deeply for her than even Catherine. Carmen made his life exciting, passionate, and comfortable, filling the loneliness. But did he love her?

"I don't know what love is. It's a confusing issue, but I know she makes my life complete, and means more to me than my own life. Is this answer enough for you?"

Brom sat back in his chair. "Yes, I can accept that. I had to know if you were bound to her before taking the risk I am now. What I tell you must go no further than this room."

At McLain's nod, Brom continued. "What I share could mean her death. There is something different about Carmen you need to know."

"I have all ready figured that, what is it?"

"First, I'll tell you about Jayce. He is obsessed with power. My mother was a beautiful woman like my sister. She was lonely after father's death and Jayce showed up. He romanced her, seduced her with flowery words and cheap trinkets. To have a younger man enamored with her caused her to lose her good sense."

## SATIN CHAMBER

I had reservations about him because we come from a very wealth family. So, I checked into Jayce's background when he started seeing my mother and found he was financially ruined. He had run some scams that failed and had several men searching for him. It wasn't until the night mother told me that she loved him and would do anything for him that I felt apprehension run down my spine.

"You see, I knew Carmen's secret, and feared mother would tell Jayce. I found her early the next morning dead. The bastard had made love to her one moment and slid a blade across her throat the next."

"And this is the man who has Carmen." McLain hissed.

"Yes."

"Are you aware that Carmen thinks you are your mother's murderer?" McLain watched Brom's expression, searching for any deceit.

Brom looked down, rubbing his brow before glancing into the fire. "I can't blame her. She caught me standing over mother's body with the bloody knife in my hand. I didn't have the will to discuss what happened for fear of putting her in more danger. Jayce stood behind her in the shadows and I feared for her life. As she turned to leave, he followed her. I stayed close but lost him in the dark woods. It wasn't until I learned about several attempts on Carmen's life that I moved to step in to take her away until I caught Jayce. However, she jumped the gun and slipped out on her own. I have been searching for her ever since, hoping I would find her before Jayce did."

McLain rubbed his jaw with thumb and forefinger. "What does she have that Jayce wants?"

Brom's gaze swung back to his. "She holds the power of the gods."

McLain frowned, dropping his hand across the armrest. "What are you saying?"

"The Celtic god of war and health, Cocidius seduced my mother and from that union came a child, Carmen."

"She is a demi-goddess?"

"Yes. Her powers are unique and her blood has the power of life and death. That is what Jayce wants. He thinks to destroy his enemies and bring himself god-like stature, to control everything around him. However, there is a catch to this power, which he doesn't know about. If Carmen's blood is taken by force or without her blessing, it means death to the taker. It's like acid to all it comes in contact with.

***Alyna Lachlan***

“Only if she gives the blood with her whole heart, an offering, and that person accepts it, will the blood give life and strength.” A crooked smile touched Brom’s lips. “I figured you were a vampire when you left unseen from the boarding house with Carmen. Then again, tonight when you disappeared into the fog and beat me back here without a mount. I also know you didn’t take her blood when you could have.”

McLain groaned and sat forward, resting his elbows on his knees. He bowed his head and ran his hands into his hair. “I now know what happened to your informant that night. He attacked Carmen when I stepped out of the boarding house. When I came back, the vampire was foaming at the mouth, choking on his greed. He had taken Carmen’s blood and it killed him. I was concerned that whatever he had ingested would harm Carmen. She knew it had been her blood all along.”

“Don’t judge her harshly, McLain. Understand, she carries a heavy burden with this secret. You don’t share this information because it could get you killed. I only tell you now, because I can see she has chosen you, and you are her protector. I see the twisted fear on your face. Only love could bring that agony.”

McLain raised his head to meet Brom’s intense gaze. *By all that was holy, his gut gnarled in torment. And he didn’t like it one damn bit.*

“She is in great danger because my mother couldn’t keep the secret. What I fear from Jayce is that he is going to take her blood and store it, using a drop here and there in someone’s wine to eliminate those who stand against him.”

“So where is this Jayce?” McLain growled. “In taking Carmen, he has sent me an invitation I can’t refuse.”

“He is most often seen in the seeder part of the city, around Stag’s Horn Tavern.”

McLain stood. “Then there is where we go.”

Brom stood as well. “I must send word to Roy that my plans are changed. Then I will meet you at the tavern within one half hour.”

\* \* \*

A stray cat screamed and a black streak of fur passed across the tavern’s threshold.

Brom jumped back. “Hey.”

“Someone else is on the prowl.” McLain sharp gaze followed the feline.

“Hope he has better luck with his search.”

## SATIN CHAMBER

The two men stepped into a loud, smoke-filled room. Boisterous laughter came from one corner where a group of men and ladies-of-the-evening sat around a card table.

McLain leaned close to Brom. "Ask some of the working women if they know where Jayce holds his meeting. I'll ask the bartender and a few men toward the back of the room. Try not to seem too anxious. These rats can smell gold from two miles away. They can tell you anything to pick your pocket."

"I feel my skin crawling already from slippery gazes."

A barmaid shrieked and sprang away from a gentleman's grasping hands, and spilled a tray full of mugs to the floor with a crash. The patrons sitting around the bar and tables burst out laughing. The maid's cheeks turned red as she knelt, picking up broken pieces of crockery as they floated in a sea of ale.

The owner stomped over, and backhanded her. "Ya'll be paying for that spill or you're out on your ass."

"I would take it," McLain pointed to the bloated red-faced owner, "that is the man I'll have to speak with."

Brom smiled and nodded, weaving his way through the crowd toward a blonde-haired woman.

McLain strode up to the counter where the stout man had returned and motioned with a jerk of his head for attention. The large man waved then finished serving the man facing him before he turned to McLain.

"What will it be, my lord?"

"Information, it pays well."

The bartender scratched his chin. "Information comes at a high price."

McLain nodded in understanding and showed the man some gold coins. Information in the wrong hands could see you with a knife in the back one dark night.

"I need to find a man named Jayce. I was told his cult meetings are held here."

The bartender snarled. "You won't find out anything here. Jayce, and his like, murder informants." McLain probed the man's mind but only got a man's features, red robes, and a dark back room. He could take the bartender's blood and pick all the details from his thoughts. McLain didn't have the time to wait until the man left the bar and went to a back room or outside on a break. He would have to give the big man a command to visit the storeroom for more wine.

*Alyna Lachlan*

Just then, he spotted a small ragged form duck down and move behind the counter. Grimy small hands grabbed some coins from the moneybox then disappeared around a corner unnoticed by the busy bartender.

There was his informant. He nodded in understanding to the bartender, then turned to follow the small pickpocket. Before he moved from the bar, McLain glanced over the room, making sure no one stood watching him then cloaked himself invisible, following the fleeing urchin, unseen.

The child moved fast. McLain followed him out into the alley and around carts of crates to a hole in the wall of a crumbling building two blocks down. He pushed his way through the hole and entered an abandoned warehouse. Soft scratching came from a room beyond, and he moved silently to the doorway.

A dirty-faced boy around the age of seven stood bent over a small box where he was stuffing his ill-gotten coins. He closed the lid on the scarred box and put it back behind a loose floorboard. Dirt floated down in a cloud from above as a pigeon took flight when McLain materialized.

The boy turned in surprise. The child screamed and backed up, tripping over some empty crates. He scrambled to his feet, terror evident in the widening of his eyes.

“Hold on, lad. All I want is information and I’m willing to pay well. I’m looking for someone, and you are smart enough and sly enough to hold this knowledge.”

The boy’s gaze grew wider. “I know nothin’—I swear.”

McLain pulled two silver pieces from his pocket, showing the shining coins in his palm. The boy craned his neck for a better look and bit his bottom lip. He stiffened, trying to keep himself from reaching for the offered coins.

McLain took one and tossed it to the lad. The boy caught it with ease and bit down on the metal. “The first coin is a gift. I have another here for information and two more coins if I like what you give me.

“You would truly give me money for nothin’ at all?” The boy’s gaze narrowed, his head tilted to one side, no doubt skeptical.

“It is not nothing to me. A man has taken my wife with plans to harm her. I want to reach her before injury is done. But I can’t do it without your help.”

The child straightened his backbone, standing taller, his shoulders rolled back. “What would you be needin’, governor?”

## SATIN CHAMBER

“There is a man named Jayce, though he wouldn’t go by his real name. He runs a cult. They wear red cloaks and meet in Stag’s Horn Tavern where you took the coin.”

The boy’s gaze shifted to the floor and his foot made a pattern in the dirt. “I don’t know what tavern you speak of. I don’t steal, but I have seen the red cloaks.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yea. I know most everythin’ that goes on around here.”

McLain smiled. He wondered if the boy realized he contradicted himself with that boast.

“The leader of the red cloaks goes by the name Ram. They meet once a week and I’ve heard talk of where they go in secret, for rituals.”

McLain tossed him another coin. “All right...I like it so far. Can you tell me where these secret meeting take place?”

“Give me another two coins and I’ll tell ya.”

McLain laughed. “You’re a good hustler. Very slick.” He pulled two more coins from his pocket and held them out but when the boy reached for them, he closed his fist. “First give me what I want. Where do they hold their meeting?”

“The crypt of Lord Charles Montgomery in Shady Oaks Cemetery. It’s the largest stone buildin’ at the center. The Montgomery’s son runs with the cult.”

“Well done. Here are your coins.” McLain handed them to the lad. “You are now under my protection. What is your name, lad?”

“Shifty, governor.”

“If you ever need a place to stay, or need help, look for McLain Dubrinski. There, you will find food and shelter if you so desire.”

The lad’s face broke into a smile and radiated such joy McLain was tempted to take him in. However, he knew he couldn’t, not yet, too many things in his life were unsettled. Besides, he wasn’t even sure he would be alive after tomorrow evening. He had yet to face Menippus. If he didn’t survive, Brom would see to the lad and all he held.

“Shifty, I need you to do me a favor. Go back to the tavern and find a man named Brom. Tell him I’m headed to Shady Oaks Cemetery.” He didn’t want to waste time going back for Brom. Time poured like sand through his fingers and Carmen’s life hinged on holding the last grain.

The lad nodded and caught another coin tossed to him.

*Alyna Lachlan*

Without waiting to see if the lad followed his directions, McLain turned, stepping out of the warehouse and headed through the back alley. A splash of red, disappearing around a corner caught his attention. Who would be out this time of night wearing a red flag before any cutthroat or thief? Since they were headed in the same direction, he followed to quickly catching sight of a large, cloaked figure, passing behind a few building. The man's height and width reminded him of the bartender. If that were the case, the man was going to warn Jayce that someone sought information about him. And Jayce, being a smart man, would set a trap.

McLain entered into the man's thoughts to find out he was indeed the bartender, so he planted a fog of confusion within the man's mind. The man stumbled then stopped. His hand came up to rub his forehead, a frown marking his face.

McLain raised himself up into the night air, moving closer to the unsuspecting victim. The bartender glanced back the way he had come then shook his head. McLain floated down to stand before him, blocking his path.

The man's gaze grew wide with terror. He stumbled and lifted his hands out in front of him as if that would stop McLain.

"Going somewhere? You shouldn't leave your bar this time of night. Haven't you heard—dangers lurk about?"

The bartender glanced right then left, finding himself blocked in by stone walls on either side. He began to back up.

McLain lifted his lips in a snarl, menacingly showing his sharp fangs. "You can't escape me. Your life is in my hands. Were you going to warn Jayce of our little talk?" He would know if he held the truth.

"Jayce kills all those who speak of his cult, then goes after their family. I have to save their lives."

"And you think I will not kill you and leave your body to rot in this alley for rats to feed? Choose wisely. Jayce has my woman and I will have her back with or without you." This man had no thought for his family. His greed was his motivation.

"Shit!" The man shook his head. "Jayce holds this meeting in Lord Charles Montgomery's crypt. You will find him there with your woman. A meeting was called only an hour ago. The note said, the Ram had found his prize."

McLain raised his hand and pointed a finger over each of the man's eyes. "Close your eyes, you grow tired. Listen well...you will not warn Jayce. You will forget all



### **SATIN CHAMBER**

about the cult and me. You came out here to relieve yourself, then return back to the tavern.” He leaned closer, putting a push behind his command. “Heed my words well.”

The bartender’s gaze fixed, and his shoulders sagged. He nodded and turned to walk back the way he had come on stiff legs.

McLain was about to leap into the air when he spotted Brom leaning against the wall, watching him. Once the bartender passed Brom, he pushed away from the wall and strode toward him. Something in his gaze must have prompted Brom to speak. “I saw the bartender slip out so I followed.” Brom shrugged his shoulders. “Just curious.”

The left side of McLain’s lips curled up. “We need to go.”

Brom lifted a brow. “You have something?”

McLain nodded. “Jayce has Carmen in the crypt of Lord Charles Montgomery. She is to be sacrificed.”

*Alyna Lachlan*

## *Chapter Nine*

As McLain and Brom passed through the cemetery, they heard an eerie chanting on the night air. A stone building pushed up through the fog covered ground between two large oaks. The iron door stood ajar on a large crypt. Its stone walls were covered in ivy and where it lie bare, the rock was stained black with mildew. McLain waved Brom over. "It's coming from within."

"Leave it to your good ears. In this thick fog I have no sense of direction."

"Jayce is cocky not to have placed guards."

McLain opened the door wide enough to pass through into a chamber with nameplates on one wall. The largest of them read, Lord Charles Montgomery. There were other names of those laid to rest inside the stone walls, no doubt family that followed. To the left lay another iron door, at the top were rusted steel bars, opening into the darkness beyond. The chanting poured in passed the bars a teasing of what lay within.

McLain lifted the handle and pulled on the door. It swung open on well-oiled hinges, telling that someone had greased them recently. McLain nodded toward the dark passage. "Are you ready?"

"Lead on."

McLain descended the steep stairs. The smell of mildew and dust filled his senses and tickled his throat. He moved lower into the dark abyss, hearing Brom close behind until they reached the bottom. Down the long underground passage, he saw a faint glow.

Both men moved silently up to the door where the light poured from its opening and pressed back against the damp wall. Cautiously, McLain peered around the doorframe, taking a quick view of the happenings in the lit room.

## SATIN CHAMBER

Open crypts surrounded the circular room in every wall space. Wherein laid coffins of those Montgomery's that died long ago. However, what was happening in the middle of that room held his attention.

He spotted Carmen stretched out over a cross-shaped stone alter. Her arms and legs were spread wide and chained to the stone's surface. She appeared naked except for a red satin shroud with golden symbols that lie across her torso. Her shoulders and legs were bare to every eye, and the fabric was thin enough to see the outline of her breasts and juncture of the thighs.

McLain's hands balled into fists at his side as fury worked up the back of his neck.

Men with dark blood-red robes and cloaked hoods circled the area, standing closer to Carmen than to the crypt's outer walls.

Wood carved ram's heads decorated the armrests of a large throne, sitting on a raised platform at the head of the table. Upon that throne sat a red-cloaked man, his face revealed for all to see. McLain swung back into the darkness, pressing against the cold wall in hopes of cooling his anger. He leaned toward Brom to whisper. "She's in there and chained to a stone table. A group of around fifteen surrounds her. Change places with me and take a look."

Brom crept around McLain and took a glance inside, then swung back. "That's Jayce on the throne. He has quite a following, the demented fool. What's your plan?"

"By all the powers of hell, the bastards are going to wish they were dead once I cut their rods off and slice their throats." McLain snarled then indicated with a nod of his head back down the dark passage. "We passed another room back a-ways. I wonder if there is another way into the crypt."

As they searched through the small storage room, McLain picked up some dark red material. "If I'm not mistaken, these are some of their ceremonial cloaks. I think I have a plan." McLain smiled.

"And I think I'm going to like it." Brom returned the smile

\* \* \*

Carmen lay on the cold table. The stone stole the warmth from her body until she lay shivering. Her heart beat rapidly and she pleaded in her thoughts for McLain's safety, hoping they hadn't found him, and that he was even now looking for her. She wanted to feel his presence next to her.

*Alyna Lachlan*

She opened her eyes to meet Jayce's cold, hard stare. "Why are you doing this?"

"I deserve the power. I'm tired of working to keep up my lifestyle, tired of society's dictates and rules. My blood is blue and true, and as good as any of them. They will see. I will have power. I will rule and make others bow to my wishes. I want the choice over life and death. Nothing could be more powerful. And with your help, sweet Carmen, I shall have all that and more."

He pulled his dagger from the waistband and placed the blade against the flesh of her shackled wrist.

"No, Jayce! You cannot." She froze in fear that any movement and the sharp edge would cut into her, releasing the poison she held within. "It is a curse I must hold."

"Not this time, beautiful." He ran a finger across one hardened nipple, puckered from the cold beneath the satin. "I will have the gift from the gods. It should have been mine, but the gods ignored my cries."

He grabbed a golden goblet that sat near her waist, and moved it under her wrist. Without hesitation, he pulled the blade across her flesh, slicing into the soft, white skin. Blood boiled up, the liquid tickled along her flesh to drop in a steady stream filling the golden goblet.

She hissed and tightened her fist. A deep moan pushed past her lips. The burn of the slice was intense.

He was taking her blood. Any one who touched or drank of it would reap death. There was no cure.

Carmen pulled upon her powers and centered them upon her injury, pushing the skin together, closing the wound. She watched the expression on Jayce's face. His mouth sagged open and his brow lifted in surprise; as her flesh sealed together.

"How did you learn of my secret, Jayce? How did you find out about the blood in my veins?"

He snickered. "Your mother told me. Right after we had sex, she was feeling content and shared with me that the Celtic god, Cocidius, found her appealing and worshiped her body one night. A month later, she found herself breeding with his child. I asked her to go on and her vanity caused her to finish the tale, sharing your secrets, your gift of life and death. She thought it would arouse my interest in her, to know she had a powerful daughter. She told me about the time you grew a berry bush in a matter of minutes and plucked the fruit, eating them. Of you, touching a wound and it closed just

## SATIN CHAMBER

like your wrist. It was then I realized I had the wrong woman. No money would equal the power you could give me.”

A sick heaviness cramped Carmen’s stomach. “It was you that killed my mother.”

His wicked laughter raised above the soft chanting of his followers. “Did you think it was that sniveling coward Brom? He was forever putting his nose where it didn’t belong. The bastard wouldn’t know his mouth from his ass. Soon he will reap his reward. I shall see to it.” An evil smile twisted his lips. “I was standing behind you that day in the hall when you found Brom holding the knife I used to slice your mother’s throat. Brom looked up and saw me before I left. It was me he threatened to kill, but as you turned to flee, I realized you thought he meant the threat for you.” A high-pitched cackle rose from his throat.

“You’ve made it so easy for me, Carmen. You have been running from Brom all this time. And he has run after you, trying to save you from me, thus pushing you right into my arms.

“I tried on many occasions to eliminate you, but Brom always interfered, causing you to slip through my fingers. But not this time. Once I take what I need, you are no longer of value.”

He walked away from her over to the throne. “Gather around, followers. I have the power we seek in this goblet. Once I drink and feel the power flowing through my veins, she is to be sacrificed. Use your blades anywhere you wish upon her flesh. I want no evidence that will lead Brom to me or competition to my reign.

The cult followers moved in around the table. Carmen found herself closed in by men in masks, red cloaks, their eyes dead and empty, others full of lustful fire, glanced down upon her. Each man pulled a blade from their cloaks; the steel reflected the light from the burning torches set about the room.

Terror constricted her chest, nausea rolled in her stomach. A death chant brought a thick cloak of malevolence to blanket them all.

“Jayce.” She turned to him. “Do not do this. That blood is not meant for you. Dispose of it and let me go. Cease this madness before all is stripped away and you are destroyed.”

He laughed. “What motivation is there for me? I now have everything within my grasp.” He lifted the golden goblet and swung his hand across his followers. “And men

*Alyna Lachlan*

to do my every bidding. We will take what we want. Do you think because you tell me to that I would just throw it all away?"

"But I speak the truth, Jayce. Take that blood and you will die."

His over-bright gaze moved to the goblet. "I have seen what you can do with this blood. You command and even nature obeys. It is mine, now. You speak falsely in hopes of keeping the authority all to yourself."

With both hands, he raised the goblet overhead. "See here, followers, I will now be your god."

He tipped the goblet to his lips and swallowed deeply, blood trickling from one corner of his mouth. Jayce swallowed again until the contents were gone. Throwing the goblet on the floor, he swiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "All is mine to command."

He pointed to Carmen with one long finger. "Sacrifice her."

Then his face twisted, the smile turned to a grimace.

Carmen closed her eyes, pulling together her strength. Words fell softly from her lips as she fell into a deep trance. A blue glow encased her body. The brilliant light grew intense, causing several of the cult members to cover their eyes and stumble back. Others shaded their gazes and struck with blades that bounced off the shield of light.

It was then that McLain and Brom threw off their cloaks used to conceal themselves among the cult followers. They knocked several men to the floor with a shoulder slam. The remainder stood as if surprised they were under attack.

Suddenly, Jayce's scream drew every gaze. He had gone pale and beads of sweat dotted his forehead. He bent over, losing the contents in his stomach. Boils rose on his skin to ooze yellow puss. His hair fell out in large clumps leaving whole sections of bare scalp.

"What have you done to me?" he cried, glancing at an unreachable Carmen.

Jayce screamed again as his fingers turned wrinkled and black then dropped off, leaving stumps. His body shook and jerked. His legs gave out and he fell to the floor, cracking bones that had grown soft. Once strong arms shriveled and his chest sunk in.

One by one, McLain saw cult followers quietly sneak away, leaving Jayce to his fate.

"Carmen, Carmen save me." There came a gurgling from Jayce's throat, then his eyes rolled back into his head as he exhaled his last breath.

## **SATIN CHAMBER**

McLain gave no thought to Jayce, as he became a blood spot on the rocky floor. His concern centered on Carmen. She had gone into a trance, holding the shield around her body. Carmen was in to a place he couldn't follow. He had to find a way to reach her.

"Carmen, hear me. You are safe. I am here to take you home."

Brom walked up beside him. "Is she responding?"

"No!"

"Perhaps you are not saying what she needs to hear." Brom frowned. "All the others are seen to. Share your heart, McLain. I will wait outside, giving you privacy."

McLain's gaze never left Carmen's face. She had sealed herself away where no one could reach. "Carmen, come back to me. I have a need for you to be with me." He reached out, placing his hand on the shield and felt the sharp tingle along his arm. The energy was pure and familiar. It was part of who she was. The energy recognized his touch and the shield softened where his hand lay. He could insert his hand but the sharp sting grew to a painful burn. McLain gritted his teeth and pushed farther until he could touch her face. Intense white-hot pain, like flames charring his flesh from his bones, tortured his mind, but even that wouldn't hold him from her. He was nothing without the breath of spring air that Carmen had become. She was the home he had wandered the centuries searching for.

"Awake, Carmen, and end my pain. I will not be parted from you."

At his first touch, her eyes opened to meet his. Then the shield disappeared and she was reaching for him. He pulled her up into his arms, holding tightly as she wept softly into the curve of his neck.

"By all that is holy, you scared me through." When she didn't respond, he pulled the red satin material about her, then lifted her into his arms and carried her from the crypt. He wanted her out of this place and back in his home with him. Brom stood guard outside in the night air. He turned to them as they exited.

"She is well?"

Carmen lifted her head and turned to face her brother. "Oh, Brom, can you ever forgive me?"

"In your place I would have thought the same. There is nothing to forgive. I'm glad to see you hale and healthy with a strong man at your side." He placed a hand on her cheek. The sparkle of love and respect shone in his gaze. Then he let his hand fall.

*Alyna Lachlan*

“Care for her well, McLain, or we will meet again some dark night.”

McLain smiled as Brom turned and walked alone into the fog. Unwilling to let Carmen out of his reach, he carried her home. With every step, her breasts pressed into his chest, while the sweet scent of her skin warmed his senses. When she started to nibble the flesh along his neck, he growled and leaped into the air with her.

In moments, he entered the manor and took the stairs to the second floor, two at a time. He pushed the first door open and carried her inside. He examined her for wounds but found none.

“Are you hurt?”

“No, I am well now that I’m here with you.”

“I will have you, Carmen.” His need was evident in the husky demand.



## SATIN CHAMBER

### *Chapter Ten*

McLain pushed her up against the wall, his fingers woven between hers as he raised her hands overhead. The red satin fabric slid along her body to fall forgotten on the floor. He lowered his head, running his bottom lip along the soft curve of her throat, feeling the beat of her heart. Then his teeth grazed an ear lobe. The satin flesh tasted sweet. Her leg circled around his and her foot slid up the back of his calf. Rocking his hips forward, he pressed his hard rod into her soft woman's curls. Her breasts crushed against his chest.

While holding her hands with one of his, he unfastened his pants with the other to free himself so he could feel flesh on flesh. Then he ripped his shirt off, the fabric hanging from his one arm as he slid his body along hers.

He was desperate to have her. She was his alone. He wanted to wipe away the taint of Jayce's touch and reach a heaven only she could give.

One hand came over to cup and fondled her breast as his lips fed on hers. His tongue slid along hers, coaching her to respond. She pressed her hips forward, bringing her damp curls along his hard shaft. Her little moans were driving him to a heated frenzy. But he demanded more than just a joining of body. He hungered for the sharing of blood, a bonding like none other. And somehow, she knew.

"Take from me, McLain. I freely give my blood to you, sharing the force within me. Drink and receive my gift and my body."

McLain only hesitated a moment. He might die this night anyway, what better way than in the arms of the woman he loved. He hungered for her now, and would have his moment of deep satisfaction before his end came. He scraped his fangs along the column of her throat. Her head fell to one side in offering, a sigh on her lips. Her fingers raked into his hair as she slid her body against him. The moonlight fell over her unmarked pale throat and he felt the calling of the beast.

*Alyna Lachlan*

Need pushed him to take what he wanted and his lips slid over her skin before he extended his fangs and bit down. She stiffened slightly and his arms tightened around her, holding her to him. Hot sweet blood filled his mouth and he swallowed, taking her essence. A hum of energy came with the next swallow to burn in his stomach, yet he didn't fight it, he embraced it. The next swallow pushed the white-hot pain to his very fingers and toes. The beast curled its claws. McLain raised his head and cried out. Fire flamed behind his eyes.

Her cool palms framed his jaw as he swam in a lake of fire. "Accept me, McLain."

Yes, she was his. His eyes snapped open and he pushed himself against her. He grabbed her hips, opening her up to slide down upon his hard rod.

He thrust into her. "You are mine, Carmen!"

The energy in him grew, demanded, and he carried her with the tide. The force spiraled stronger with each thrust. The sound of their pants and groans disturbed the unnatural silence, as all nature seem to wait for the explosion.

He palmed her breast, teasing her hard nipple to a straining point. On the brink of ecstasy, the pinnacle of burning need as his body changed, he met her, pushing her with each thrust to join him in cascading over the cliff of pleasure. The passion escalated to a sharp point until her cry of ecstasy drove him over the edge.

McLain's head fell back. His cry of pain and release shattered the windows. The glass crackled as thousands of zigzag lines ran through the panes then exploded outward, raining down to crush across the stone walkway below. His seed poured from him to rest within her welcoming core and he shook from the power he had released.

He placed his forehead against hers, both of them trying to catch their breath. His body still burned. It was hard to breathe as his body absorbed and adjusted to the power he was given.

"Can you tell me what just happened?"

"You are my chosen, McLain. I will love no other." Fear of sharing all that transpired halted her words farther. She had just experience something profound and earthshaking and had no want to see it leave with angry words. Carmen ran her palm across his sweat slick chest and gloried in the heat pouring from his flesh. The feel of him still inside her brought a shiver of renewed pleasure.

He lifted his head to meet her gaze. "I drank from you and still live."

## **SATIN CHAMBER**

“I have given you all the powers I possess. Your strength will equal no others.” Her fingers run over one of his male nipples. “You now carry the blood of the gods in your veins. It was given to me to choose a man of honor, to hold the title of Slayer. You are the law, the prince, and the ruler over all immortals. My father, the Celtic god Cocidius, saw a need to see all immortals under direction. They grow unruly and uncaring, so Cocidius sought women that would give him daughters. They in turn must seek out a mate suitable for the task as Immortal Enforcers. Only for me, I fell in love with you. A bonus, I’m thrilled to accept. Are you angry at me?”

McLain frowned, his eyes narrowed and she feared he would now leave her for withholding the facts.

“Does Slain and Brom hold these powers as well?”

That question was not what she had expected. “My brother has never taken my blood, but Slain is a Slayer. I gave my blood to him freely, to save his life, but it was from a goblet. He never touched me.”

McLain leaned forward, kissing her once again. Words fell as a caress over her lips. “There will be no other but me, Carmen. You are my mate for all eternity.”

Her eyes sparkled in the moonlight. “Yes, love.”

A disturbance on the night air blew through the open windows, causing both of them to glance out at the full moon.

“Menippus comes.” McLain removed himself from her and slid her feet to the floor. Gripping the back of her head, he kissed her hard again.

“Dress and get below.”

“What about you?”

“I go to meet our guest.”

*Alyna Lachlan*

## *Chapter Eleven*

A blast of unnatural power rolled in waves across the land. The birds took flight in screeching pandemonium. Every dog and wolf from miles around let out howls and insistent barking. *A warning. The ancient had arisen.*

“Menippus will be on the hunt, gorging himself on anything close enough to get his hands on. And once he reaches full power, he will come for me.”

“How do you know this?”

“Because, I killed his son, an act of vengeance he will not ignore.”

“I thought you couldn’t have children.” She ran a hand over her belly in a soothing caress.

McLain noticed and an odd sparkle lit the depths of his dark gaze. “A myth to quiet the fears of the humans. What do you think would happen if word got out that we could give birth to powerful immortals? Giving birth is rare to our clan. They are called True Bloods, and it is forbidden that they be harmed.”

“There is more between you and Menippus than you have shared with me, isn’t there?”

His palm cupped her cheek. “You are my sun in a dark world, a blessing from the gods. I would have you know that I love you, Carmen.”

Her gaze narrowed and fear curled like a disease through her heart. “You do not expect to live through this encounter.” She grabbed the long dark hair on both sides of his face in fists. “Listen well, my love. Your power is greater than his. He cannot defeat you—unless you allow it. Do you hear me?”

A wicked smile curled his sensuous lips. “Even the gods could hear you, love. Your passion pleases me.”

“You please me, McLain. So believe in your new powers or they would not rise to help you. Come back to me.”

## SATIN CHAMBER

He ran a finger along her jaw a fire of determination in his gaze. “Nothing could keep me from you.”

\* \* \*

McLain stood near a large oak, its branches thick and wide in a canopy. Menippus would have to come over land, not by sky to greet him. A father’s wrath would not allow him to build to his full strength before searching him out. Again, he remembered coming across Menippus’s son, Snake, holding a screaming child of no older than six. His fangs planted deep in the child’s torn throat. The boy’s eyes were wide in pain and fear as they swung to his. There was no hope of rescue in their depths, only an inevitability of his death. In the next second, the child stopped struggling and closed his eyes. Snake threw the boy’s body away with a smack of his lips and a sniff of his nose. McLain’s anger rolled in like a wave on a stormy sea. He would no longer stand for the endless slaughter that Menippus was breeding. McLain was done waiting for revenge. He walked up to Snake and struck before the vampire knew what he meant to do. With a razor sharp nail, McLain slice through Snakes neck then plugged his fist through his chest and ripped out the vampire’s heart. The startled vampire burst into dust with a cry on his lips.

The total absence of nocturnal animal or insect songs brought his thoughts back to Menippus. The familiar taint of evil warned of the ancient drawing near. An inky slither of mist fingered its way around the base of several trees. It glided closer until it rose into a pillar some twenty-feet in front of McLain before taking human form.

Menippus’s flesh hung gray and wrinkled, stretching like leather over bones. His eyes glowed red and were sunken, but power crackled about him.

“McLain...we meet again.” Menippus greeted.

McLain examined his nails as he leaned one shoulder against the oak’s trunk.

“Yes, I must have forgotten my garlic,” he answered laconically.

A growl came from within Menippus’s chest. “You killed my son, insolent dog.”

“I will not abide vampires gorging themselves on the young, destroying the innocent.”

“That was not your decision to make. I am the ancient ruler over our people.”

“Are you? Do you rule from the grave?”

Menippus’s gaze narrowed. “This vendetta has been fun, but I grow tired of it.”

*Alyna Lachlan*

“This vendetta is of your making, Menippus. Once you killed Catherine and my unborn son, you took my heart, but you didn’t stop there. You had to take my soul as well.”

“Catherine was marked as mine, fledgling. I offered her everything, even immortality. You were nothing. I wanted you to suffer for eternity.”

“I wonder if the saying is true, that if the vampire who turned you is killed you become human again. I believe I’m in the mood to test that theory.”

“You have no chance of living. Come to me, McLain, meet your death with honor. Your sentence will be carried out.” His voice rang hypnotic, a push hidden within his words.

McLain felt the effect, the need to move forward, but held his place. Menippus had underestimated him. He was no longer a heartsick boy on the verge of manhood. He had waited over the centuries for this moment, a chance to avenge Catherine and his son’s deaths and end the ancient’s reign. He still remembered the evil glow in Menippus’s gaze as he bit violently into his throat, taking the only life he had ever known. He had to leave his home for fear of the blood lust running through his veins. McLain had been alone in his walk through the night, finding his own path. No longer would Menippus be a threat to him or Carmen now that she walked with him. It ended here.

“You are tired of walking this earth, Menippus. Weakness invades your bones. Let me help you find that rest.” McLain used his voice as a weapon, putting his own compelling push within the soft cadence. Menippus took a step forward then stumbled to a halt. McLain felt the power, building within. He pushed away from the tree to move closer to Menippus.

“Ancient one, the years grow long and without pleasure. I hold peace in my hands. Take it and sleep.” McLain held out his hand in offering. Menippus’s gaze fell to his outstretched hand, the glow fading from his eyes. He stumbled forward. Then he raised his stare to McLain, the fire returning to his black orbs.

A wicked smile twisted Menippus’s lips and McLain felt the wave of energy just as Menippus raised his hands and red flames shot forth.

McLain leapt into the air with his new increased speed, making him look like a streak of color. He watched below as the flames slowly devoured the spot where he had just stood. He lowered himself behind Menippus and whispered. “You missed.”

## SATIN CHAMBER

Menippus swung his head around. Surprise evident on his face as McLain swung his fist into the ancient's jaw.

The sickening crack of bone sounded as the vampire's head jerked backwards and he stagger to fall backward, landing hard on the ground.

Menippus shook his head and stood, his gaze menacing. "Etan!"

McLain's gaze narrowed. What was Menippus up to? Suddenly, a sharp pain ripped through McLain's chest. He glanced down to see a clawed fist, protruding through his chest, only to disappear, leaving a gaping hole, where his flesh had been. He leapt into the air before this unknown assassin could attack again. He glanced down to see Menippus's mate before the cover of trees hid him from view.

He was losing blood rapidly and the collapsed lung made it hard to draw breath, but the witch had missed his heart.

*"McLain, I feel your pain. You are bleeding, close the wound."* Carmen's voice rang through his thoughts.

He didn't ask how. He only knew his strength poured out with his blood. *"How?"*

*"Center all your power on the task. Command your flesh to close. Push deeper, and will your flesh to heal. Tell me when this is done."*

He landed among the protection of the trees and closed his eyes, blocking out Menippus and his mate, Etan, and the surety that they would follow him.

McLain took a shallow breath, then built a ball of energy. Its glow bright, its heat burning as he held it contained then when he could no longer hold it, he pushed it into the wound and its heat coated his chest. His muscles stretched and reconnected, bones liquefied to reform under his muscles then harden. His lung filled with air, and he drew a deep breath. Finally, flesh covered his sinewy chest, making him whole once again.

A scream of such agony echoed about the woods and McLain's first thought was of Carmen. With a swift leap into the air, he returned to the field where Menippus stood over his mate. Etan was rolling on the ground. The arm she had shoved through his chest was disintegrating. The flesh ran down the arm to drip from her elbow. The bone crumbled to lie twisted and charred in pieces.

Understanding brought clarity to the scene before him. In taking Carmen's blood, he had grown more powerful, *yes*, but now his blood had become a deadly poison to all it touched without permission from him. When Menippus's mate attacked, she had put her

*Alyna Lachlan*

fist through his chest, missing his heart by inches, yet in doing so, she had lost that arm. His blood had dissolved her very flesh and bones. Now the poison spread into her body, soon she would die in greater agony.

As McLain stepped out onto the field, Menippus looked up and stood, his hands hanging loosely at his sides. The burning orbs in his deep-set sockets pierced McLain's skull like hot pokers. Then those eyes slowly moved away from him to land on something just over his shoulder.

McLain felt a chill run down his spine. Fear rose up as he realized who stood behind him.

"McLain, are you well?" Carmen slid her hand up over his shoulder. "I couldn't stay behind when you were injured. I had to seek you out."

"In so doing," McLain shared, "You have put yourself in harms way and me at a disadvantage."

"It has not been the first time."

Menippus threw back his head and cackled. His gaze fell again to McLain. "I have found your weakness. Now, I will have you both."

The wind began to pickup, buffeting them with the approaching storm. Dark clouds paralleled McLain's mood.

"Old man, the gods have foretold your death. Your son reigns no more, your mate writhers on the ground, taking her last breath. And for your crime in seeking to destroy me and mine, I will take your life and end any threat you levy against us."

"Your conceit will be your downfall. Come weakling, taste of my power." Menippus raised his hands and red fire shot forth.

In a blinding streak of speed, McLain grabbed Carmen, pulling her to the ground, rolling her out of harms way. The fire shot over their heads, the heat singing the flesh of his hip.

He landed on top of her and a wicked smile curled his lips. "I would like to take advantage of my position but duty calls. Stay hidden behind the shelter of a tree."

"Finish this McLain and take me home." She smiled then rolled away, and he stood to face the storm.

The wind whipped up. The gusts tore at his long black hair and fire danced in his gaze. He reached up, pulling lightning from the black roiling sky and threw it like a spear at the gray figure. Menippus stumbled back, smoking curling from a black spot on



## **SATIN CHAMBER**

his shoulder. As the ancient raised his hand to attack, McLain vanished to reappear in another area and brought the lightning again, hitting Menippus in the thigh.

The ancient screamed in frustrated anger, then his form changed to a tower of rats. A lump of swarming bodies now stood where he had been. They leaped off one another to move in a wave of black bodies toward the tree where Carmen hid.

McLain shot fire from his fingertips, flames devouring dozens of squealing bodies. Tiny fire demons, their fur ablaze, ran in every direction to escape a torturous death.

The ones unscathed sought out Carmen with teeth and claw. With the first stinging bite, she glanced down to see a sea of rats, closing around her ankles. She closed her eyes and forged a shield of blue light about herself. Before the shield sealed about her, clawed fingers scrapped into the back of her neck, leaving burning cuts. Menippus had reformed, using the remaining rats. One arm and half of his left side were missing. She met his burning gaze and smiled in triumph.

McLain materialized behind Menippus and shoved his fist through the vampire's chest, pulling out Menippus's black heart and squishing it between his strong fingers.

Menippus's eyes widened, his mouth opened in a silent scream, then he crumpled to dust at their feet. Rain chose that moment to fall, washing Menippus's remains into the soil. McLain stepped forward taking Carmen into his arms as the blue light encompassed them in a shield of brilliance. The energy burned away any taint of the ancients black blood from McLain's hands.

She put her arms around his neck as he lowered his head to kiss her. "Our future is a clean slate. What plans shall we make?"

Carmen's question stirred his hunger to have her again. "The sun rises soon and I mean to have a taste of your body once more before we sleep. His hand came up to fondle her breast. "I will start at your neck, then suckle your breast before moving lower to feast 'til we are sated."

"Mmmm. Then take me home, love. For I feel a hunger of my own."

A wicked grin twisted one side of his lips. "Do you trust me?"

She laughed. "Explicitly."

He grabbed her around the waist and launched them both into the air, traveling to a new destiny.

*Alyna Lachlan*

*Author Bio*

Alyna Lachlan is Lady of the Crypt. Dark dangerous vampires are her creation. She lives in North Carolina but grew up in Florida. Alyna loves the dark bad boys that are tortured and in need of a strong woman. She writes under many names and has won awards for her works. One award is the Romantic Times Reviewer Choice Award winner for fantasy book of the year. In diving into her worlds beware what lurks in the corners. She has twists and turns in every book.

Website: [www.alynalachlan.com](http://www.alynalachlan.com)