

The book cover features a man and a woman. The man, on the left, is shirtless, has long dark hair, a goatee, and red eyes. The woman, on the right, has long, curly blonde hair and green eyes. The background is a gradient of purple, blue, and green. The title and author's name are in a white, serif font.

FAWN
LOWERY

THE WITCH AND
THE VAMPIRE

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BY

FAWN LOWERY

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The Witch and the Vampire

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*To Tina, my friend and mentor. Thank you for
your encouragement and faith in my ability as
a writer.*

CHAPTER 1

Ronna Gentry stood aside while the two men from the antique shop maneuvered the heavy suit of medieval armor inside her third floor loft apartment. After a month long search of every vintage boutique and antique shop in Brooklyn, she had finally come across the perfect housewarming gift for Pam Sheffield, her closest friend and employee at The Witches' Nook, the small novelty shop Ronna owned on Brooklyn's upper west side.

"This thing weighs a ton," one of the men commented.

"Yeah. The guy who wore this suit had balls."

Once the heavy armor was standing in the living room, Ronna gave the movers generous tips and closed the door behind them. Perhaps she would call them again—when she got the armor polished up and ready to present to Pam. She heaved a long sigh and thought about her friend. She was getting married in three weeks, going on a honeymoon to Hawaii for a week, and then upon the couple's return, they were moving into

their new house. A wave of envy careened through Ronna's insides. She would never be like Pam—falling in love and getting married.

"Witches don't have ordinary lives."

She shook her head, pushing aside the realities plaguing her and turned her attentions to the massive suit of armor standing in the middle of her living room floor. It was incredibly tall and broad. The chest bulged and the legs were as big around as tree trunks. She tilted her head and gazed up at the large helmet situated on the broad shoulders.

The man who wore it had to be a giant.

When she found it sitting in a dark basement corner in the last antique shop she had ventured into, she knew for certain it would make the perfect housewarming gift for Pam and her new husband. With her mind set to haggle over the price, if necessary, she sought out the old man who owned the shop and began bargaining.

"Is it English?"

"Yes. Twelfth century. It's quite valuable."

"It's rusty."

"It's only in need of a good polishing." He looked at her with a slanted grin on his wrinkled face. "You can have it gleaming in a few hours."

Realizing he thought himself too sly to barter, she merely cast a spell on him, and bought the armor for a fair price.

She walked around the armor, surveying the

backside as well as the front and decided she'd need a gallon of metal cleaner—and a bottle of burgundy to get started. She shrugged out of her summer cardigan and headed for the kitchen. She wasn't a heavy drinker—witches weren't known for being able to hold their liquor and she was no exception. Once, she had consumed too much champagne at a friend's wedding, and been sick for days.

"All of my friends are getting married."

She wrinkled her forehead. Since learning of Pam's upcoming marriage she had been inundated with feelings of growing old alone. In the past year she had been to five weddings. Once Pam married Lee, she would be the only single female in the group.

Taking a bottle of merlot from the refrigerator, she poured herself a glass. But then she was the only witch in the group—a fact that she often times overlooked when considering how old she was becoming. She raised the glass and took a sip, tasting the sweetness of the wine on her tongue.

Being the only witch in Brooklyn—or at least she surmised she was the only witch in the city—meant she had to keep what she was a secret from everyone else. Not even Pam knew of her talents.

A blond brow lifted. She preferred to think of herself as a talented person—since she couldn't openly flaunt her witchcraft. She opened the small

novelty shop selling party supplies, holiday decorations, and gag gifts, once she realized she couldn't confide in anyone about her abilities. Selling oddball things for parties and holiday celebrations occasionally gave her the opportunity to utilize one of her many talents—without the customer being any wiser.

She had grown up in foster care—never really understanding how or why she had landed in the system. She had no known relatives that she was aware of. She used to wonder if she had just dropped out of the sky one day since no one seemed to have any record of her birth or any other pertinent information about her. She was seven when she realized she could do a number of things the other children in the orphanage couldn't do. Her first 'strange' achievement, as she came to call her attempts to make things happen, had occurred after one little boy snatched a stuffed teddy bear out of her hand. She had gritted her teeth and silently commanded him to eat the teddy bear, button eyes and all. Moments later, the house mother was pulling cotton out of the kid's mouth and vowing never to let him play with a stuffed toy ever again. Ronna had smirked for the rest of the day.

When she reached her eighteenth birthday, she took her few possessions and left the group home, vowing she would never look back. A month later

she opened her store and began concentrating on casting spells on her customers to make them buy her merchandise. It worked so well that within a month she needed to hire an assistant and she had settled on Pam—once she found that Pam believed in the supernatural and ghosts, and vampires, and—

In fact, there wasn't much Pam Sheffield didn't believe in.

The thought made her giggle. She finished the wine in her glass and poured herself another helping.

The years had passed quickly. She was twenty-eight years old and resigned to being a closet witch—never to reveal the multitude of wonderful powers she possessed to anyone. She was a mystery unto herself. Just last week she discovered she could levitate—a little trick she found amusing and a bit scary.

She pushed aside the personal thoughts and took her glass of wine into the living room. She only had three weeks to get the armor polished and by the looks of the thing, it might take the entire three weeks working day and night.

The late afternoon sun was gleaming through the double windows in the room, bathing the interior of the loft in summertime heat. She set her glass on the coffee table and pulled her sleeveless cotton sweater over her head. Clad only in a lacy

pink bra and white short shorts, she turned her full attention to cleaning the armor.

“Where to start?”

She gathered her cleaning supplies, stepladder to reach the head and shoulders of the suit, and began the chore. Pam would be delighted with the gift—once it was presentable. It would stand proud and tall in Pam’s front entry, greeting her guests with regal formality.

She decided to start on the bottom of the armor and work her way up. Seating herself on the wooden floor at the large feet, she wet a clean cloth with metal polish and began scrubbing. The heavy metal bore decades of tarnish and every effort to break through the blackened surface, seemed to prove futile. After several minutes of hard scrubbing, she realized the task ahead was worse than she first thought.

“I’ll have to resort to a spell—otherwise I’ll never get it looking presentable for Pam.” She had thought she would do the cleaning by hand, feeling that she would be giving Pam a special gift she had given careful attention to instead of resorting to witchcraft, but like a lot of her ideas, it held little promise. She shrugged her shoulders. She supposed Pam wouldn’t know one way or the other.

She skimmed her gaze over the tall monstrosity while she thought about the spell to make it clean

and sipped the glass of merlot she had brought into the room. It was huge. How could a warrior possibly maneuver the heavy structure into battle? Had it been worn battling the Crusades? She shook her head, unable to imagine the man or the time period when the armor might have been used.

Her gaze traveled upward, along the legs of the suit, to the crotch. Her eyes widened at the sight of the juncture between leg and groin. The armor disappeared and was replaced by a heavy woven fabric—iron mail—at the crotch. Curious, she scrambled to her feet to take a peek.

“What have we here?”

She giggled. Her head was swimming from the effects of the wine she had consumed. She placed one hand on her forehead and blinked her eyes.

“Witches can’t drink.”

She steadied her feet, bracing them apart and leaning one hand on the chest of the armor until her vision cleared. She swiped one hand across her forehead. It was hot in the room or she had drunk too much. She felt extremely overheated. For a moment she considered removing more clothing then giggled when she realized she only wore shorts and a bra. She ran one hand across the swell of her breasts, feeling the moist sheen of sweat lying on her skin. Her fingers trailed the heavy gold chain around her neck to the large amber

colored amulet nestled between her plump breasts. It weighed a ton sometimes, or it felt like it since she was destined to wear it forever. She had given up trying to remove it when she was seven. The chain appeared to be too short to allow her to take it off over her head and there was no clasp, as most necklaces had. She grasped the amulet in her palm and held it away from her chest. There were times when she wished she could remove it and throw it away. So far, it had proven useless. It neither helped when she cast spells, nor brought her any good fortune.

She heaved a sigh and released the amulet, her thoughts once again on the crotch of the armor. A woven cloth hung from the metal covering the abdomen, hanging loosely as though worn by the inhabitant of the suit. She took hold of the fragment—time had ravaged its edges and made it horribly stiff. She gingerly raised it. Bending her head, she peeked beneath the scrap—only to see a darkened space inside the suit.

Shaking her head, she chided herself for thinking she might see something unexpected.

She turned and picked up her wine glass. It was too hot to work without benefit of cool refreshment. She sauntered to the kitchen, her feet slightly unsteady on the polished wood floor.

Returning, she reminded herself that she wasn't a drinker, regardless of how hot it was in the

room. She returned to the chore of cleaning the armor, going over the spell she would cast to make it clean, when she became fixated on the large helmet. It sat precisely on the broad shoulders, domed with a tall crest and sporting a hinged face cover. She pulled the small stepladder she had fetched so she could polish the upper portion of the armor into position and stepped up on it.

Curiosity fueled her movements as she peered through the hinged face cover. A scrap of cloth was visible—as though a head was covered inside. She pulled in a quick breath, drawing back in surprise. The old antique dealer hadn't mentioned that there was anything inside the armor. Surely there wasn't a statue stored inside—or God forbid—a dead body of a soldier.

She considered her options. She could get off the ladder and get sloppy drunk, leave the cleaning of the armor until later when she could think clearly—after the effects of the wine had worn off—or she could lift up the hinged face shield and appease her curiosity.

She grasped the face shield and pushed against the rusty hinges on either side of the mask. It refused to budge. Too many years of tarnish had made the mechanism cease to move.

“Crap.”

She propped her hands on her hips. Maybe it

had been a mistake to purchase the armor in the first place. It was rusty and tarnished. Actually it was quite ugly. And she might never be able to get it looking presentable to give to Pam. She stepped off the ladder and glared at the suit of armor.

A bead of sweat rolled down her spine and oozed between her butt cheeks.

“Damn. It’s hot in here.”

She reached behind her back and released the clasp on his bra. Peeling the lacy cups from her breasts, she tossed the garment in the direction of the couch. Skimming her hands across her breasts, she sighed. It felt good to be free of the confining bra. She lowered her hands to the zipper of her shorts and slid it down, then pushed them from her hips.

Feeling better because of her near nudity, she considered removing her bikini panty -but then decided to leave it on. She raised her hands and lifted her long hair off her shoulders. Gathering it in one fist, she went toward the bedroom for a scarf to tie it up. It was almost sundown and the temperature would be cooling off soon. Where had the day gone?

Had she wasted the better part of the afternoon trying to clean the suit of armor—or deciding whether to zap it into oblivion?

Refreshed, she returned to the living room and stood before the huge metal suit. She was

intrigued by its size and the thoughts that accompanied the time period when it might have been used for battle. The whole mystery surrounding it had fueled her need to purchase it.

The spell to clean it started to take shape in her mind. She would have its tarnished metal gleaming but what of its fragmented mail? Curiosity pulled her nearer the suit. The crotch intrigued her to no end. How big a man had to be to wear the suit amazed her. She smiled slightly, imagining the size of a man's cock hidden behind the drape of mail.

She lifted the fragment with tentative fingers, and then thrust her hand into the darkened interior of the suit.

"What the hell—" She jerked her hand away.

Startled, she staggered backward, careening into the coffee table and bumping her calf.

She glanced down at her hand, still feeling the imprint of something against her palm. Surely she hadn't pressed her hand against male genitalia. Or had she?

She lowered her butt to the couch and stared at the armor, blinking her eyes. She was drunker than she initially thought. She was imagining things—and this time it was nothing of her own making. She stared at the face shield, feeling suddenly as though someone was staring back at her. A shiver of cold dread raced across her flesh.

Suddenly she was very aware of her nudity. She levered herself off the couch and raced toward the bedroom for a robe.

Leary but intrigued, she hurried back into the room. Her fingers shook as she cinched the tie belt on the satin robe. She had set some eerie motion into play with her curious inspections. Her senses seemed to be alerted—in a foreign way. She pulled in a long breath. Her nipples were taut. She glanced at the front of her robe. Why was she feeling aroused?

She walked around the protective suit, her gaze traveling over it as she locked her fingers behind her back. She had the uncanny desire to touch the metal, to stroke the cold surface.

"Mmmm."

The sound seemed to echo inside the room—or had she imagined hearing something? Perhaps *she* had made the sound.

"That's what I get for drinking."

She shook her head and tried to push aside the unfamiliar feelings wafting through her insides. She felt strangely drawn toward the armor as though an invisible force was summoning her.

"Maybe I need another drink."

She circled the armor, ending up at the couch where her wine glass sat on the table before it. There was still a swallow of wine left. She picked up the glass and raised it to her mouth—then

stopped suddenly as she glimpsed movement out of the corner of her eye.

Jerking her head around, she saw a swirl of gray mist seeping slowly through the face shield of the helmet on the armor. Alarmed but incredibly fascinated, she stared in bewilderment as the mist grew in size and gathered in height, seemingly mounting upon itself in a shimmering wave. She drew back slightly, a tremor of fright gathering in her stomach.

The smoke colored mist swirled, drawing upon itself as it left the faceplate in soft undulating waves, cascading downward to grow and take form on the floor. An alarming eeriness accompanied the mysterious vapor, as though a presence was invading Ronna's solitude. She was fixated on the sight—unable to look away as her nerves trembled in warning.

The formation grew, towering in the room and rapidly taking on form. Ronna drew in a surprised breath as she realized the mist was gaining substance and taking the form of a man—a tall, well-muscled man. She raised one hand to her breast, clutching the amulet around her neck as she made out the entirety of the manifestation.

As quickly as it began, so it ended. She blinked her eyes, disbelieving.

The waving mist became dense, taking on substance with breath and height—a

transformation right before her startled eyes. She felt the urge to run—though her feet felt heavy and rooted to the floor. A measure of fright gathered inside her—though she sensed it was temporary and unwarranted. She curled her fingers around the cold amulet suspended around her neck, her nails biting into the palm of her hand as she stared at the apparition standing mere feet away.

CHAPTER 2

He stood well over six feet tall, with broad shoulders and well-muscled legs. He was clad in knee-length black velvet britches and matching coat. A white shirt was open at his throat. Ronna locked gazes with him, assaulted by the virility and raw masculinity she saw in the depths of his coal black eyes. He smiled at her—making her stomach pitch

“I am in your debt.”

Ronna stared at him, a warning siren going off in her head. Had he really seeped out of the suit of armor in the form of gray mist and taken shape before her eyes?

I must stop drinking!

He chuckled, cocked one dark brow at her.

A new wave of surprise filtered through Ronna.

You dare to think that I am a figment of your imagination because you consumed a bottle of wine?

“Are you reading my mind?” Her voice sounded shaky.

He bowed to her, bending slowly at the waist and lowering his head. His long dark hair fell about his shoulders, obscuring his face. When he raised his head next, a wayward lock hung loosely across his forehead, giving him a devil-may-care appearance.

Ronna sucked in a quick breath at the sight. She was a sucker for bad boys.

“Telepathy is a gift between two soul mates.”

“Soul mates?” She stared at him, trying to convince herself that she hadn’t made him up. He was real—absolutely real regardless of how he had come to be right before her eyes. And he was downright gorgeous. She tightened her fingers around the amulet, baffled by the turn of events.

“It is rare indeed, when one finds his life’s mate.” He stared at her, a smile forming on his face.

He was quite handsome. Dark, chiseled features accentuated by shoulder-length black hair. A strong chin and high cheekbones called exquisite attention to deep-set ebon eyes. Full lips pursed in a slight smile as he wafted his inspecting gaze over Ronna’s robe-clad body.

She finally managed to move, shifting her bare feet to take a step back. He seemed to be warning her with his very presence—standing there looking at her as if she were a piece of meat and his appetite was raging out of control.

“Who are you and why are you here?”

His dress was of a time long past. An era when men wore velvet pants and silk stockings reaching to the knee. He looked neither foreign to the clothing nor comfortable in it—he appeared dressed as for a celebration since his hair and rough-hewn features belied a man of a much more roughed type. Ronna shivered inwardly—assessing the front of his velvet britches. A sizable bulge was visible and though she wasn’t as familiar with the opposite sex as she sometimes wished she was, she knew from her brief sexual encounters that the bulge meant an erection of sizable proportions lay just beneath his pants.

“I am Marcus Sutherland, Duke of Morganford.”

A short giggle leapt from Ronna’s throat. She raised one hand and clasped it across her mouth.

“And I’m here because you awakened me.”

His slow smile disarmed her.

A blond brow lifted.

“Holy cow!”

He chuckled. “I must thank you for having such a healthy curiosity. Your hand on my cock was quite inviting—and much needed.”

A wave of alarm suddenly overtook her, making her knees weak. She sank onto the couch, her eyes pinned on him.

“This can’t really be happening.” She tilted her

head and stared at him, wondering if perhaps she was having double vision or... "I don't believe for one fucking minute that I awakened you by grabbing your cock or that you came out of that rusty suit of armor." She frowned at him. "Is this a joke?"

He smiled at her and shook his head. "You rescued me from a fate worse than death." He sighed and looked away.

Sadness seemed to overcome his dark features. Ronna felt the wave of intense remorse that seemed to grip him like an iron fist. It surged through her mind like a wave of bitter regret and just as quickly, vanished, leaving her wondering.

"You felt my thoughts." He turned his head slowly, locking gazes with her.

His words were more statement than question. Ronna didn't know whether to reply or order him to leave her home. Puzzlement gathered anew inside her. She felt a new awareness travel through her insides—an awareness that lent itself to fear and sexual warning.

"I don't understand what has happened." She swallowed to ease her suddenly dry throat. Her body was becoming more and more aware of him—of his virility, his male sensuality that seemed to reach out to her, drawing her into an invisible web of his own making.

Suddenly he took a step toward her.

"Stay back! One more step and I'll turn you into a toad!"

He halted his feet and looked at her, a shocked expression wreathing his features.

Shaking, Ronna scrambled off the couch and scurried to the far side of the room. With any luck, she could cast a spell that would at least shackle his feet together—she didn't know for sure whether she could turn him into a toad or not—

He laughed loudly, throwing back his head and bellowing into the wide room.

"No shackles please." He smiled broadly. "But I find the notion of becoming a toad quite interesting."

She cocked her head at him. "'Cause you know damn well I'm not sure I can do it." She smiled in spite of things.

She eyed him, her gaze traveling along his body in inspecting waves of appraisal. Should he have come to her under any other circumstance—well, she felt her nipples growing taut beneath the silk robe.

"You are aroused."

A blond brow lifted. She shook her head, sending her long ponytail brushing across her shoulders. She started to deny his statement then thought better of the idea. It would hardly do her any good to lie—since he obviously knew her thoughts. She frowned at him, wondering what

she should do next.

“Remove your robe.”

“I don’t think so.” She propped both hands on her hips.

“Your arousal will only become stronger.”

He smiled slowly, seductively, as his eyes held hers in a heated stare.

Ronna felt a new surge of heat rush through her veins. Lust burned white-hot through her insides. She felt sweat pop out on her forehead, her breathing quickened. Her crotch felt wet. She raised her hands and gripped the front of her robe.

“What are you doing to me?”

He reached out one hand and beckoned to her. “Come to me.”

Her will was not her own. She felt the force emanating from his body—the intensity with which he reached out to her. It was alarming and all consuming—yet erotic and filled with sexual promise. She wanted to refuse—but found her willpower flagging with such haste that her breath caught in her throat. An uncanny desire to strip out of her robe and panties came over her like a flash of lightening lighting the nighttime sky—quickly and totally—without any hint of warning.

Her hands shook as she pulled the front of her robe aside and exposed her bare breasts. In a trance-like state, she pushed the robe off her shoulders and allowed it to slide along her body

to pile in a soft heap at her feet.

“Come to me.”

He waved his hand slightly and she had no control over her body. Her senses were his to command. She felt totally vexed—as though some force she had never encountered before was consuming her. She moved toward him, her arms lax at her sides, her feet sliding along the polished floor in uncertain steps.

“Do not try to fight me—I am stronger than you.”

His voice seeped into her mind, a tone that comforted and stroked her feminine senses until her fright began to subside. She pulled in a long breath, feeling his heated gaze wafting along her bare body. He paused, his dark gaze on her breasts, making her nipples peak and jut forward in want of his touch.

Ronna’s heart hammered in her chest. She drew near him, her breasts within inches of the front of his jacket. Her eyes rose to travel along the bare expanse of muscled chest visible through the opening of his shirtfront, rising to follow the impressive arc of his throat to the deep cleft in his chin. His skin was dark, as though he were of Italian ancestry, though there was a pallor lying beneath. Her gaze continued upward, to his full lips, then to his high cheekbones. A Roman nose lent distinction to his male features. Incredibly

inky black eyes were deep set amidst a fringe of long black lashes. Gently arched brows rose slightly as he watched her inspect his face. A slight curve to his lips revealed his amusement.

His hand settled on her bare shoulder, cool and smooth, as though he were unaffected by the summertime heat engulfing the room. His touch seemed to gentle the warning siren going off inside her—soothed her in an unusual way—a way foreign to her body. She sighed, an audible release that made her breasts jiggle and draw his gaze downward along her body.

He raised one hand and stroked her hair, releasing the ponytail on the back of her head without effort. Her long blond hair cascaded about her shoulders, covering his hand on her shoulder and falling softly across her left breast. With barely a movement, he lifted the shimmering tresses in his fingers and brought them to his nose. He inhaled the fragrance of her hair—an incredibly erotic gesture for a man to do. Ronna felt her belly curl at the sensual intimacy the action brought to mind.

Slowly, he allowed the golden tresses to fan across his palm and slide gently off his fingertips. His dark eyes caught the play of waning sunlight through the silken strands as they fell softly against Ronna's rounded breasts. His gaze lingered for a moment before rising to waft across

her face. With one fingertip, he traced along the arch of her cheek and onto the fullness of her bottom lip.

She felt imprisoned—unable to withdraw from neither his touch—nor wanting it to end. A deep measure of intense craving began inside her very core, heated, demanding, not to be overlooked. It made no sense—yet she failed to summon the courage to argue the fact.

Her body leaned toward his, brushing his velvet jacket with her taut nipples and feeling the sexual pull of his hard erection beneath his britches. Every fiber of her being wanted his hands on her, wanted his touch, cried out for his attention.

His hand rose to stroke her throat, his fingers curling about the slim arc with a light, yet possessive touch that made her close her eyes and sigh gently. She leaned her head back, as though obeying his will. She felt lightheaded. Anticipation welled up inside her.

His fingers curled about her neck, his thumb traced the pulse racing just beneath the silken flesh, his palm settled along her nape. He held her fast, yet she sensed she could move should she choose to. She had no desire to leave his touch, to separate herself from his gentle hand. She leaned her body against the sturdy wall of his chest, drawing his fragrance into her lungs. He smelled

earthy, as though coming from the forest. A fleeting thought careened thought her mind.

He is not of this world.

Do not fret. I mean you no harm.

He pressed her body to his suddenly and lowered her to the floor. Her underwear seemed to disappear in a second as she settled against the coolness beneath her back. Her eyelids wafted open, to glimpse him shedding his clothes. He came to her, muscular, naked, his cock engorged with male juice. She reached out her arms in welcome, her legs opening as though familiar with his body.

His skin was cool against the heat of hers. His hands slid beneath her back, pinning her breasts against his chest and raising her buttocks so he could ram his hard cock inside her tight womanly sheath. She felt the fullness he brought to her body, the lunging thrusts as he worked his cock deeper and deeper inside her body. His hand moved up her back, his palm at her nape once more.

She arched her throat, opening her mouth and panting as his thrusts brought her quickly to the brink of ecstasy. Exquisite sensations began in her belly and curled along her limbs, spiraling throughout her nerve endings, sending her senses spinning out of control. She pulled in a deep breath as the climax bore down on her body,

gasping as the feelings grew in intensity.

His head lowered, his thumb found her pulse. She felt his lips nuzzle her neck, his tongue lather her silken skin.

The orgasm came full-bloom—skyrocketing throughout her body in exquisite shards of electric bolts—

His teeth sank into her throat—an exquisite sting mingling with the erotic sensations of orgasm—adding depth and exquisite hurt that somersaulted into an unbelievable triumph of melded flesh and shared union. She released a low mew as the sensations overtook her mind and flooded her body with never before sensations. She closed her eyes and savored the multitude of rippling vibrations that shot along her limbs.

She writhed beneath his body. His head was at her throat, her life's blood flowing from her vein. He drank. When he sated himself, he gently lathered the pinpricks with his tongue, closing the marks over her vein. He trailed hot kisses along the arch of her throat to the corner of her mouth. His lips sealed over hers.

She couldn't resist his kisses—though she knew he had bitten her—taken blood from her body to sustain his own. Her mind reeled with questions but his mouth took from her lips all she had to give and then some. His tongue poked into her mouth, stroking gently along her gum and

sending shockwaves along her limbs. Her body still harbored the waning sensations of orgasm—still felt the lingering warmth his body generated atop hers. She tightened her arms around his waist, pinning his powerful muscular form against her soft curves.

His hand moved from beneath her head and traveled along her side, then rose upward to toy with her breast. She sighed and thrust her nipple against his palm. His fingers tweaked the taut bud, bringing a new bout of tingles to her already sensitive nerves. His fingers splayed, his palm caressed—

She felt his fist clench and realized he had taken hold of the amulet she wore at her neck. She jerked her eyes open—a question filling her mind—moments before he gave the amulet a jerk and she felt a turbulent whirlwind engulf her body.

“What the hell—”

CHAPTER 3

Lightening flashed and thunder pounded the heavens. The very floor shook as the magic rolled over their bodies, tumbling and arching in electrified bolts. Ronna felt her senses reel, her body contort and disfigure as she was spun into a vortex of blackness. Noises unfamiliar to her ears nearly deafened her, spiraling shards of amber light shot outward from the north, the south, the east, and the west. She felt a scream tear from her throat. She squeezed her eyes shut as a force heavy with warning and fright gripped her insides.

She felt heavy, her body laden with an unknown force. She tried to raise her head. She tried to open her eyes. Her limbs ached. Her throat felt bruised. Her head pounded. She pulled in a long breath and let the assaulting feelings engulf her body.

* * * *

Ronna feared opening her eyes. She could hear voices—unfamiliar voices that slowly penetrated her conscious state. She felt as though she had been beaten, her body ached in unfamiliar places. She lay still and listened, trying to understand what had happened to her. The last she remembered, she was drinking wine in her living room—drinking wine and trying to decide whether to clean a suit of medieval armor she had bought for Pam’s housewarming gift.

She slowly lifted her lashes, peering tentatively at her surroundings. It was dim in the room where she lay, her body uncomfortably sprawled on something quite lumpy. She blinked her eyes, staring at the ceiling. There were large wooden beams suspended overhead. A jolt of surprise shot through her insides. She rolled her head to one side, following the stream of moonlight filtering into the area. Her gaze fell on a small arched window with a stone ledge.

She levered herself upright, her heart pounding in her chest. “This has got to be a joke.”

She turned her head from side to side, feeling soreness at her nape. The walls of the room appeared to be made of stone blocks, roughly fashioned with gray mortar visible between them. It was cold. She shivered as she swung her feet over the side of the bed. She was naked and

quickly dragged a fur coverlet across the bed to cover herself. She felt dizzy and decided not to try and stand. A weakness seemed to settle inside her body. She stared at her surroundings, trying to make sense of what had happened to her. She was in a room she had never seen before. It was stark in gray evening light, with only the bed she sat on and a small table sitting at its head. She began to shiver at the notion that something terrible had happened to her.

She heard a noise—a footfall—and turned her head toward the door of the room. A rough-hewn wooden door with metal latch was shut. She stared in question as the noise beyond the door sounded nearer.

The door opened suddenly and the apparition she had last seen in her living room strode in. Suddenly the memory of having sex with him flooded her mind. She sucked in a quick breath and clutched the fur coverlet to her breasts, her eyes pinned to his large form as he crossed the room to her.

“You are awake.”

She combed one hand through her hair, pushing the heavy mass over one bare shoulder. He looked different than when he seeped out of the suit of armor in her living room—

A million years ago.

He smiled at her and offered her the pewter

mug he held. "Drink this. It will make you feel better."

"What happened?" She hesitated to take the tankard from him, merely stared and wondered as he drew closer. He was dressed in rough cotton britches and loose fitting tunic. His black hair was secured at his nape with a black cord. And he seemed to have lost that paleness she had noticed about him at first. He seemed robust and virile...the perfect man to...

"You seduced me."

She clutched the coverlet to her breasts and scooted back on the bed, drawing her knees up to her chest.

"You seduced me...and now I wake up here. Where in hell am I?"

Her anger didn't go unnoticed by her host, though he appeared to discount it rather quickly with a smile in her direction. He sat down on the side of the bed and offered her the tankard again.

"You need to regain your strength. Please drink this."

Please?

Ronna eyed the large mug as he pushed it at her hands. For the life of her she couldn't imagine what was in it or why he continued to insist she drink it. She felt her head pound—as though she had awakened from a night of drinking. She reached out and took the mug, bringing it to her

lips.

The first sip caused her to frown and gag. She peered into the mug, her mind quickly deciding she needed cappuccino instead of the vile concoction. In an instant the mug was filled with steaming French vanilla cappuccino and she was drinking it down.

She slid her gaze to her handsome host, noting his curiosity at her having changed the liquid in the cup. She smiled slightly and finished the sweetened coffee.

"I don't know what you did—or how in hell you did it—but I'm ready to go home now." She handed the empty tankard back to him.

He accepted the mug and set it on the small table near the head of the bed. "I'm afraid that isn't possible right now." He swung his gaze around to encompass her naked body huddled in the center of the straw mattress. "We have work to do." He levered himself off the edge of the mattress and strode to the window in the room, his back to her.

*If I could just remember that toad spell –
You don't really want to do that.*

His words slammed into her brain hard enough to make her wince. She scrambled across the bed to the far side and stood up, pulling the fur coverlet tightly around her shoulders.

"It's time you explained things, don't you

think?" Her tone was filled with anger. She glared at him with furious green eyes.

He turned toward her, his hands clasped behind his back, a condescending smile across his chiseled features. "You've nothing to fear. You're safe here."

She propped one hand on her hip. "And what am I supposed to be fearful of?" Her brows drew together.

He heaved a long sigh and crossed the room to stand before her. He took hold of her shoulders with both hands and held her at arms length. His black eyes bore into her green orbs with compassion and warmth.

Ronna felt her senses jolt. His nearness brought back memories of the sexual episode in her living room. She tried to shake off his hands, to step out of his grasp, only to find his fingers tightening on her upper arms.

"You are unaware of who you are."

"And you—I don't know who the hell you are either. Turn me loose. I don't like your hands on me."

He released her immediately.

Ronna hurried past him to the door of the room.

"I want to go home."

"Regain your strength and we'll talk." He waved one hand and a fire appeared in the hearth

at the end of the room, its heat immediately engulfing the space.

Ronna turned shocked eyes on the fireplace, the fur coverlet suddenly became suffocating around her body as warmth filled the room.

“What are you? A warlock? A sorcerer?”

She felt intrigued and curious. She turned from the door and took a tentative step in his direction.

Had she finally found someone who had powers similar to hers?

“I’ve told you my name. I’m Marcus Sutherland, Duke of Morganford.” He flashed a white-toothed grin at her. “I didn’t get your name.”

“You managed to fuck me without even asking my name!”

“I can understand your anger.”

“You just *think* you understand my anger!”

She gritted her teeth and stared at him, as a rain cloud suddenly appeared over his head and poured forth a torrent of drenching water, soaking him where he stood.

“I should have conjured up tar – and feathers!”

He didn’t move, merely stood in the pouring rain and smiled at her as though he was immensely pleased with her abilities. She glared at him, hoping to see some reaction other than pleasure from him.

“Damn!”

She shook her head and the rain stopped, the cloud disappeared, his clothing dried.

She looked at him as the smile spread across his handsome face.

"You are a descendant of the Morganford witches."

Her eyes widened. She shook her head. Suddenly she felt overwhelmed to reveal her past. All her wonderings suddenly took on new diminutions. Who was she and where had she come from? Who were her ancestors? Had she ever known her parents? Were there others like her?

He crossed the room and took hold of her hand. He led her to the bed in the room and pulled her down beside him.

She felt anything but fear of him now. Her mind was filled with questions—questions she wondered if he had the answers to. And she sensed he was aware of her curiosity.

"The Morganford witches are a coven of witches as old as the universe. For centuries they worked their magic and menace on the inhabitants of Morganford and the surrounding villages. The leader of the coven is Drucella, a tempestuous old hag who—"

His words broke off suddenly and Ronna caught the slight infraction in his tone.

"Yeah! So what did she do to you? Or rather,

what did you do to piss her off?"

A dark brow lifted. "Piss her off?"

Ronna chuckled.

I wish I'd never seen that damn suit of armor.

But then you would not have helped me, my beautiful lady. And you would not be here and vulnerable to my touch.

Ronna raised her eyes to his face. Lust shown in the inky depths and suddenly every ounce of her strength seemed to drain away. The overpowering desire to be in his arms surged through her insides. She groaned and realized he was enforcing his will upon her again—and she didn't seem to have a defense against it.

His hand brushed her hair, lowered to the fur coverlet concealing her nudity and pushed it from her body. He pulled her into his embrace, his touch gentle and sensual.

Ronna felt all questions leave her mind as her nude body met the unyielding force of his muscular chest. She tipped her head for his kiss and closed her eyes as his lips descended to claim hers. His flesh was cool against her hot mouth and when he forced his tongue between her lips, she knew he would take her body again. He splayed his hands across her back and lowered her gently to the mattress. He settled atop her body, his mouth devouring her lips in a commanding way.

Ronna inched her hands around his wide

shoulders and skimmed her palms across the rough fabric of his tunic. A simple thought and his clothing disappeared—revealing firm muscled flesh beneath her inquisitive hands. She reveled in the feel of him. For so long she had wanted someone to love—a man that would take her body and reap multitudes of pleasures from it.

He parted her thighs with one knee and settled his hips into the hollow at her crotch. The head of his engorged cock speared the hot spot of her sex and slid inside in one quick movement. He began to thrust his hips, holding her firmly beneath him. His mouth continued to assault her lips, teasing her tongue and sucking it inside his mouth.

Ronna marveled at the way their bodies fit together. It was as though he had been made just for her—for sexual pleasure and fulfillment. She lowered her hands to his thrusting hips and dug her nails into the ropy muscles beneath the smooth skin, holding him to her crotch as she began to feel the onslaught of climax.

She arched her back and opened herself up for his lunging thrusts, pulling her mouth from the possession of his so she could gulp in much needed air. She felt the heated sparks shoot along her limbs and curl her belly. She raised her feet and wrapped her legs around his thrusting hips, levering herself against his body so he could thrust deeply inside her cave.

The orgasm blossomed, grew in intensity, took control of her body and mind. She panted through her mouth, her eyes closed tightly as the sensations raced through her insides.

You are my life mate.

CHAPTER 4

His fingers tangled in her hair, his fist flexed. Ronna released a laden sigh. He had fucked her again—exquisitely. She smiled at the reality. For all her reasoning, she seemed to be lacking common sense. But then, witches weren't the quickest to catch on to things.

She trailed one hand down his back. His skin was cool to the touch, his breathing even and restful. She shifted her body beneath his, rousing him so that he rolled off her. He lay on his side facing her, his arm possessively across her waist. He propped his head up on one hand and stared down at her.

“You are very beautiful.”

She gazed up at him, her eyes searching his face in the dimly lit room. Only the yellow glow from the fireplace illuminated the space. An eerie shadow of moonlight hung luminescent beyond the small window in the room. The room was warm and she was feeling sexually satisfied as she

had never felt before.

His face was unreadable. She turned her head away. How long had she been confined in that space? How long had she been under the power of this incredibly seductive man? She tried to recall his earlier words when he refused to let her go home. Had he replied that they had work to do? And what of his telling her she was a Morganford witch?

Her brows drew together in puzzlement. It seemed every time he was on the verge of revealing something to her—he seduced her instead.

Not that that's a bad thing –

He chuckled and traced his fingertip up to the arc of her left breast. He slowly circled its circumference, sending shivers of delight racing across her flesh. She grabbed his hand—least his play should turn into another sexual episode and she not get her questions answered again.

She rolled out of his reach, and got to her feet at the end of the bed. A quick thought of clothing and she was clad in Rene jeans and cashmere sweater. She combed her fingers through her hair and instantly it became manageable, caught up in a Chloe silk scarf at her nape. A quick glance at her bare feet and she was conjuring up a pair of Markee suede boots with stiletto heels and faux fur trim at their tops.

She turned, facing the man whose power she felt at every turn. A new wave of confidence surged through her. For the life of her, she had almost forgotten her wealth of powers. She propped both hands on her hips and stared at him, issuing a mental challenge.

He levered himself off the bed.

A breath caught in Ronna's throat as he strode toward her. Confidence oozed from every male pore—a trait that both intrigued and frightened her. She felt her own courage waver and steeled herself against his control as he approached.

He was an Adonis. A man so perfectly formed that she feared he couldn't be rivaled. She felt her nipples pucker as her eyes took in his powerful physique. Broad shoulders with bulging biceps lent perfect structure to narrow hips and long, powerful legs. A spray of dark chest hair tapered beautifully to a trim waist. Her gaze lowered to his crotch.

She urged her eyes away—should she suddenly become overcome with the urge to have sex with him again and from the looks of the man—his intention was exactly that—to pin her beneath him and ram his hard shaft inside her body.

"Stop!" Her voice was a high-pitched screech.

He paused, looking at her, his hands atop his hips.

She shook her head, clearing thoughts of

having sex with him from her mind.

"You are quite the excitable witch. It's obvious why you dress yourself."

"And you haven't the power to undress me—" She bit her tongue suddenly. He merely bid her to obey him, and she was under his power. She smiled at him, then cast a quick spell and dressed him in jeans and sweater.

He gazed down at the clothes she suddenly made appear on his body, raising one arm to inspect the soft cashmere sweater with his fingertips. He brushed one palm across the denim of his jeans and turned his gaze on her.

"Very nice. The fashions of your period are quite different from mine." He smiled. "I like them. Thank you." He cocked his head at her. "But tell me, will you take them from me if I do not please you?"

Ronna strode past him. Even dressed as he was, he was a powerful force to her senses. She failed to understand the enormity of his attraction—or the full extent of his unusual powers.

"It's time you were honest with me."

He nodded his head, sending a lock of raven black hair onto his forehead. "You have many powers with which to help me." He walked toward her, a smile on his face. "What is your name?"

"Ronna Gentry. I live in Brooklyn and own my

own business—a small novelty store called The Witches' Nook. I'm twenty-eight years old, unmarried, and I'm a witch." She shrugged her shoulders. "I'm a novice witch. There are things that I can do and things I stumble across."

Dark brows lifted. "You are from the future, yet you have ties to this time."

Ronna scratched her head. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

He laughed. "And you have a naughty mouth."

"And you fuck women you don't even know."

He sighed. "Must we fight?"

Ronna felt a headache coming on and given the circumstances of her situation, she doubted he would have any aspirin in the medicine cabinet. *Or a medicine cabinet at all.*

"I want you to help me find my three brothers. The witch Drucella has them imprisoned—doomed to an inevitable fate of her own choosing."

Ronna stared at him. "Because you pissed her off?"

He wrinkled his brow.

"Because you made her mad?"

He nodded his head. "It was a slight indiscretion—"

"On your part?" She smiled, though her stomach curled at the thought of him with another woman—especially a witch that she might

somehow have ties to.

"I suppose so. Women are so easily pissed off." He chuckled.

She smiled. "You want me to settle a lovers' quarrel?"

"No. I want you to awaken my brothers—once we manage to find them."

"We? I don't think I'm up to this. I should go home now. I have a business to run, a suit of armor to polish—"

"You don't understand."

He rushed across the room and grabbed her by the upper arms, giving her a shake. Ronna's teeth clattered together as her head snapped back. His fingers dug into her flesh, making her wince.

"You have no choice in the matter. Together we will find my brothers and relieve them of the witch's curse. You have the power to awaken them and you shall obey my command to do so."

His breath was hot on her face, his anger clearly visible.

Or was that urgency in his steel-like grasp on her arms?

The notion that she had little choice in the matter bloomed in her mind. She raised one hand and laid her palm on his chest. His hands loosened on her arms. Suddenly he drew her into his embrace.

"I'm sorry."

He sounded sincere and the mere touch of his arms around her body brought thoughts of sex to her mind. She pushed out of his embrace in an act of self-defense.

"Who are you and why did Drucella imprison your brothers?"

He combed one big hand through his hair.

"I'm not used to answering to a woman. I'm used to being in control."

"And Rome wasn't built in a day." Ronna turned to face him. A smile pulled the corners of her full mouth upward. Maybe it was a little pathetic—a man of his powers and strength being grilled by a female. "If you expect me to help you, you have to be up front with me. After all, I deserve to know what I'm getting myself into."

"You're right. Drucella hates vampires."

His words slammed into her brain. She had the first inkling about him when he bit her neck—just before fucking the daylights out of her and then bringing her to this place. Her hand rose unconsciously to where he had bitten her previously.

"You bit me. Am I going to be a vampire now?"

He shook his head at her. "No. I only took a little of your blood. It had been centuries since I had fed and—"

"And I'm supposed to believe you didn't know your way around Brooklyn, so you bit the first

warm body you encountered?" Her temper exploded. "And what about all that talk about us being soul mates? Was that just a load of crap?"

"A load of crap?"

She waved one hand at him. Truly his language barrier was getting the better of her sense of humor.

"Bullshit. Bologna. Hog wash. Poppycock."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I meant what I said, Ronna. You are my soul mate. We are meant to spend eternity together."

She rolled her eyes in consternation. Men could be such dolts—regardless of what century they came from.

"Come. I will prove to you that what I am saying is true." He held out one hand to her. "The proof of Drucella's deception is in the great room of this fortress. I will show you."

She hurried past him to the door of the room, ignoring his extended hand. The less she touched him—the better off she would be.

The bedroom was on the second floor of the stone building. The moment the wooden door creaked on its rusty hinge, Ronna realized the situation just might be as bad as she surmised. A narrow hallway, dark and extremely cold, wound its way toward a yellow glow of light at one end. She headed toward the light, hoping that what was on the lower floor was better than she had

seen on the second.

A curving staircase arched around a circular formed wall, the steps narrow and uneven, giant stone boulders positioned atop each other. She placed one hand on the wall as she maneuvered down the steps. Marcus followed close behind her, each step of his heavy boots echoing in the vast openness of the building.

Partway down the staircase she spied a blazing torch positioned on the wall near the end of the steps. It rose upward in a spiked yellow flame that gave off a smoky stench. As she set foot on the floor at the bottom of the staircase, she caught sight of a massive fireplace in the end of the large room. The interior was eerily cold and dimly lit. She saw a window high on the wall and wondered what time it was. It was pitch black outside.

An enormously large table, with numerous chairs, sat near the hearth. Wall hangings hung on the adjacent wall, tapestries of the time period, no doubt. She glanced around, her emotions ready to explode as she realized she had somehow traveled further back in time than she even realized possible. She glanced over her shoulder at her host.

“What year is this?”

“The year of our Lord, eleven-eighty-five.”

His voice echoed in the large open space. She felt a chill travel up her spine as she tried to

imagine the reality of her situation.

"This is like a bad dream—only with incredible sex."

He chuckled behind her and placed one hand on her waist, steering her toward the hearth at the end of the room.

"Tell me, is sex more...enjoyable for you—because you are a witch?"

She giggled and shot an inquisitive glance at him over one shoulder.

"How in hell should I know?" Though it was extremely dim in the room, she glimpsed the surprised look on his face. It dawned on her then that his question had more to do with something pertaining to him, than her. "So, are you in the habit of fucking witches?"

He chuckled and led her to a large chair near the fireplace.

"All my conquests haven't been witches." He cocked his head at her. "But I find those with special powers to like their sex hot and extremely wild."

She instantly imagined him in bed with a vixen—arms and legs tangled, mouths licking and nipping, seminal fluid in places it wouldn't likely be thought to be found. She felt a flush of heat rise inside her just imagining the wickedness this handsome vampire could bestow upon an unsuspecting female.

And the ecstasy he could reap!

He leaned close to her ear as she lowered her body into the chair near the fireplace.

Shall we set a date for our next rendezvous?

Ronna smiled, realizing he knew her thoughts. The notion that her mind was an open book to him gave her pause. On the one hand, if they should be soul mates, as he insisted they were, they could always be as one.

That could be a good thing—or not. I don't particularly like the notion that you would be aware of my thoughts even when I go to the restroom.

Restroom?

"Toilet, Marcus. Toilet."

"Ahhh. The chamber pot."

"God forbid!"

"Your Lordship."

Ronna jerked her head around, suddenly aware that someone had joined them in the large room. She saw a woman standing near the back of the room. She bowed slightly and came forward only when Marcus gestured to her.

"Milady. The venison is very good tonight."

The woman was dressed in a dark colored loosely fitted shift. She had dark shoulder length hair and a thin, weathered face. She curtsied to Ronna and presented the tray she carried to her.

Ronna took the tray and set it on her lap. A metal plate heaped with hot meat sat in its middle

along with a piece of crusty bread at its edge. She stared at the food, realizing Marcus had ordered she be fed a meal and that the woman should bring it to her. She turned a smiling face to the woman but before she could convey her thanks, Marcus was waving her away.

“Eat. Your strength has not yet returned.”

“Aren’t you dining with me?”

The moment she uttered the words, she regretted doing so.

Marcus looked away. “I haven’t tasted the food of man for nearly a century.” He strode across the room, becoming barely a faint shadow in the pale light of the fire.

Ronna felt compelled to try the meat. It smelled quite appealing. She reached into the plate with her fingers having realized that the woman hadn’t brought any eating utensils, and picked up a shard of meat. She placed it in her mouth and began to chew, noticing that the taste was very different from any meat she had ever tried.

No preservatives.

She ate more than she thought she would and just as she was getting up to dispose of the tray and plate, Marcus appeared. He carried a large book and laid it on the table in the room.

“This book belongs to Drucella. I stole it from her after she imprisoned my brother Jarharis. I had hoped to unlock the spell she cast over him...”

Ronna turned to the large leather-backed book Marcus placed on the table. A cloud of dust loomed around it as it plopped on the table, causing Ronna to wave one hand to clear the air.

"This is a book of spells? This is a book of spells that belongs to...to a witch that I might be related to?" She could hardly contain her emotions. The very sight of something so old and akin to her in any way thrilled her beyond reason. She reached a tentative hand toward it then paused.

There was a noticeable sting to the air surrounding the book. She pulled back and stared at the old relic. The dust had cleared, but something else had replaced its stifling aura. There was no telltale sight of any force field surrounding the book, or a murky shield of non-entry cast about its weathered backing. She leaned closer and inspected the yellowed edges of its pages.

"The book is protected from others with a ring of fire."

CHAPTER 5

Marcus sighed and combed his fingers through his dark hair. “I so hoped you would be able to unlock the magic of the book and set my brothers free.”

Ronna felt an overwhelming sadness engulf her. She bit her bottom lip, searching for words to soothe him.

“Drucella has cast a protective spell around the book. It has a halo of fire. I cannot get near it. It holds great threat for me.” *I would burst into flames like a roman candle on the Fourth of July.*

He tugged her into his arms, hugging her tightly against his chest. “I will protect you with my life. I swear. No harm shall come to you.”

She wrapped her arms around his waist. His body was so sturdy, she leaned into his strength, closing her eyes and nestling her cheek against his shoulder. She pulled his earthy fragrance into her lungs, feeling the aroma soothe her emotions.

She felt compelled to help him – somehow. She

tried to think of some spell that might release the book from the halo of fire commanding it. She sighed. She wasn't such a good witch when it came to knowing her craft. She opened her eyes and stared at the old book lying on the massive wooden table. Could the book be her legacy?

She pushed out of Marcus' arms, feeling the chill of the room engulf her body. Perhaps there was a spell that she could use, much like the one she cast on the customers shopping in The Witches' Nook. She shrugged her shoulders. It was worth a try.

She approached the book with caution, her ears alert for anything sounding remotely like the crackle of fire—even a witch's fire lent itself to sizzle and spark. Once, when she had first opened her shop, she had a visit from a local woman who claimed to a witch. She smiled at the memory. The old woman had inspected the oddball gifts in her shop and proclaimed that her business would fail—that she would not allow any other witch to peddle her wares in her coven.

Ronna had been more confused by the old woman's visit than anything else. Shortly afterward, she began casting spells of need on the customers who entered the shop. If a customer showed interest in one item over another, Ronna bid them to buy, making them feel as though they could not leave the building without having that

item in their possession. It was comical to watch at times. Once she had bid a man to purchase every lantern in the shop to light his backyard—even though he confessed to living near downtown, where the streetlights were always lit and his property seemed to be in perpetual daylight.

She raised her hands and held her palms over the book. The sting of fire scorched her flesh, warning of its potential danger. She slowly moved her hands, silently chanting a spell to change the fire into smoldering embers, then into ash.

The fire began to lessen, the heat against her palms waning by degrees. She continued to chant, to lessen the spell's affects. Satisfaction began to settle inside her body. She lowered her palms, growing bolder, feeling more confident.

Suddenly a shower of sparks rose from the old book, shooting toward the ceiling and encompassing Ronna in their arcing spray. She shrieked and drew back, stumbling toward the fireplace behind her. A shard of fright tore through her body. Magically, a flash of amber fire sparked right before her eyes—displaying the face of a woman extremely distraught.

Ronna stumbled and recovered only when Marcus' strong arms caught her. She went limp, her body leaning into the massive strength of his. She felt drained, her abilities suffering terrible shock. She felt her eyelids grow heavy and

suddenly darkness overtook her senses.

* * * *

“Milady? Milady?”

The voice was soft and melodious, coming to Ronna as she tried to surface from the pool of blackness she had sank into. She tried to respond, tried to open her eyes, tried to make her addled brain remember what had happened.

She opened her eyes to see the maid who had brought her the venison earlier in the evening. She stood over her like a gentle nurse, concern on her wrinkled face and compassion in her dark eyes. She stroked Ronna’s hand.

“What happened?”

“I do not know, Milady. His Lordship merely ordered me to tend you.” She released Ronna’s hand and placed a wet cloth on her forehead. “Do you feel better now?”

“Yes. Thank you.” Ronna sat up, finding she was lying on the end of the long table in the great room, the old book near her feet. She grasped the cold cloth the woman placed on her head and scanned the room. “Where is Marcus?”

The woman withdrew immediately, bowing as she backed away. “His Lordship has to go into the village. He will return before sunrise.”

Her words brought cold chills to Ronna’s spine.

Marcus had gone out to feed.

He's a blood-sucking vampire!

My sweet. I do not wish you to think of me in that manner.

Ronna stiffened, fright rising inside her. She had sex with him—fell under his spell and ended up in this God-forsaken place—

You are not of this world. You frighten me. I'm only a little witch from Brooklyn – I want to go home!

Not yet. You must help me first.

She sensed his heart was very laden at her request. She swung her feet over the side of the table and jumped to the floor. The room was empty. The woman servant had disappeared. The old book lay inches away, threatening menace. She stifled a shiver and backed toward the fireplace.

What have I gotten myself into?

You ask questions that I have no answers for, my sweet Ronna.

I'm not so sure I like this mind reading!

It is rare indeed—very rare for a man to know the thoughts of his beloved.

Ronna held her emotions at bay, trying to keep her mind blank. How could this be possible? How could one person know the thoughts of another—even when they were apart?

She felt Marcus sigh, as though he were right there with her. Quickly she spun around, searching the dimly lit room for him. The blackness was void of any presence. She raised her

hands and rubbed her arms. Despite the warmth of the cashmere sweater and the roaring fire at her back, she felt a coldness that chilled her to the bone.

She began to pace. She hadn't felt so alone since she left the orphanage and set out on her own. Even then she had a plan. Now she seemed to be in limbo—except for the menacing presence of Marcus Morganford.

Whoever he is!

You wound me, my sweet. I shall return and we shall get to know each other.

Ronna let out a huff of air. If there was one thing she couldn't tolerate—it was a conceited man. No doubt Marcus would return and seduce her again—take her upstairs to that uncomfortable bed and have sex with her. She sighed. Well, maybe she'd have a surprise for him when he finally came home.

CHAPTER 6

He appeared all at once—quietly and without warning. Ronna neither felt his presence nor glimpsed him in the room—nor had he announced his coming to her telepathically. He was merely there, standing before her, his posture confident and erect.

“You scared the hell out of me. Why didn’t you warn me? Or are you always in the habit of materializing out of thin air?”

A mental picture of gray mist seeping through the vent of the face shield on the suit of armor suddenly bombarded her. He had many powers—some quite unique.

And others that were extremely frightening.

I am sorry I frightened you. Forgive me.

The fact that he deliberately sent her thought messages when it was not necessary—they were face to face in the same room—told her he was merely exerting his powers over her. She felt the hair on the back of her neck stand up in alarm.

Had she no privacy from this man? She turned suddenly, and strode across the room, putting herself in shadow. Perhaps it was time she gave him a little taste of her powers—just to let him know that she wasn't a total klutz when it came to witchcraft.

A blond brow lifted. She thought of ropes and clamps and suddenly the force sprang into reality. A whirl of magic spun out, shooting in lightening sharp shards of amber and rose glinting from her outstretched hand. Marcus started toward her, took only a few steps in her direction, before the force engulfed his big body. He was propelled across the room, rising off the floor slightly before landing with an audible thud in one of the large wooden chairs sitting near the hearth. Binding ropes circled his wrists and ankles, pinning him securely to the arms and legs of the chair.

He chuckled, a low rumble that echoed into the vast room. "My sweet, you are wanting to play?"

Ronna propped both hands on her hips and strode in his direction. A feeling of confidence rose inside her. Marcus was securely bound and it would take an act short of hell fire to release him. She smiled slowly as she locked gazes with him.

"I want to know all about you, Marcus Morganford. And I don't trust you to answer my questions without you changing the subject and seducing me." She shrugged her shoulders. "If

you're confined to one place — "

He chuckled and shook his head. "Very well, my sweet. What is it you wish to know?"

She leveled her gaze on him. Was she to be fooled by his show of compliance? Or was she merely underestimating the force of her own spell?

He laughed again, low in his throat. He flexed his fingers on the arms of the chair. "I assure you, your bindings are quite tight about my wrists and ankles. It would appear I am your captive."

His voice rang of amusement.

Ronna's temper flared.

A wave of her hand and his clothing disappeared.

"My sweet — "

How cocky do you feel now?

Cocky? My sweet, I only believe you want to play. See my cock? It is beginning to grow hard with arousal.

Her eyes found the object of his reference. A hard cock standing erect in his lap, like a proud soldier ready to march into battle. She let out a huff of air and turned on her heel, striding across the room.

"How long have you been a vampire?"

Her words seemed to hang in the smoky air for seconds before she heard him sigh. She glimpsed his hands flexing on the arms of the chair, felt his impatience.

"Marcus, how did you become a vampire? Do you feed on the people of this village? Is it true that you murder people for their blood?"

He released a laden sigh.

Ronna felt his grief, strong, dark, and regrettable in a profound way. She bit her bottom lip, anguish rising upward in her gut at her harsh treatment of him. She rushed across the room, kneeling at the chair where he was tied hand and foot.

"Answer my questions, Marcus, so that I can release you." There was pleading in her tone, a note that sprang from his remorse at being a vampire.

"I once befriended a man named Darrias. He was a merchant who traveled the world." He sighed. "One evening as Darrias and I shared a tankard of wine, he exerted his power over me. He threw me to the ground and bit my neck. He drank a great deal of my blood and I was quite ill for a number of days. During that time, Darrias remained at my side. I questioned him at great length, for I believed we were friends. Alas, I was neither his friend, nor he mine. On the following eve, I suffered a mortal death at Darrias' hand."

She felt the pain of his words—they crushed into her heart like a heavy weight. She felt tears spring to her eyes. She reached out her hand and laid her palm across his bound wrist. At once she

felt his pain subside, pulling back like a gentle tide washing across a sandy beach.

“Ronna, you are the hope I have been searching for since that terrible night.”

She felt puzzled. Her brows pulled together.

“Being as I am, there is no way I can mate with a mortal woman—no way for me to have a family.” He sighed, cocked his head at Ronna. “We are bound by the ability to know each other’s thoughts—to become one regardless of where we are at any given time. For the first time in many years, my emotions have been awakened. I feel as though there is a future for me—us—despite my condemnation of immortality.”

“We had sex, Marcus. Hot, down-and-dirty sex.” Puzzlement intensified inside her. “The fact that we had sex doesn’t mean we’re meant to be together forever.”

“You do not understand. Vampires are doomed to a life of loneliness because of how we must live. Darrias didn’t care whom he turned—but only of his own needs.” He shook his head. “He didn’t stop with only making me a vampire. He attacked my three brothers as they slept in their beds. Night after night he stole into their bedchambers and took of their life’s blood. Soon, one by one, they suffered mortal deaths as I had.”

A cold dread seeped into Ronna’s insides.

“What happened to Darrias? Is he here now?”

Marcus shook his head, spilling his long hair across his bare shoulders. The movement was sensually erotic and didn't go unnoticed by Ronna's keen eyes. The dark strands picked up the light from the glow of the hearth and cast a blue-black shadow across his chiseled features. The action turned his remorseful features into those of a virile man, a darkly erotic figure bound in a chair by his lover.

The stark contrast shot through Ronna's insides. She rose to her feet quickly, almost stumbling backward in a rush to separate herself from the nearness of him. His powers to excite her were far greater than previously imagined.

"Drucella killed Darrias. She found where he slept in the day and drove a stake through his heart."

Ronna gasped and covered her mouth with one hand. The horror!

Marcus smiled at her. "It was not a bad thing, my sweet. Drucella rid the world of a monster."

She drew nearer, her curiosity peaked at his words. "You speak well of Drucella? Only earlier you called her a hag—"

"She sentenced me to imprisonment—a fate worse than death. And my brothers, she sought them out and sentenced them as well. She hates vampires."

A blond brow rose. "Then why didn't she kill

you and your brothers?"

"She chose to imprison us instead—to impose her will upon us."

"Then she could awaken any of you at any time?"

He shook his head. "Witches are not immortal."

"I see." She locked gazes with him. "But you have the power to make others immortal—like yourself. Why didn't you make Drucella immortal so that she might have at some time awakened you and your brothers?"

His black gaze bored into hers. "Because I did not love Drucella."

His words wrapped around her heart. A tiny part of her subconscious had somehow feared that he was asking her to interfere in a lovers' quarrel even though he had denied it earlier. Now, the intensity in his voice spoke otherwise. And she believed him.

A wave of peace settled inside her. She sighed and allowed herself to turn loose the worry lurking at the back of her mind. Had she begun to have feelings for Marcus—this vampire who had suddenly come into her life?

"That is why we had to return to this time—because now Drucella lives and only she knows where my brothers are imprisoned. We must find them and set them free. You must awaken them as only a witch can do."

"But how do you know that I could wake them? Are you certain Drucella's spell is bound only by the curse of witchcraft? Are you certain your brothers aren't dead?"

"She told me she was sentencing them to the same fate as she was sentencing me and that only the touch of another witch would break the spell. Ronna, you are meant to awaken my brothers—as you awakened me."

She felt her cheeks flush. The thought of placing her hand on his brothers' cocks and breaking the witch's spell sent a rush of embarrassment traveling through her insides.

He chuckled. "You must help them, Ronna. You must awaken them—no matter the method. It is your witch's powers that will break the curse. Please say that you will help them?"

Ronna strode toward the end of the great room. Beyond the window high on the wall, daylight was nearing. The sky was growing lighter by the minute.

"Is it true that you must sleep in the daytime? Is it true that you cannot stand the rays of the sun to touch your skin?" She turned to face him, sitting nude, bound in the large wooden chair, his muscled body beckoning to her. "Marcus, is it true that you must go into the earth to sleep?"

"The earth is my sanctuary. But I am not like some mole that must burrow into the earth—I

sleep beneath the earth because of its darkening capability." He sighed. "My chamber lies in the lower level of this fortress. It is secure and I am safe there."

"You fear for your safety?"

A tiny smile pulled at the corners of his mouth. "Thank you for feeling concern for me, Ronna. It is true. I fear for my safety. Drucella lives and I am certain she knows that I have been awakened."

Ronna pulled in an audible breath.

"She will come looking for me. And she will not be happy to find you in my home when she arrives. You must be on guard."

A quiver of fright snaked up Ronna's spine. She crossed the room to Marcus and knelt before the chair. "Earlier, when I tried to break the fire spell on the book, I saw the face of a woman. I sensed she was very angry."

"Drucella is ruthless."

She stared at him, fighting the urge to touch him, to reach out her hand and caress his naked chest, to lower her fingers to his swollen manhood. He had told her much, answered all her questions, with the exception of one.

"Marcus, did Drucella punish you because you did not return her love?" She bit her bottom lip and waited for his answer.

His laden sigh echoed in the quiet room. "We were both young and quite foolish. She had just

taken the head of the coven and felt compelled to exercise her exalted powers. She felt she possessed me. I merely saw her as the witch she was. I did not love her. And when I rejected her, she cursed me. By that time, she had already destroyed Darrias and knew of my turning. It was a vengeful act against me, but then she decided to hurt me further by involving my brothers."

"Marcus, the face of the woman I saw – she was very beautiful."

"I was not taken by her beauty."

Ronna stared at him. "You and she were lovers?"

He nodded his head. "Yes."

Perhaps you seduced her – like you seduced me.

There can be no comparison.

"She is still in love with you."

He stared at her. "She hates me. Else she would not have cast her spell on me."

Ronna smiled though the action didn't reach her eyes.

"You are ignorant in the ways of love. A woman scorned is a vicious demon – a force to be reckoned with. She cast her spell over you in an effort to make you see the error of your ways. She wanted to control your heart, Marcus – not your sleeping patterns."

CHAPTER 7

His flesh was cool beneath her palm as she took hold of the rope binding his wrist. Her fingertips played across his skin as she released the knots. For all the time she had kept him confined in the chair, not once had he tried to free himself, though she held little doubt that he couldn't have gotten loose with little effort—had he wanted to. She smiled as she worked on the knots. He had indulged her need to be in command.

Or else she had played into his hand without his having to command her.

Ronna, trust me.

She paused, her hands on the rope at his wrist. A slight smile played across her lips. Her insides burned for him. Her breasts were thrusting against the front of her cashmere sweater with an urgency born of need. Her crotch was moist and aching for his male cock to slip inside.

She resumed her work to release the knots in

the bindings. He had little time before having to go below and slumber. She felt his urgency. Knew of his need to have her body before leaving her.

He moved suddenly, causing her to jump back. He caught her by the wrist and pulled her onto his lap. The remaining ties were lying on the floor beside the chair, him having gotten them off without further help from her. She grinned in knowing he had been indulging her. A chuckle sounded deep in her throat.

He trailed one hand beneath her sweater at her back and slid his palm up to the back of her head, tangling his fingers in the fall of hair at her nape. He urged her forward, tipping her head so he could claim her mouth. His lips was hot against hers, pressing tightly and urgently.

Ronna moaned and leaned against his chest, her hips settling across his lap and her hands going to his hard erection. She wound her fingers around the tall shaft, tightening her grip as she began to stroke him. Her fingers delved within the nest of dark hair surrounding his large balls. She circled each orb with her fingertips, making him gasp.

He forced his tongue inside her mouth, stroking her tongue and slicking along her gums. He played across her teeth, tasting her sweetness. He pressed her head back with the force of his kiss, driving his mouth against hers in intense

possession. He moaned deep in his throat.

Ronna commanded her clothes be gone and instantly she was naked, perched atop Marcus' lap. Her breasts heaved with the exertion of her breathing—her nipples thrust forward in tight little buds begging for his hands. She pressed his erection toward her crotch as an intense feeling of need gripped her insides.

She let out a shuddering sigh as she fitted her wet crotch atop his towering shaft and slid hotly along its length, engulfing his organ inside her body. She pulled back, breaking their kiss and opening her mouth to gulp in a breath of air as the fullness of him exploded inside her body.

“You are so big!”

“You are tight.” He released a shuddering breath. “Your body holds mine like a tight glove. You were made for me to love.”

He moved suddenly, grasping her buttocks in his big hands. He thrust upward into her cavity with such force that she cried out.

She dug her nails into the hard muscles of his shoulders, holding on as he moved rapidly in the wooden chair. She relinquished her body to his movements, clinging to his strength for the orgasm she knew he could reap from her.

The firelight played across their naked flesh, kissed their heated skin with amber lights. Sweat beaded on Ronna's back and buttocks, her muscles

tensed and released with every thrust of Marcus' powerful body. She hunched her hips and rode the rampaging ardor building inside her.

Passion exploded in a crescendo of spiraling electrical shocks racing along her nerve endings. A multitude of tingling sensations overtook her emotions and caused her to close her eyes, to sigh deeply, to knot her belly as tight waves of ecstasy engulfed her senses.

Marcus released his wad inside her, gripping her buttocks tightly in his hands as he drove his shaft in to the hilt. He rose upward out of the chair, cradling her body against his chest as he climaxed. He drove his mouth down on hers, sealing their coming together with a force that belied definition.

He carried her across the room, her naked torso clinging to his as the orgasm still lingered inside her. He mounted the stone staircase.

Ronna's breathing was erratic, her eyes closed in total abandon. She had never experienced orgasms like Marcus could deliver. Her whole body felt alive, on fire with possession and passion running rampant along her limbs. Her belly curled with waning sensations that warmed and heated her insides.

She felt the chill of the upper floor as Marcus carried her down the long hallway to the bedroom she had awakened in. She clung to him, not

wanting him to separate his body from hers. Pale daylight lit the small room as he entered the door and crossed to the bed. He lowered her to the mattress, his mouth finding hers in a goodnight kiss that ended too soon and left her wanting more.

He waved a hand and renewed the fire before he disappeared from the room, leaving Ronna tucked beneath the sheepskin fleece in the middle of the bed. The door creaked on its metal hinge as he left her. Her eyes closed in needed slumber as the room warmed and she drifted off to sleep.

* * * *

She awakened with a start. A noise beyond the stone walls beat into her subconscious. She jerked upright in the bed, her back paining from the lumpy mattress, and her heart racing with fright. What had awakened her?

She threw aside the fleece coverlet and swung her bare feet to the floor. Shivering, she crossed the room to the window. The glass pane was covered with frost. She scraped her fingers across it, wiping away the concealing vapor to peer outside.

A wide courtyard lay below the window, spacious and covered with early morning frost. She craned her neck, looking from side to side in

the cleared space on the window pane. A small village set nestled in a valley beyond the courtyard. She could see several people moving about amidst the thatched roofs.

I wonder if that is Morganford lying beyond the courtyard.

She peered through the window, realizing beyond any doubt that she had in some manner, traveled back in time. She was no longer in Brooklyn. There were no high-rise buildings stabbing at the landscape or crowded lanes of traffic beyond the window. She felt her knees become weak.

She turned from the window, one hand clamped over her mouth.

This isn't a bad dream.

She paced across the room, her eyes widening as she took in the small space. It was primitive beyond reason. The floor was bare, the small bed sagging and fashioned out of tree limbs. A clay urn and washbowl sat on a small table near the bed. She sucked in a quick breath and turned toward the hearth at the far end of the room. The fire had burned itself out.

The thought that she had to save herself—get back to civilization, as she knew it—came full force in her mind. She conjured up jeans, a sweater, and warm boots for her cold feet then crossed the floor to the door. The place was

appalling. Never in her worst nightmares had she dreamed of such a desolate place.

She hurried from the room, rushing down the winding hallway to the top of the stairs. Last night's account of Marcus and his revealing story of his life filled her mind. He had warned her to be on guard against Drucella, the witch who had imprisoned him in the suit of armor—

She shook her head, sending her hair bounding across her shoulders. God forbid she should meet an angry witch—especially one so adept at her craft that she could cast a spell that imprisoned a vampire for centuries. She couldn't contain the shudder of fear that raced up her spine.

The great room was empty and, just as she feared, it existed. The hearth blazed in the end of the room, the long table flanked with numerous chairs sat before it, and the walls were adorned with heavy tapestries. She gazed about, biting her bottom lip.

Reality is so cruel.

She crossed the room to a heavy wooden door and lifted the latch. A loud squeak echoed into the room as she pulled it back on its hinges. A blast of icy air surged inside, engulfing her body. She gasped and stepped through the opening.

The courtyard was barren, dirt moist with morning dew rustled beneath her boots. Glancing about, she spied several people working near one

of the outbuildings at the side of the courtyard. She crossed her arms about her body, hesitating.

Should she ask someone for help – or accept the fact that she hadn't dreamed the whole episode?

She looked beyond the courtyard and the outbuildings, past the rows of houses nestled in the valley below. The surrounding countryside was a wasteland. Winter pallor embraced the trees and pastures as far as the eye could see. She turned suddenly and gazed at the structure at her back. Marcus' home was indeed a fortress, a towering two story stone building with turrets at one end and tiny high windows along its gray façade.

"Holy shit!"

The feeling of complete abandon rose inside her body as an icy blast of wind chilled her to the bone. She grasped the neck of her sweater and rushed back inside the building, slamming the door behind her.

"Of all the ridiculous situations to be in –"

Suddenly she felt something brush against her leg and glanced down, halting her angry words. A sleek black-coated cat pressed its side against her boot and turned a green eyed gaze upward. At first glance, she felt inclined to kick the cat then in the next instant, wondered why in hell she had such a thought. She loved animals, especially cats. She bent and smoothed her hand across the cat's

head and onto its back.

The cat arched its back against her palm and began to purr.

Ronna smiled. A measure of relief traveled through her insides. She stroked the black shiny fur, noticing that the animal appeared well tended. Perhaps it belonged to someone at the house. She rose from her stooped position beside the cat with intentions of putting it back outside when it suddenly leapt against her thigh, nearly knocking her down.

A bitter stench bubbled up, spewing forth in a rancid gush that stung Ronna's nose and made her gag. She lurched back, separating herself from the cat, only to watch as the animal transformed. Sitting up on its haunches, it pawed the air with one front foot. Elongating its sleek body, it grew in height.

Ronna clutched her sweater at her breasts and backed further into the room. The animal had lost all semblance of the black cat she had allowed inside the house. It continued to grow in height and width until the figure of a woman stood in the floor. Long blond hair framed a cherub-like face with piercing green eyes and a bow mouth. A gown of purple silk reached to the floor and billowed around the form concealing the true shape of the woman.

"So, you have awakened the vampire."

The voice spilled softly into the room as the green eyes latched onto Ronna's face. She felt drawn forward, as though summoned by an unknown force. Instinctually, she fought the force, calling on her witch's powers to keep her distance.

Drucella!

The shrouded figure drew closer, traveling on seemingly invisible feet. She glided across the floor to stand before Ronna.

Ronna tried to contain her fright. She needed her wits about her should a volatile situation arise. She swallowed down her nervousness and met the witch's stare with a steady gaze.

It was bad enough that she had awakened in that place – and now to be confronted by an angry witch – she wasn't about to stand idly by and lose her life.

"Who are you?"

Her tone was demanding. Ronna stared at her, a number of answers coming to mind. But then she realized that she already knew she was a witch—else Marcus would still be imprisoned inside the suit of armor. A wave of homesickness washed over her insides. If only she hadn't gone into that antique shop—

"Who are you?"

Ronna realized her anger had increased. She moved closer to her and she retreated a step.

"You are not of my coven." Green eyes narrowed. The bow mouth drew downward into

an angry scowl. "How dare you release the vampire." Her voice was a sharp hiss.

Ronna realized she would have to take a stand. She would have to refuse to be intimidated. She drew herself up to her full height, squared her shoulders, and gathered her courage.

"You must be Drucella." She stepped to the side, making Drucella whirl around to face her.

Drucella raised one arm and immediately Ronna cast a spell to make her arm useless. It fell to the witch's side as Drucella let out an audible huff of air.

"We can't be nice?" Her tone was condescending.

Drucella chuckled loudly, tipping back her head she bellowed into the room. "So your powers are not great. Should you risk death to defend Marcus?"

A smile pulled Ronna's full lips upward at the corners. "He told me about you."

"While you were locked in the throes of passion? While his long cock was thrusting inside your hot body? While his male juices were being released inside you?"

"Tsk, Tsk, aren't we the jealous witch?"

A lightening bolt suddenly smashed into the wall over Ronna's head. A shower of red-orange sparks cascaded down from the ceiling, falling around Ronna's body.

"I will make you wish you had never interfered."

"It's too late now. I'm here and I'm not leaving." She felt her nerves quiver at the statement.

"Then you shall die."

Drucella raised her arm and a fiery red blaze shot from her hand, narrowly missing Ronna as she lunged out of the way. Another blast shot near her head and she ducked beneath the table for cover. A loud witch's cackle sounded in the room seconds before she delivered another fiery blast toward Ronna.

Ronna crawled beneath the table and poked her head out the other side, gauging the nearness of Drucella. Taking careful aim, she conjured up a spell to make her suddenly quite ill.

Drucella wretched and doubled over, grasping her stomach with both hands. Blood-red vomit spewed from her mouth.

Ronna crawled from beneath the table, a feeling of victory welling up inside her. It would be increasingly difficult for Drucella to hurl any more fiery cannons at her when she was too sick to stand up straight. She eyed the witch, intensifying the spell. She kept her distance, seeing the mess she was making on the stone floor. She was still dangerous, regardless of how long she commanded the spell to last.

“You only have...tiny spells...in defense...of my...powers.” She vomited again, clutching her belly and making terrible retching noises. “Yet you wear...the amulet... around your neck.”

CHAPTER 8

Ronna could barely understand the witch's words since she was spewing vomit like a volcano. She inched her way around her, opening the door of the room to the outside.

"Get out. And don't bother to come around again."

The order issued, she stood at the door waiting for Drucella to leave.

Drucella raised bleary eyes and locked gazes with Ronna. Hate showed in the emerald green depths. Her face contorted, she grasped her belly, and more vomit jumped from her mouth. She swiped one hand across her mouth, her lips twisted in hate.

"I will not let this pass. I will return to Morganford Manor and—"

"And I'll work on honing my spells in your absence! Now get the hell out!"

Ronna waved one hand at Drucella and ordered up a fierce wind. It caught hold of her

dress and whipped it about her body before lifting her off the floor and spinning her through the open door.

"I'll be back!"

Her words died on the wind as Ronna watched her body sailing across the courtyard and away from Morganford. She slammed the door and leaned her back against it, her breathing rapid as she took all that had happened in to account. Tears suddenly sprang to her eyes and she slid against the door to settle on the floor.

"How will I ever get out of this?"

Her shoulders shook as she released the anguish in the form of tears. She covered her face with her hands and cried until she felt breathless. Calmed, somewhat, she sat against the door and looked round the empty room. When the wind swept Drucella away, it took all semblance of her having been there as well. The vomit she had heaved on the floor had disappeared—the eerie feeling accompanying her presence had left. It was the same dank dreary room she had first seen last night and made love to Marcus in the early hours of morning before he had to leave her.

"It could use a bit of decorating."

She laughed out loud.

Getting to her feet, she took survey of the room. It was large and had potential. She envisioned a three cushioned couch in rustic tones of amber

and mauve, against one wall, a grouping of three over-stuffed chairs positioned near the fireplace, a dinette set in dark mahogany with chairs for twelve, lamps, dark wooden tables, a decorative vase appropriately placed —

She waved one hand and the furnishings appeared. She stood marveling at her handiwork, a small smile of satisfaction on her face. Marcus would love it when he came again.

The ugly reality of her situation suddenly returned with alarming haste. She let out a sigh and sank onto the couch against the wall. Absently, she trailed her fingers down the gold chain to the amulet nestled between her breasts. She felt its weight in her palm, fingered its multiple cut facets.

Suddenly she remembered that, between bouts of puking, Drucella had made some remark about the amulet. She tried to recall her exact words. She had said something in regards to her powers—or lack of.

She raised the amber jewel and stared at it.

“What is this thing?”

She sat quietly and waited for an answer to come—from anywhere. Minutes passed and she had received no sign—either magically or human manifested. She released the amulet to settle into its familiar spot between her tits and got on with her decorating. The bed upstairs could certainly

use replacing. She levered herself off the couch and headed up the stairs.

* * * *

Ronna.

She felt Marcus call her name. She froze, her hand reaching upward to clutch the amber amulet suspended about her neck.

Ronna. I will come to you soon.

She had thought about him and the situation involving Drucella and his brothers until her head hurt. She had no idea where to start to find Marcus' brothers. And if they were somehow fortunate enough to stumble across them, she doubted whether she could actually awaken them. Surely her finding Marcus in the suit of armor and touching his genitals was a mere coincidence.

Do not doubt your powers, my sweet.

Stop talking to me like this. It scares me.

She levered herself off the couch she had conjured up and crossed the room to the fireplace. While she was in the mode of decorating the old building, she should have installed central heating and air conditioning. She grimaced and shook her head. God forbid she was there long enough to enjoy the fruits of her handiwork. She wanted to go home and wipe all memories of this episode from her mind.

She felt his presence suddenly, bold, intimidating...sensual.

She whirled around finding him crossing the room toward her. A stern look wreathed his handsome face and for an instant, Ronna's breath hitched in her throat. His masculinity was filling her senses with total abandon. She raised one hand to her shirt and began opening the buttons.

He paused in his steps toward her, his dark eyes boring into her face as she stripped away the blouse from her upper body. His gaze lowered to encompass her breasts, heaving with her rapid intake of breath.

His gaze burned her skin. She bit her bottom lip. Her fingers lowered to release the snap on her jeans. Had she no control? Was she destined to be under the overwhelming powers of this man of the night?

He beckoned to her and she seemed to glide across the floor to where he stood. He let the smile clinging to his mouth spread across his lips. He reached out one hand and clasped her nape, curling his long fingers behind her head. He drew her forward, bringing her against his chest.

"Marcus—"

He tipped his head and nuzzled her throat, sending a chilling sensation across her skin.

"Stop, Marcus. I need to talk to you."

He kissed the arch of her throat, tipping her

head to the side so his lips could work up the silky incline to her jaw. He nibbled softly, the tip of his tongue tasting her flesh as he worked his way to her lips. He settled his mouth over hers, pressing firmly as he drew her tightly against his chest.

Ronna felt her knees go limp as his mouth took possession of hers. She moaned and closed her eyes as she settled comfortably against the rigid firmness of his broad chest. She inhaled the fragrance of him, the earthy aroma clinging to his clothes and skin. His long hair was unbound and brushed across his shoulders, fanning against her cheek as he kissed her.

Her fingers halted on the zipper of her jeans as he pressed her body into the long length of his. Thoughts of having sex with him flooded her mind as her body began to heat up. Her heartbeat increased, hammering against her ribcage in a wild tattoo. Her crotch felt the first release of pre-sex moisture, dampening her bikini panty. Her nipples drew into tight little nubs that awaited his touch.

She tried to focus her mind—tried to deny her body the pleasures his attentions promised. She needed to talk to him—to tell him of Drucella's visit and—

He drew her down on the couch she had conjured up and pressed her back against the cushions. He settled his big body atop her as he

continued to kiss her lips. His tongue pushed inside her mouth, teasing her tongue and flicking across her gum.

Suddenly a slight high-pitched sound penetrated Ronna's brain, urging her to open her eyes. Her lashes fluttered, dipped to her cheek before drawing wide open. Hovering just above her head, perched amidst a glowing ring of fire sat a tiny being.

Ronna shrieked and lurched forward, pushing against the solid wall of Marcus' body as she tried to warn him that they had a visitor. Marcus was on his feet so quickly Ronna almost fell off the couch as her hurried movements lunged her body forward to a sitting position. She swiveled her head, trying to make Marcus aware of the presence in their midst, and found she had lost sight of the tiny apparition.

"It was right there." She pointed a hand toward the end of the room. "I saw a tiny figure sitting inside a ball of fire." She searched the room for the object.

Marcus combed one hand through his hair. "It was Tiana. Drucella sent her fairy to scare you, Ronna. Have no fear. She is gone, carrying her message back to the witch."

"Tiana? Drucella's fairy?"

Ronna scrambled off the couch. The room felt icy suddenly. She found her shirt on the floor and

pulled it on. Turning to Marcus, she pinned him with a warning stare.

"Drucella has a fairy?" She shook her head. "Drucella is no ordinary witch, Marcus." She crossed the room to him. Placing her hands on his chest, she gazed up at him with imploring eyes. "Please, tell me what is going on."

He took hold of her shoulders. "It is said that Drucella has legion with the dark prince. Tiana is his servant and does his bidding whenever Drucella summons his powers."

"The dark prince?" She took a step back, her eyes growing wide. "The devil?"

"It's all in the book, Ronna. I thought perhaps you could unlock the mystery of her powers."

"The devil?" She couldn't believe her own ears. She had read about witches being accused of having powers granted by the devil but she had never believed it. She felt shaken by the news. "Witches aren't all bad, Marcus." She clutched her shirt at her throat. "I'm not a bad witch." She thought of the little tricks she had played on others, her customers, and kids at the orphanage—"I've never harmed anyone in my life." For just a second the sight of Jimmy Weston chewing on that stuffed teddy bear flashed in her mind. "Aside from one tiny incident—"

"Ronna, you are a descendent of Drucella's. Your powers are very much like hers." He pulled

her into his embrace.

"I'm so confused." Her brows drew together. She gazed around the room, looking at all the furniture she had assembled just by wishing it to be manifested. "I have used my powers more since I met you —"

"Meeting me has nothing to do with it. You are just reaching the age when your powers are becoming stronger. You have great abilities at your command, my sweet." He kissed the top of her head.

"Tell me all that you know, Marcus." She felt emboldened by his words. The fear of the unknown subsided slightly, allowing her to push the dread to the far corner of her mind. She broke Marcus' embrace and led him to the couch. "Tell me because I need to know." She swallowed to ease the sudden dryness in her throat. "Drucella came to visit me today. She threatened to kill me for waking you."

He settled beside her, pulling her into his embrace. "I will not let any harm come to you, Ronna. I promise." He kissed her cheek.

"But Marcus, how can you protect me if you are asleep during the day? Drucella knows of your needs. My God! She just sent her servant to snoop on us!" She remembered suddenly how she had congratulated herself with fending her off earlier in the day. She had been quite proud of rendering

her arm useless and making her vomit like an erupting fountain—but had she known of the extent of her powers... She shivered in cold fear.

"I'm certain everything you need to know is in the old book."

"But I can't open it."

"Perhaps when Drucella is dead—"

Ronna stared at him. Surprise wreathed her face. "If you kill her, how will you find your brothers?"

"I feel certain that my brothers are confined within her castle walls. I have scoured the countryside in search of clues, to no avail. There are no traces of my brothers in the neighboring villages. I believe she watches over them as they lie beneath her spell."

Ronna bit her bottom lip. It would seem so simple—merely sneak into Drucella's castle and lay a well-placed hand on each of Marcus' brothers to break the spell—but the consequences were paramount.

"My powers—" she paused and shook her head. "I have no way of knowing what I can or can not do." She sighed and placed one hand against his chest. "I had not thought of you as one of the living dead—until now." Her voice was a tiny whisper.

He drew her against his chest and held her tightly. "It is the curse of being a vampire, Ronna.

I am not of the living—yet I cannot die except by the stake through a heart that no longer beats with my life force.” He kissed her temple. “I am a man without emotion—until you touched me and awakened the burning desire for a mate inside me.” He pushed her to arms length and gazed down into her upturned face. “We are meant to be together and neither the powers of Drucella nor the stake of a dark hunter can change that.” He kissed her lips then inched his mouth to her throat.

Ronna felt his lips find her vein, the scrape of a sharp incisor on her skin. She bent her head, arching her throat for his bite. She felt akin to him—somehow—whether she was falling in love with him or feeling sorry for him because of the things Drucella had done to his family, she couldn’t decide.

His teeth sank into her vein and she sucked in a quick breath at the moment his teeth pierced her skin. She closed her eyes and relaxed against his body, knowing in her heart that he would not kill her.

You are my mate. You are in my soul, Ronna.

Marcus—I can offer up no power to stop you from taking my blood. Feed. For your strength will aid us both.

CHAPTER 2

Donna chewed the bite of hamburger as she watched Marcus study the French fry he held.

"It's a skinny triglyceride inducer." She giggled and took another bite of her hamburger, washing it down with a slurp of malted milk.

"The food of your time is like nothing I have ever seen."

She studied him for a moment. "Drucella cast a spell over you shortly after Darrias changed you?"

"I had been a vampire for one century when Drucella appeared in Morganford. Until that day, life was blissful. I fed at night on the people of Morganford, I slept during the day, and I had an existence that was bland. I had lost all will to do anything except exist from day to day. My brothers, however, were of a mind to travel. They left England and journeyed to Ireland and beyond. They came back to Morganford with tales of merriment and glee. They loved their existence as vampires. They liked being immortal, of never

feeling the sting of death. They were anxious to experience the changing world." He paused and heaved a heavy sigh. "Alas. If only they had known their fate when they returned to Morganford to visit me."

Ronna finished the last bite of her hamburger and poked the last French fry into her mouth. Her strength still waned from Marcus feeding on her, but she felt better with a full stomach. She stretched out on the couch, propping her feet up on the coffee table sitting before it.

"How can we get into Drucella's castle?"

Marcus appeared to brighten immediately. His shoulders straightened, his lips curved into a smile, he left the chair at the table where he had been seated while she ate her fast food, and came to perch on the arm of the couch.

"We will change our appearances and infiltrate her domain while she sleeps."

Ronna's brows rose. "I can't change into anything, Marcus. I can't even shrink myself." She stared at him, suddenly remembering that she had discovered she could levitate herself off the floor, if she concentrated really hard. "I can barely manage to get my feet off the floor—" She paused her words, seeing the strange look he was aiming at her. "What?"

"Every witch can fly, my sweet." He smiled widely at her.

His handsome features pulled at her heartstrings. She sucked in a quick breath, feeling the need to be in his arms again. Risking another vampire bite, she swiveled her feet round and levered herself upright. She crawled the length of the couch to where he perched on the arm. Grasping his right hand, she urged him to sit on the couch beside her.

When he was settled, she leaned across his body and wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling his head down so she could kiss him. He was an incredibly sensual man—living or not. She felt the jolt the thought brought to her insides. How could she think of him as being dead? He was vital and could turn her bones to jelly with just one glance in her direction.

She kissed him with every ounce of lust she could muster. He moaned and began tearing her clothing away, baring her body for his eager hands.

“You tempt me with your beautiful body.” He pulled his lips away just long enough to utter the whispered comment.

Her clothes fell to the floor with the speed of light. She curled her naked body around his, mewling softly in her throat. She wanted him to make love to her. She wanted to feel him thrusting into her body. She stifled a shiver of longing as his tongue pushed between her lips and his hand slid

between her thighs. His fingers found her pussy and began a rhythmic stroking that soon had her straightening out her legs and opening herself up for his play.

He moved so quickly she didn't comprehend until she felt the cushion of the couch beneath her back. He straddled her body, his long shaft hot and moist on its rounded tip. She splayed one leg across the back of the couch and reached for him as he sank between her thighs and rammed his hard cock inside her cunt.

She gasped and arched her back as his long length filled her passageway. She dug her nails into his buttocks, feeling the ropy muscles knotted beneath the smooth skin. She raised her buttocks to meet his thrusts as he began to move.

His lunges were fierce, as though he were claiming her forever. She bit her lip and stared up at him. His face was darkly handsome in the shadow of the lamplight at the end of the couch. His expression was unreadable—though she sensed he was reveling in his victory over her. She smiled a knowing smile. Who was being victorious over whom?

The orgasm surprised her all at once, zinging through her insides with lightening force. She felt her belly curl and then release, her muscles tensed, her fingertips dug deeper into his buttocks. She closed her eyes and savored the sensations

streaming though her insides. Vampire or not—Marcus was a good fuck.

* * * *

The sex was incredible. Ronna combed one hand through her hair. Was it written somewhere that a witch couldn't fall in love with a vampire?

Perhaps in Drucella's book.

A blast of cold air entered the room as Marcus came through the front door. Ronna glanced up, staring at him as she realized he held something—or someone—in his arms. She scrambled to her feet suddenly, backing across the room to safety.

"Marcus?" Her words died on the cold breeze infiltrating the large room.

Marcus released his armload into the floor. A scruffy man no bigger than a small boy pulled angrily at the hold Marcus retained on his right arm.

"This is Pemi, Drucella's slave. I found him outside the castle walls."

The small man stared up at Marcus, his body quivering in fright, his stance that of a child planning to flee at the first chance.

"Please, vampire. Please release me."

Ronna felt the apprehension the poor creature harbored. She approached carefully, her eyes on the disheveled looking person. He looked to be

about middle-aged with a gray beard and long unkempt hair. His clothes were rags and soiled with suet. He smelled worse than a garbage heap.

He turned his gaze on Ronna as she approached, backing up against Marcus at first, until he realized he was trapped between what appeared to be two evils. He jerked his arm, trying to free himself from Marcus' grasp, only to be pulled in front of Marcus as Ronna drew near.

"Please don't hurt me!" He threw up his free hand. "Please!"

Can he help us, Marcus?

He lives in the castle with Drucella. Surely he knows of the secret passage else he would never have escaped his mistress' evil watch.

Does he have any powers?

No. Drucella stole him from the village when he was a child. She cursed his height – keeping him child-size so he would fear her. He wants only to escape and return to his family.

Ronna locked gazes with Marcus. She doubted that the little man could live in Morganford without Drucella coming in search of him. How, then, could he be of help to them?

"I will tell you the witch's secret – if you will set me free."

"The witch's secret? Pray tell, what might that be?" Marcus' voice sounded amused. He winked one dark eye at Ronna.

Pemi turned frightened eyes on Ronna. He

pointed a grimy hand at her. "You are the witch Drucella fears."

Surprise shot through Ronna's insides.

"And you are the vampire Drucella vows revenge upon." He pointed toward Marcus. "She watches the manor in her gazing pot. She sees all that you do." He laughed suddenly, a high-pitched shriek that echoed inside the room. "She swears when you rut with the yellow haired witch. She is manifesting a spell to bind you forever. This time you will not escape her wrath."

"Tell me of the secret passages inside her castle."

"Master, there is but one. It lies deep within the walls and is only accessible when the tide is low."

He grew still, silent, staring up at Marcus with imploring eyes.

Ronna felt an overwhelming flood of sadness engulf her as she stared at Pemi. He looked so downcast and hopeless.

You must let him go.

Drucella will come for him when she discovers he is missing. She will destroy him when she finds him. He cannot survive outside the walls of her castle.

Perhaps he could stay here.

Dark brows lifted in question.

You do not know what you risk, my sweet.

Ronna bit her lip. The poor creature had suffered terribly at the hands of Drucella. His very

presence filled the room with remorse and dread.

Then take him somewhere – change into a bat and fly off with him to another land, Marcus.

She had barely released the thought to Marcus when she watched him lift the small man into his arms and vanish from the room. She blinked her eyes, wondering if she had imagined the whole episode.

I will return, Ronna.

Thank you, Marcus.

She sat on the couch and thought about the fairy that had appeared and then vanished into thin air, the capture of Pemi, and Marcus telling her that she could fly. It was a hodgepodge of thoughts, each somehow overriding the other as they came about. Had it not been for the fact that she knew she was in that strange place, she would surely believe she was dreaming. Tiny fairies sitting inside a circle of fire – how weird could her imagination get?

She yawned suddenly and stretched her arms over her head. She had gotten little sleep last night and so far she had proven useless to Marcus, never mind that she couldn't figure out how to go home on her own. She glanced at the amulet nestled between her breasts. She recalled Marcus' hand on it just moments before all hell seemed to break loose. She picked the amulet up, gazing at it as it lay on her open hand.

She had always been intrigued by it and she had never seen any other amulet to rival it. When she was a child she kept the necklace hidden inside her shirt or blouse, afraid that if any of the children at the orphanage saw it, they would try and take it from her. She shrugged her shoulders. Not a single person had noticed she wore it.

Her brows drew together. Was there something magical about its being around her neck? Apparently yes since Marcus seemed to know something about it. And Drucella alleged that she wore the amulet. She thought then of the old book Marcus had stolen from Drucella. If only she could get it open. Perhaps the amulet was mentioned on one of its yellowed pages.

“Marcus believes I can fly.”

She accessed her own words for a moment. It had only been recently that she discovered she could raise her body off the floor. Could that discovery be prelude to her being able to fly? How would she know?

Her brows drew together. If only she had kin that she could ask questions of.

A chill suddenly filled the room. She shivered and clasped her arms across her chest. Darting her eyes around the room, she searched for anything out of the ordinary—the reason for the sudden drop in temperature.

“Drucella is your kin.”

Ronna jerked her head round at the sound of the high-pitched voice.

"You should go to her and leave the treacherous vampire to his own fate. No good can come out of your allegiance to him."

She saw her then, perched in her tiny ball of glowing fire, Tiana. Ronna moved slowly off the couch. If she could get close enough to the tiny creature, she intended to trap her in a spell of fire. One wave of her hand and the little fairy would land in the hearth, her little ball of blazing fire merging with the flames dancing across the logs. She would perish along with the smoldering embers when the fire burned out.

"Why do you tell me this? What is it to you what I do?"

Tiana darted across the room suddenly, her precarious ride inside the burning orb leaving a trail of black smoke in its wake.

Ronna followed the burning orb with her eyes. Perhaps the devil's fairy was too smart to get caught by an amateur witch. She grinned in spite of things. If only she could figure out how to access her powers.

"Drucella sent me to issue you an invitation to visit."

Ronna laughed out loud.

"You think I don't know she wants to kill me?"

"You need only to leave this manor for her to

reconcile her feelings toward you. She is willing to discuss the matter. Come morning, she will be expecting you."

The fiery sphere darted to the far side of the room, hovering near the door leading to the courtyard.

Ronna crossed the room toward the ball of fire, her eyes squinting to see the tiny figure. She was very minuscule, with gossamer wings in shades of purple and pale umber. She appeared to hover inside the ring of fire, her tiny wings beating rapidly as though keeping the orb in the air. The thought occurred to Ronna then that the globe was the fairy's protective shield against any spell she might interpose upon her.

Drucella is leaving nothing to chance.

"Tell Drucella to get fucked!"

The blazing ball darted about the room and suddenly disappeared.

CHAPTER 10

“What did you do with him?”
“It is best that you do not know.” He stroked her cheek with one long finger. “Know only that he is safe.”

Ronna reached up and caught his fingers, halting his caressing her cheek. Only sex could come out of his touch and after the events of the night, she was hardly in the mood for more sex play with him—regardless of how fulfilling it was.

“Drucella sent her messenger to me again. She wants me to come to her castle.”

Marcus' stance grew rigid. “It’s a trap. Do not be fooled by her offer of friendship.”

Ronna crossed the room to stand near the fireplace. She could sense Marcus' anger, see the rigidity of his stance. She knew he was riled by the condescending offer from Drucella.

“What are we going to do, Marcus?”

He bridged the distance between them so quickly that Ronna gasped when he reached out

and took hold of her shoulders. "We're going to sneak into her castle and find my brothers. Then, once they are awakened, we will end Drucella's life forever."

He drew her against his chest and held her tightly. She released a sigh of relief. He sounded so positive that she had little reason to doubt him.

"I must leave you soon. The sky grows light." He pushed her to arms length and stared down at her. "Do not leave the fortress and be on guard against any more of Drucella's tricks." He pulled her back into his strong embrace. He caressed her hair with one hand.

Ronna nestled her head against his strong shoulder and closed her eyes. She needed to sleep, to regain her strength before facing any more of Drucella's threats. She felt soothed by Marcus' attention.

* * * *

The sun was low in the sky when Ronna awakened. She stretched and threw back the covers on the bed. Levering herself to a sitting position, she gazed about the sun-lit room. She was in bed alone and the door was bolted. Finally agreeing that nothing out of the ordinary had taken place since she had been asleep, she set her feet on the floor and got out of bed.

Mentally she reminded herself that she had been at Marcus' house for two nights and one day. She had allowed him to bite her neck—to drink her blood—and she had given herself to him for sexual purposes. On this second day, she hoped they could come to terms about what to do with Drucella. She was anxious to get home and back to a normal life.

“Witches don’t have normal lives.”

She dressed and gathered her hair into a ponytail on the back of her head. Just once she’d like to be in control of things. Alas, it didn’t seem to be the pattern her life was taking. Something was always amiss, or cropping up at the last minute.

She thought suddenly of her encounter with Marcus.

“Who knew I’d meet a vampire and have hot sex with him?”

She contemplated her growing feelings for Marcus. How far could their relationship go—with him being one of the undead and she a witch destined to stumble through life not fully understanding her powers? Could they be happy together? After all, he was immortal and she was not. How wonderful could that be?

Her brows drew together.

Marcus could change her into one of the undead. He had the ability.

She felt cold suddenly. The thought of such a life-altering event chilled her to the bone.

She hurried from the bedroom, her mind made up to separate herself from Marcus just as soon as possible. Once they found his brothers and awakened them, he would let her return home. She would put him out of her mind then. She would force herself to find a mortal boyfriend and begin a new affair—a romantic affair that would fulfill all her desires for a happy life.

She raced down the staircase—only to come to a stumbling halt when she spied the woman seated on the couch.

Blond hair lay softly about her shoulders and framed a lovely face with deep-set violet eyes. Rose-colored lips and crimson stained cheeks gave her an alluring appearance. A suit of emerald green crushed velvet clung to her ample figure. She turned a smiling face on Ronna as she stepped from the stairwell into the room.

“I came to talk.”

“You’re wasting your time.”

Drucella’s violet colored eyes stole to the amulet hanging around Ronna’s neck. A look of total agitation wreathed her face.

“We are of the same coven. We are sisters.”

“I don’t have any sisters. I’m an orphan.”

An arched brow lifted. “You cannot deny the brethren of the dark power. It is your heritage.”

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

Drucella rose from the couch. Her green dress billowed around her body, rustling as she moved toward Ronna.

Ronna took a step back, putting distance between herself and the evil witch. If only Marcus was there—if for nothing other than moral support. She bit her bottom lip. She hoped the witch didn't try casting any spells over her. She sucked in a deep breath and mentally vowed to die before falling victim to her will.

"The amulet you wear around your neck—it is one of seven."

Ronna inched toward the door of the room as Drucella drew closer. Any moment she could cast a spell and make the entire manor cave in on top of them. She shook her head, trying to dislodge the thought.

"We are the seven Morganford witches. We have received special powers from the dark one. He has granted us many wishes and bestowed many treasures unto us."

She raised her hand suddenly and Ronna instantly ducked should she send any sort of dark magic shooting forth.

"There is no need for you to fear me, my dear. We are kin. I come in peace. I wish for your return to the coven—to learn your craft to your advantage."

There was a condescending tone in her voice. Ronna propped her hands on her hips and glared at her.

"You are the devil's servant."

"He is our benefactor."

"You do his work. You imprison people—innocent people."

She heaved an audible sigh and squared her shoulders. "Marcus betrayed me. I had no choice."

"You're a woman scorned."

She smiled slowly. "You are from the future and thus do not understand the culture of this time. A man does not betray his intended."

"Marcus did not return your love, Drucella. I know all about your reason for sentencing him to a fate worse than death."

She hissed, opening her mouth and rolling her tongue like a cat. Her eyes blazed for a second before she waved one hand and set the couch on fire with a red blast.

Ronna gasped and ran for the door.

Laughter sounded behind her and before she could pull the heavy door back on its hinges, Drucella darted in front of her.

"You don't know what you're getting yourself into, Ronna from Brooklyn. You will be dead at my hands before the next sunrise!"

Ronna shrieked and stumbled back into the room, falling against a chair and landing in the

floor. She scrambled back on her hands and feet, her eyes holding the figure stalking her across the room.

“Is he worth it? Is Marcus worth losing your life over?”

Think! Think of a spell! Cast the bitch into hell!

“Can’t you find a mortal man to couple with? Why must you lay with a vampire—he is one of the undead! There is no future with him—only murderous rampages to sustain a blood appetite.”

Her lips were curled around her teeth—her face was contorted into a sneering angry animal. Ronna watched her hands as she raised her arms. Long black nails grew from her fingertips. She waved one arm and flung her hand, sending a towering mass of black goop sluicing across the walls of the room. She laughed loudly, making her actions seem that much more evil. She swung her head to one side and summoned a torrent of water to crash from the stairwell, soaking the furnishings and racing toward Ronna.

Ronna bounded to her feet, racing to the door, her heart pounding. Why couldn’t she think? Had her brain gone completely blank in the wake of the danger Drucella posed. Oh God! She grasped the latch on the door and wrenched it open. Spying the open courtyard, she sprinted through the opening.

A loud cackle of laughter sounded behind her.

She glanced over her shoulder—fearing Drucella was sending a monster after her. Suddenly she felt a sharp pain in her ankle and felt her body tumbling on the ground. She crashed on her belly, slamming hard against the ground and loosing her breath.

For a moment she couldn't breathe, couldn't think. She was at Drucella's mercy. She tried to roll to her back. If she was going to die—at least she wanted to see it coming. Her body felt bruised from the fall, her heart hammered against her chest in a wild tattoo of panic.

Bright sunlight nearly blinded her as she rolled over and stared upward, expecting to see Drucella hurling herself at her. Seconds passed—horrible seconds filled with fear and blinding sunlight—

“Milady. Are you all right?”

Ronna levered herself into a sitting position on the hard ground. The woman servant, who had brought her food shortly after she arrived at the manor, stood over her, a curious look on her face.

She accepted the help to stand and brushed the dust from her jeans and sweater. Gazing around, she saw no sign of Drucella. Quickly she turned to the main room of the manor. Last she remembered there was fire and water ravaging the room.

With reservations, she peeked inside, craning her neck and looking intently from wall to wall. There were no signs of destruction—Drucella had

fixed everything—or else her spells had meant to scare her and were meaningless otherwise.

She scratched her head, combing her fingers through her tousled hair. She had to figure out how to deal with the bitch—or else figure a way to leave Morganford. She raised her hand and clutched the amulet hanging around her neck. Her curiosity surrounding the jewel suddenly became ten fold.

She closed herself inside the manor, her mind made up to practice her powers—such as she was capable. Drucella meant to kill her merely because she was there. She thought suddenly of Marcus' swords. He had not returned Drucella's love and doomed himself forever—or at least until he arrived in Ronna's midst.

She heaved a laden sigh. The mere thought that she was embroiled in turmoil between a twelve-century witch and her lover vampire was hard to imagine—even for a witch. She pushed her sweater sleeves up, preparing to practice her witchcraft. She bit her bottom lip. Her powers were so limited—and yet she felt certain she was capable of much more.

She closed her eyes and thought about lunch, willing a cheeseburger and malt to appear on the coffee table. Opening her eyes, she saw that indeed, a sandwich and drink awaited her. She waved one hand and sent the food away. It

disappeared with a wink, leaving the plate it sat on behind.

"I'm such an amateur."

She spread both arms and closed her eyes, willing herself to rise from the floor. Her body contorted, her gut ached, her head pounded. Her eyes flashed open as she felt her ankles grow lax. She looked down, discovering she was inching upward leaving the floor behind.

A tremor of fright raced through her insides. She was really levitating her body off the floor.

'All witches can fly.'

Marcus' words came quickly to mind. She accessed the situation as she hovered only a few inches off the ground. What did she need to do?

"Fly, dammit! Fly about the room!"

The sudden release of power shot her toward the ceiling. She let out a loud shriek and raised her hands over her head fearing she would hit her head on the massive beams stretching the width of the room. A second of flight, and she hovered just beneath the beams, her arms and legs outstretched, her heart pounding.

Scared, she couldn't bring herself to look down—to see the floor ten feet beneath her body. She held her breath, trying to make her body as light as possible. Now that she had managed to zoom up to the ceiling—how did she get down?

The mere thought brought her lowering slowly

to the floor. She pulled in a quick breath as a wide smile broke across her face.

“All I have to do is think about what I want to do! Damn! Who knew it would be so simple?”

CHAPTER 11

Donna flew from one side of the room to the other, landing softly on the floor each time and then achieving a rapid liftoff merely by thinking of flight. She was immensely pleased with herself and her newfound ability. Maybe she had Drucella to thank for her finally figuring out how to fly. The threat of death was a powerful deterrent by any account.

She shuddered at the thought of going toe to toe with a practiced witch—especially one as evil as Drucella. She massaged her temples with her fingertips, trying to assuage the headache threatening her brain. She needed to be clear headed and she needed to be on top of her game.

Tonight we sneak into Drucella's castle and look for Marcus' brothers.

The thought brought fear racing around inside her. She could think of a million things she would rather be doing—having her fingernails pulled out one by one held more appeal. She shivered and

put the thought out of her head.

Practice, you inept witch! Practice!

Ronna, you are a lovely witch. Do not be so hard on yourself.

Marcus.

I will join you soon, my love.

His words careened through her. Did he indeed love her? Or was he merely placating her because he needed her help in rescuing his brothers?

Ronna? I feel your disbelief.

She sighed, feeling as though she had wounded him.

"You are my life mate."

She jerked her head around, spying Marcus standing by the door of the room. His large body was draped in a long black cape, the collar standing up around his ears. His long black hair was loose atop his shoulders. His dark eyes held her gaze as his full lips pulled slowly into a smile.

"Oh, Marcus."

She ran into his arms and the events of the day began spilling out of her mouth. She needed his strength to console her doubts and fears.

"Come. I have a surprise for you."

He enfolded her inside his cape and instantly they were airborne, rising magically through the door and into the nighttime sky.

Ronna gulped in a breath of air, the sudden action sending fear shooting through her nerves.

She clung to Marcus' shoulders, wrapping her arms tightly around his neck and holding on for dear life.

"Do not fear. You are capable of flight on your own."

"I know." Her voice was shaky. "I flew about the great room today."

He chuckled and suddenly flung her body into the air.

She shrieked and opened her arms, catching her body on invisible air currents. She held her breath and hovered, feeling the coolness of the night against her face.

Do not fear, Ronna. All witches can fly.

I'll get you for this, Marcus!

Fill your mind with the thought of flight, my sweet.

She tried to shut out his thoughts—to concentrate on the lesson she had given herself earlier in the day. She began to feel relaxed as her body rose upward, carried along on the slight evening breeze. She rose into the treetops, brushed against the barren limbs with her arm as she soon left them behind.

A smile spread across her face as she realized she was indeed flying under her own violation. She gazed overhead at the stars in the sky, scanned the horizon beyond the treetops, and dared to look below her body to the ground beneath. Gradually the sensation began to feel

natural to her. She hovered and soared, dipped and swooped like a bird in flight. The smile on her face spread wider as her confidence rose.

Marcus? Where are you?

I am here, my sweet. Look to your right.

She turned her head and saw nothing at first, then she made out a small bird-like creature flying beside her.

I must try shape shifting, Marcus.

Merely have the thought, Ronna. And it shall be.

She considered his words as she stared at the small animal flying so close by. The thought suddenly filled her with fright. It was all so new to her—flying, and now daring to shape shift.

Ronna, we are nearing Drucella's castle.

Oh shit!

All thoughts of trying something new fled her mind. She felt the urge to turn around and head for Morganford, but Marcus' words halted her thoughts in mid-sentence.

It is time we searched for my brothers, Ronna.

In the blink of an eye, he dove through the night sky and disappeared from sight. Ronna held her arms out and veered her body toward the ground. Had Marcus landed somewhere amidst the trees beneath them? She aimed her feet and brought her body down slowly amidst the barren boughs.

She glimpsed him in her midst moments before

he took hold of her hand.

"This way."

She marveled at the way he had so quickly changed from flying bird to a man again. Now they tramped through the tangled underbrush of a forest and Ronna could do nothing except follow him and wonder about her own abilities yet discovered. She had flown for the first time in her life – risen above the trees and soared like a bird –

"Drucella's castle is on the hill."

Ronna followed his pointing hand. High atop a jagged mountaintop loomed a massive stone fortress with sharp spiked turrets stabbing at the sky. She drew in a quick breath. The nighttime sky lent a foreboding aura to the stone structure. The sound of rushing water sounded somewhere nearby.

He grasped her hand. "The secret passage is this way."

He rose into the air with Ronna at his side. Quickly they descended to a craggy beach strewn with large boulders at the waters edge. The tide was low, opening the rocky hillside to view.

A giant stone façade rose upward, stabbing sharply at the nighttime sky like a menacing demon. Fear snaked up Ronna's spine as she followed Marcus across the beach to the barren face of the mountain.

"We must change or else we will be unable to

slip inside the fissure."

A blond brow lifted. "You've been here before."

He didn't reply, though he gave her hand a gentle squeeze.

She had wondered where he went at night when he left her. She had supposed he went into the village to feed on the inhabitants but it seemed that was not always the case. He had been searching for his brothers and in the midst of his search, discovered Pemi trying to escape the witch.

"I've never even thought about shape shifting, Marcus. I'm not sure I can do it."

He squeezed her hand. "Hold on to my hand."

In an instant a spark of magic tugged at her body, pulling her closer and closer to the ground. She blinked her eyes at Marcus, trying to see his shrunken form through the murky darkness.

"Are we elf size? How did you do that?"

"Shhhh. Drucella will hear us. Come."

He led the way, inching through a mere slit in the face of the mountain. Creeping along slowly, the rocky shelf at their backs, they made their way inside the rock. It smelled of the ocean and marine life. Ronna found the odor engulfing. She stifled the urge to cough, to clear her lungs of the stench, but she didn't dare make a sound lest Drucella hear and put an end to their lives.

They traveled upward, deeper and deeper into

the heart of the mountain. Silence surrounded them, yet the odor they first encountered grew in intensity. The path became steep, causing Ronna to pant as she followed Marcus further and further into the stone and closer and closer to the evil Drucella.

A dim glow shown within the crevice of the mountain as the path grew wider. A number of passages stemmed off the main route, leading upward and to the left and right. Marcus hesitated only a moment before choosing the opening on the right. A low hum came to their ears as they drew near a larger opening. Marcus cautioned her by squeezing her hand.

Do not make a sound. We are coming upon the central room of the castle.

Do you suppose she can hear my heart racing? I'm scared, Marcus.

I will protect you with my life.

You're dead – remember?

He glanced over his shoulder at her.

In the dim light of the passageway she thought she saw his eyes glowing a brilliant red – but by the time she questioned her own eyesight, he had turned his head away.

A flash of light suddenly appeared at the end of the passageway, fiery red with amber sparks that rose and burned out. The low hum of voices sounded louder, drawing them forward. Marcus

halted his feet mere inches from an opening that led into the chamber.

Ronna's lower jaw dropped open. The room was circular, with giant spires rising upward to a tall ceiling. In the center of the room, a large cauldron sat. Thick black smoke rose in a billowing wisp from the rim of the pot. A witch stood nearby, a long paddle in one hand. Periodically, she placed the paddle into the pot and stirred it around.

A large table sat to one side of the cauldron. Numerous glass vials containing assorted colored ingredients sat strewn across its surface. A movement from the far side of the room announced the arrival of more witches, each gowned in long black robes. Ronna strained to see their faces — which one was Drucella?

Drucella is not among them.

There are five. Drucella said the coven contained seven witches —

She broke off her thought as a new fear arose inside her. Drucella may have been telling the truth when she said there were seven Morganford witches. Unconsciously she raised her hand and clutched the amulet hanging between her breasts. She hadn't been so scared since she watched the movie *Dracula* alone when she was seven.

Seven.

Marcus glanced over his shoulder at her.

Red eyes! She hadn't been hallucinating! His eyes were red!

This may not be the time to ask this question – but why are your eyes red, Marcus? They remind me of taillights on a car.

He squeezed her hand and she felt his laughter.

I haven't any idea what a car is or taillights but you sound humorous.

There's nothing funny about this. What are you doing with your eyes?

Watch.

He turned his head and looked through the opening into the room where the witches were gathered. The cauldron spewed its black smoke as one witch stirred it with the long paddle. The other witches were scattered about the room. He turned his red gaze on the witch closest to the opening.

The witch suddenly fell to the floor.

What the hell happened? What did you do?

I merely willed her to come to me and since she is bound by Drucella's order, she cannot approach a vampire without losing her life. In defense, she chose to faint. She will not be able to move for as long as I am in her presence.

Drucella is jealous of the other witches! She wants you for herself!

Well, she can't have me.

He squeezed Ronna's hand.

My heart belongs to you, my sweet Ronna. I love

you.

His words made her knees weak. She stared though the dim light at him, unable to make out his features except for the outline of his body. He loved her? A part of her felt like crying—while reality dug its ugly claws into her brain. *He's a vampire—for God's sake!*

She found it hard to return her attention to the witches beyond the opening—Marcus' words racing round inside her mind. The addition of new sounds finally commanded she peer through the opening once more. The other witches had discovered the witch lying on the floor and come to see about her. They hovered over her still body, murmuring quietly among themselves.

What are they saying?

They think she ate something that didn't agree with her. They are going to take her to bed.

How can you hear them talking? I can't make out a word.

He looked at her again, his red eyes glowing.

I have increased hearing—one of my vampire gifts. He shrugged his shoulders. *Though the whole fucking vampire thing is more like one big booby prize.*

She bit her lip. She felt sorry for him suddenly—doomed to a life as a vampire with no end in sight—save a stake through the heart. She gave his hand a squeeze in reassurance.

You used my naughty word, you naughty boy. She felt her panty become moist and had to fight the

urge to touch his groin.

The witch was carried from the room and the witch stirring the pot began to chant. Ronna listened with curious ears as the wisp of smoke grew in size, rising to the ceiling and covering the jagged stones in a thick blanket.

The other witches returned to the room and joined in the chant, holding hands and circling the pot. Their voices raised in unison, their words foreign to Ronna's ears. She listened and clutched the amulet suspended around her neck.

The words drummed into her brain, over and over again, until she thought she would scream. Then, as though finally opening a package that had been sealed forever, the words began to make sense. One by one, she translated the words, put them into perspective and felt a new awareness growing inside her. The keen edge of fear slid menacingly along her nerve endings. The hair stood up on the back of her neck. Cold chills settled along her spine.

The witches are summoning the power of the devil!

CHAPTER 12

She couldn't say exactly how she knew what the switches were chanting – only that she somehow had the ability to decipher their foreign words. She clutched Marcus' hand and stared through the opening, anticipating the worse.

A noise at the door of the chamber brought the witches chanting to a quick halt. The appearance of Drucella was quick and distasteful as she arrived in a wild gust of wind that swept about the room and delivered the worst stench known to man. The four witches in the room held their noses and retched noisily.

Drucella whirled about the room, her black robe and long blond hair catching the breeze and standing out from her body in stiff sheets. She named the witches one by one –

“Esmerelda! Penelope! Eliza! Griselda!”

She flew about the room, knocking over the vials on the table and fanning the witches' robes, whipping their hair in their eyes until they were

forced to cover their faces with their hands.

"You have been lax in your duties. You have allowed Morah to fall victim to my spell! You shall all pay!"

The wind whipped and roared about the room, causing a whirlwind of dust to rise from the floor. It swirled in bitter rivulets around the witches, causing them to cry out and beg Drucella for mercy.

"Spare us! We are one with you!"

"The vampire Marcus is in our midst! You were not on guard. I saw what he did to Morah."

"We have not seen the vampire, your highness. We have not!"

Their cries were mournful and Ronna watched in horror as Drucella continued to berate and torture her sister witches. She bound them with their own cloaks and cast them against the wall to writhe and moan with pain.

As quickly as she swept into the room, she departed. The dust settled. The smoke gathered against the ceiling fell slowly to the floor. The simmering cauldron once more bubbled quietly as the fire beneath its black bottom licked about its rounded sides.

Marcus! She knows you're here!

He squeezed her hand, silently reassuring her.

We must search other rooms in the castle. Come.

He pushed her gently aside, leading the way

along the passage they had just traversed.

Do you think she knows I'm here too?

His fingers tightened around her hand. *Her powers of perception are exceptional. And since she knows you were the one who awakened me, she knows you have returned with me to this time period to rescue my brothers. Yes, my love, she knows you are with me.*

Having her fears confirmed didn't help her nerves. She bit her bottom lip. Inching her feet slowly along the rough stone passageway, she hoped they didn't encounter Drucella again before they were able to find Marcus' brothers and awaken them. She heaved a long sigh. If she lived to be a hundred years old, she would never understand what compelled her to buy that suit of armor for Pam in the first place—or the silly notion to think she could clean it up without using witchcraft. If she had only zapped the thing—

Marcus turned to the left when they reached the part of the passageway where other narrow walkways branched off. Their route led them down a steep incline, perhaps leading into the lower rooms of the stone castle. The temperature grew colder and the stench of ocean water and marine life intensified.

Marcus halted his feet suddenly. There was light shining in the passageway just ahead, signaling the opening of another room. Slowly they crept forward, their ears keen to any signs of

Drucella or the rest of the coven.

Ronna felt cold dread engulf her insides at the sight of the light glowing faintly from the opening. Surely they were about to peek into another room of Drucella's evil world. She was quick to realize that the rooms with light were those being used by the witch and her coven.

An enormous room lay beyond the crevice in the mountainside. Filled with furnishings and rich tapestries—it was a room uncommon to a witch's tastes. Ronna couldn't help but feel surprised when she viewed the area. A large velvet draped bed sat in the center of the room, an impressive array of candles were lit around the outer walls, giving the space a smoky yellow glow.

This must be where she entertains the men she casts spells over.

Yes. Drucella has an appetite for sex.

Ronna felt the pit of her stomach quiver. Had Marcus fucked Drucella on the velvet-draped bed? Had they shared hot sex and exquisite passion?

I feel your jealousy. Thank you, my love.

She dashed the thoughts from her mind. Was it feasible to fall in love so quickly? She stared at Marcus in the faint yellow glow of the candles in the room. He was handsome beyond compare. His height, his strength, the way he appeared unassuming at times, the way he held her—he was everything she could wish for in a man. But

he was one of the undead. A vampire. He was a creature of the night. She shivered.

She combed one hand through her hair, trying to return her thoughts to their immediate situation. They had to leave their hiding place and search the rooms of Drucella's castle else they would never find Marcus' brothers—if indeed they were imprisoned there. A giggling little voice at the back of her brain warned that daylight rapidly approached. Their time to search was quickly running out.

She felt Marcus' hand release her own and his arm snaked around her waist. He drew her body against his side. For a moment she enjoyed his nearness, the feel of his big body pressed against her own. If only they were elsewhere—passion could bloom so easily. She drew in a quick breath, realizing how easily he became a distraction for her.

We're going to shapeshift and search the castle. Think mouse.

Mouse?

Before she could mentally voice her fears at such an undertaking, she felt her body begin to contort. Her limbs jerked as her head lolled backward onto her shoulders. Her thoughts somersaulted in a vortex of grayness that rolled over her body and captured her senses. For an instant she couldn't breathe.

She found herself aware suddenly that she had grown a thick gray coat of hair. A glance round and she spied Marcus beside her, his body covered in hair as well. She inspected the transformation and realized they were mice.

How clever.

The change had been immediate. She had transformed from minuscule person to mouse all in the blink of an eye. She felt proud and confused all at the same time. Was it possible to change back as easily? What if she became stuck there in Drucella's castle as a mouse?

Follow me.

She didn't have time to wonder about the future just at the moment. Marcus was scurrying across the stone floor and she hurried to catch up to him. He was squeezing through the crack of the door and racing down the interior hallway of the castle. Ronna rushed to keep up, afraid she might become separated from him and get caught by Drucella. Fright filled her tiny mouse body.

The view from the floor was one of enormous difference. The rough uneven floor posed difficulty in itself and the large doors stemming off the main hallway were closed and made entering the rooms they concealed a chore. She felt scraped and bruised from squeezing through the rough wooden cracks behind Marcus.

Couldn't we have changed into something other than

mice? Couldn't we just hulk out and kick Drucella's witch ass?

She chuckled slightly. Had they been in her time, and faced with the obstacle before them, she would have merely picked up the phone and called the cops. To hell with witchcraft and wondering if a spell would work or not—call in reinforcements and let them handle it.

You underestimate your powers, my love.

I'm tired and I'm scared. And I just stumped fifteen toes—all at once. Can't you find an easier way into these rooms? I've rubbed off half my fur squeezing through these cracks.

We're going to the dungeon.

Oh joy.

She followed and complained, though she thought his trying to rescue his brothers was an admirable act since all sorts of danger lay in store for him should Drucella find him traipsing about her castle. Surely she would kill him outright this time if she were able to discover him in her midst. She had left the other witches of the coven hanging on the wall without little thought.

The stone steps leading into the dungeon of the castle were damp and steep. It was necessary to jump down from one step to the other—a feat she realized was quite easy since she was a mouse. She caught up to Marcus as he bounded to the landing at the foot of the stairs.

Without warning, he shape shifted and she

immediately followed suit, changing into her human body.

As she looked round at the dark dank dungeon she understood why Marcus had shape shifted back into himself. The area was pitch black and stank to high heaven. She raised one hand and covered her nose, the musty aroma assaulting her senses. Afraid to move because she couldn't see her hand before her face, she shuffled her feet along, reaching out with both hands in case she stumbled into something. After a few minutes of groping the darkness and finding nothing, she decided they needed flashlights and conjured up a couple.

Shining the beam of the flashlight about the dungeon they disturbed a number of rats, sending them scurrying off in every other direction to avoid the light. Cobwebs hung from the rough rock walls and putrid water stood on the floor, seepage from the ocean through the rocky bluff beneath the castle.

As they inspected the dungeon, the glow of the flashlight fell on a number of iron chains suspended from one corner. Round wristlets were at the ends of the chains and when Marcus' light found them, there was a noticeable reaction from him.

I can feel your anger.

Ronna reached one hand out to clutch his arm,

finding the muscles beneath his coat knotted with tension.

This is a torture chamber. Many have lost their lives here. The stench of death clings to the very walls. Their blood stains the floor.

Marcus, let's finish searching and leave. It will be daylight soon. And you haven't fed yet.

She stifled the urge to scream. She hadn't meant to bring the fact of his needing blood to survive to his attention — not figuring for one moment that he had forgotten his curse. She turned her light in the opposite direction, leaving him to contemplate her words. She discovered a smaller room containing empty wooden casks, perhaps once holding wine or vinegar. The aroma was faint and mingled nauseatingly with the putrid stench of the dungeon. She clasped her nose with one hand and hurried back to find Marcus.

There's nothing here. Let's go.

He grasped her arm as she passed him, pulling her to a halt.

Drucella is very cunning. Perhaps she has disguised something from our eyes. Perhaps there is a spell that keeps us from seeing where she hid my brothers.

It was obvious what he was asking her to do. And since they had gone to such lengths to infiltrate the castle, she supposed it was worth a try before they slipped back through the fissure and left for the night.

She waved one hand over her head and

summoned the spell to show itself—if indeed it existed at all. To her amazement, the wall directly in front of where she stood, glowed brilliant yellow, turned peacock blue and then revealed an opening, a doorway into yet another chamber of the dungeon.

Marcus hurried forward, not heeding the silent warning Ronna issued for him to use caution since Drucella had seen fit to conceal the opening with a spell, it could be quite dangerous for anyone who broached the room. Before she could complete her telepathic warning to him, he stepped through the opening and disappeared.

Oh shit!

CHAPTER 13

For a second Ronna couldn't think. She merely stood frozen to the floor and stared at the place where Marcus had vanished. The wall sealed over the opening she had managed to uncover the second Marcus stepped through it, leaving her on the other side.

Alone in the dungeon, she looked around, her eyes following the path of the flashlight. All attempts to make the opening appear again had failed. Marcus was concealed within the wall—or rather—trapped within Drucella's spell once again.

She's probably laughing her ass off—

It dawned on her suddenly that Drucella knew the instant her spell was breached. She would be arriving any moment to do battle with her. She bit her lip. She needed to escape—now!

A pain shot through her head as she forced herself to turn her thoughts to saving her own butt and leaving Marcus behind. She felt the sting of

tears burn her eyes as she mentally willed herself to shape shift. Remembering having seen windows on the walls of the upper level of the castle, she changed into a bird and flew from the dungeon.

Flapping her wings quickly, she raced along the dark passageway to find the main chamber of the castle. Glancing around quickly, she took in the roaring fire in the hearth and the massive suits of armor standing guard at the front entrance before heading straight to a window high up on the castle wall. With as much speed as she could muster, she crashed against the window and felt it shatter around her body, lending her escape to the outside world.

Her heart hammered in her chest as she set her course for Morganford. Tears clouded her vision as she winged her way above the trees, leaving the ocean and the rocky clefts far behind—and God forbid, leaving Marcus to Drucella’s mercy.

She perched silently in a tree outside Morganford manor, shaken from the ordeal. She jumped to the ground and shape shifted into her self. She felt little joy at having accomplished a shape shift under dangerous circumstances—thoughts of Marcus seemed to override all else. She had left him behind but then she had managed to escape Drucella and perhaps, death.

“If both of us became her prisoners—”

She swallowed the lump in her throat. Tears rolled down her cheeks. She stumbled toward the front door of Marcus' home, her emotions getting the better of her.

Once inside, she conjured up a stiff drink—whiskey on the rocks—and gulped it down, gasping at the sting in her throat. She needed courage and if it had to come from something artificial—then so be it. She plopped down on the couch, her head in her hands. How was she going to rescue Marcus?

A keen peel of laughter sounded very close to her ear. She jerked her head up to spy Tiana speeding away.

“Come back here! You little—”

Ronna bounded off the couch, giving chase to the tiny fairy in her flaming ball of fire.

Tiana zipped about the room, hovering near the ceiling, out of reach.

Ronna watched the fairy with increasing anger. Drucella had sent her little imp just to gloat.

“The vampire has been captured. Drucella has him in her power.”

Ronna watched the fairy. Her coach of fire was harmful to her since she was a witch but there were plenty of spells that might land her helpless or better yet, captured—if she could entice her to come a little closer.

Ronna turned on her heel and headed toward

the stairwell. Ignoring Tiana, she began climbing the stairs.

Tiana flew across the room, hovered. "Shall I reveal to you what Drucella has in store for the vampire?"

Ronna ignored her and continued up the stairs.

"You can't fool me. You are in love with the vampire."

Ronna set foot onto the second floor and headed down the hallway.

Tiana flew up the staircase, hovered near the ceiling. "I saw the two of you rutting. I saw the vampire bite your neck. I saw him drink your blood."

Ronna reached the door of her bedroom and stepped inside, leaving the door ajar.

Tiana hovered at the open doorway, her tiny wings beating rapidly to keep the fiery ball aloft. "I know that if he bites you once more, you'll become a vampire and Drucella will kill you both." She maneuvered her fireball through the crack of the door.

A flash of lightening lit up the inside of the bedroom. Water gushed from an invisible source just above Tiana's fiery haven, quenching the fire and leaving the fairy fluttering in the near darkness. A second flash of lightening and Ronna imprisoned Tiana in a cage manifested of magical mirrors.

"Find your way out of that, you little —"

"Oh woe with me! Woe with me!"

The fairy flung her little body against the mirrored bars, baffled as to which one concealed the magical opening that would return her freedom.

"There is no opening so you can stop ramming your head against the wall."

"Drucella will come looking for me. You will be sorry."

"Yeah, yeah." Ronna quickly cast a spell of silence on the fairy. She placed the cage in one corner of the room and went to bed. Come morning, she would deal with her and figure out a way to rescue Marcus.

* * * *

Sleep was elusive. Ronna managed to doze off once but then she dreamed Marcus was there with her, making passionate love to her. She woke up in a sweat, sitting upright in the bed and fanning herself with one hand. It was one thing to be in bed with the man, but it was entirely different to dream he was there. The passion was all too real. She threw back the cover and levered herself out of bed.

The sun was streaming in through the tiny window high on the wall. Ronna stretched her

arms over her head. Her body was tired from want of sleep. She got dressed and went to inspect Tiana sitting in the cage in the corner of the room. The little fairy was seated in one corner of her mirrored prison, her legs stretched out in front of her, her wings drooping around her shoulders. She sneered at Ronna as she drew near.

Ronna smiled slightly, amused at the discomfort the fairy exhibited.

"I'll make you a deal." She waved one hand and lifted the spell of silence she had cast over her last night.

"Let me out of here!"

"You tell me where Drucella is holding Marcus and I'll consider releasing you."

The fairy scrambled to her feet and glared at Ronna. "Release me first."

"Do I look like a fool?"

She cocked her head, as though deciding how to answer Ronna.

"Never mind." Ronna waved one hand and turned. "You just cool your heels in there for a few lifetimes —"

"Wait! Wait!"

Ronna halted her feet and glanced at the fairy. She was pressed against one side of the cage, her eyes imploring.

"Your vampire sleeps...in Drucella's bed."

The fairy's words shot through Ronna's insides,

filling her with cold dread. She bit back a nasty retort and approached the glass cage.

"Prove it."

Tiana giggled and waved a tiny hand. Immediately a picture of Marcus asleep in Drucella's bed flashed into the air.

Ronna gasped and bit her lip. She stared at the figment the fairy cast.

Blond brows drew together in dismay. "You are as treacherous as your mistress. How do I know this is the truth?"

"Your vampire is no longer in the dungeon—but in Drucella's bed." She laughed loudly, high-pitched.

Ronna turned from the fairy, lest she see the shock on her face. Perhaps she was telling the truth after all. Maybe Marcus was really asleep in Drucella's bed—that didn't mean the two of them had sex.

Get a grip!

She paced the room, her hands on her hips. The thought of Marcus with another woman made her hackles rise. And tears come to her eyes. She swiped one hand across her face, banishing the moisture.

Turning quickly to Tiana, she glared at her, making her inch to the back of the cage. "Tell me where Drucella is holding Marcus' brothers. Tell me now or I'll cast you into oblivion!" She raised

one hand in a threatening gesture.

Tiana shrieked and cowered on the floor. "It will do you no good to know, for you will never be able to free them. Drucella has them under a time spell. You cannot free them no matter how hard you try."

A time spell?

"Where are they?"

"They are in plain sight in Drucella's castle."

What better place to hide?

"Explain to me what that means."

Tiana chuckled and folded her arms across her chest. "I will only tell you that they are holding sentry. Now release me, before Drucella comes for me and ends your miserable existence, such as it is."

"You have a nasty mouth." She conjured up a bar of soap and flung it inside Tiana's cage. "Wash your little mouth out."

Ronna hurried from the room, racing down the stairs to the great room.

Holding sentry. Holding sentry. What the hell does that mean?

She conjured up breakfast and considered her options. She didn't have many. Given the fact that it was daylight, and Marcus was useless during the day, she felt compelled to have to wait until dark. Even if she managed to infiltrate Drucella's bedroom and find him, he couldn't be awakened.

She heard Tiana ranting upstairs. She would leave her in the cage until she figured out what to do with her. Fairies were vain little creatures. She would soon turn her attentions to looking at herself in the mirrored walls of her cage and grow silent. Satisfied that Tiana couldn't escape, she turned her thoughts to solving the riddle of where Marcus' brothers were imprisoned.

She tried to recall what she had seen in Drucella's castle. There was nothing that gave the impression that a full-grown man was hiding in, not until the magical doorway opened up and Marcus stepped through it. Why hadn't she been quicker in warning him? She raked her fingers through her hair, agitated with her inability to identify danger when it was right in front of her nose.

She recalled Tiana's words and finished her breakfast. She had been in such a rush to get away that she hadn't paid much attention to anything except finding a window to escape through—she tried to picture the rooms she flew through before she broke out of the castle. She remembered an enormous fireplace with a blazing fire filling its opening. A multitude of candles were placed about the area, emitting black smoke from their tallow wicks, a large table was in the room strewn with parchment rolls.

She left her seat at the table and paced the floor,

her brows drawn together in contemplation. For the life of her, she couldn't recall every item in every room. The castle was vast and since her mind had been had been consumed with the threat of danger and her need to escape. She simply hadn't taken notice as she should have.

She wracked her brain. What else had she seen in Drucella's castle? What had she seen that a man could hide in—or become imprisoned in? God forbid she have to return after dark and search every room in the castle.

Something at the very back of her mind refused to allow her to believe she couldn't remember anything more. A niggling little thought made her concentrate really hard in search of the answer.

She mentally retraced her movements from the moment Marcus stepped through the magical door of Drucella's spell and disappeared. She had been so frightened at finding him gone from her side that she panicked. She tried to recall her exact movements, tried to picture in her mind's eye all the objects she had flown over as she headed toward the window in the great room.

"Suits of armor!" She paused her feet. "I saw three suits of armor in the foyer." She felt her hopes rise. "And Tiana said Marcus' brothers were standing sentry. They are indeed standing sentry — silent sentry at Drucella's front door!"

CHAPTER 14

Ronna's plan wasn't etched in stone. She knew from her brief encounters with Drucella that the witch was unpredictable. She hoped to be able to sneak into the castle before dark and see for herself whether Marcus was in Drucella's bed.

The mere thought made her grit her teeth. But then, she supposed that Drucella had, perhaps, placed Marcus in her bed just to make her jealous.

"And by God it worked!"

She conjured up the magic and shape shifted into a bird. Winging her way across the English countryside, she headed toward the castle on the edge of the cliff. Low tide wasn't until later, but she needed the benefit of daylight to do a bit of investigating. Should she catch the opportunity, she would fly inside and conceal herself until Marcus awakened at dusk. Then, together, they would take on Drucella.

She wished she had a better plan. She wished

she were more adept at using her witchcraft skills. Shit! Until she awakened Marcus, she wasn't even aware of many of her skills. And, her curiosity peaked suddenly, she wished Drucella had gone into more detail concerning the amulet she wore around her neck, but then the witch was hell on wheels and only wanted her dead. She hadn't exactly been open for conversation once Ronna had pissed her off.

She saw the castle on the horizon and looked for a suitable spot to overlook the grounds. Choosing a turret at one end of the castle, she lit and took in the view of the countryside. Beyond the hillside lay a small cluster of outbuildings and she could see several people milling about.

Drucella's slaves, no doubt.

She recalled Marcus saying that the coven menaced the villagers of Morganford. She thought then about Pemi. Marcus had taken the poor man to a safe haven and refused to tell her anything further. She pushed aside the thought that Pemi might be of use in helping her destroy Drucella.

The realization that she was gearing up to do battle sank in suddenly. She shivered, shaking her bird feather coat with such force that she almost lost her footing on the turret edge. Noticing that the window she had escaped from last night had been repaired she flew to the main entrance of the castle and perched atop the front door. She would

have to find another way into the stronghold. The gray stone was cold and damp, her breath puffed white on the winter's breeze. She turned her eyes on one of the servants milling about the outbuildings, silently casting a spell over the man. He headed toward the castle, struggling to carry a load of wood for the fireplace.

The servant dropped the wood beside the heavy front door and opened it, pushing it back on its hinges while he stooped and gathered the wood. Ronna darted inside, silently flapping her way to the upper beams of the great room.

Perching high on the ceiling beam, she surveyed the room. No one was around, except the servant and he carried his load of wood through the door and deposited it near the hearth, adding a log to the waning fire before taking leave.

The door slammed as he left and Ronna felt the full measure of her actions. She was inside Drucella's castle with no immediate way of escape. And knowing the powers of perception that Drucella was privy to, the witch knew she was there. Cold dread spread through her body.

She heaved a long sigh. Before she met Marcus she was happy with her life, such as it was. True, she had no love interest—save for a brief sexual experience now and then. But she had managed to convince herself that it was okay to be a solo act—

regardless if all her friends were either married or planning to get married.

She sat on the beam and contemplated her life. It was hell being a witch with powers she didn't know about. It was hell trying to make it in the world with different powers pulling you in various directions. She made a promise to herself. Once she managed to help Marcus, and his brothers, she would return to her time period and strive to become a better witch. Maybe there was a course at the local college she could take—a course on witchcraft. She could practice at home at night and no one would be the wiser.

She forced her mind back to the situation at hand. Never mind assessing her life from several centuries in the future, she needed to clear her senses and get on with business. She gazed about the large area, spying the massive suits of armor positioned near the front door. A wave of surprise washed over her. She had flown right over them when she darted inside, being so intent on getting in and hiding that she had not looked down.

She surveyed each of the suits, amazed that they looked so similar to the one Marcus was imprisoned in. She hoped that his three brothers were inside the metal suits—it would make things easier once they disposed of Drucella. She abandoned the idea of checking out each of the suits just to be certain the vampires were inside. It

was much too dangerous to let her guard down—since she was almost certain Drucella knew she was in the castle.

She jumped from her perch on the ceiling beam and took flight, following the path she had flown last night when she left the dungeon. Drucella's bedchamber was one of the rooms off the narrow hallway. She needed to see for herself whether Marcus occupied the witch's bed.

The hallway was dim and narrow. All the rooms stemming off the passageway were closed off with heavy wooden doors. She lit on a candle scone and settled in for a long wait. Sooner or later, Drucella would come along and open the door and given the opportunity, she intended to dart inside.

Voices sounded from the end of the hallway and Ronna crept behind the stubble of a tallow candle. Daring to peek around the stub, she saw two witches coming down the narrow passageway. Her keen eyes took in their long black dresses, and then fell on the amulets they wore around their necks. They looked identical to the one she wore.

If only I could know the history of the amulet.

It would be too risky to shape shift and approach any of the witches. Drucella would be after her in an instant and then her plan to rescue Marcus would be foiled. She thought about the old

book Marcus had at his house. Perhaps with Drucella's death, she might be able to open it. Surely when a witch died, her spells were revoked. She pondered the thought.

I wonder if time spells are broken as well.

The thought assailed her then that she may not be able to awaken Marcus' brothers. In that case, what could she expect from the vampire? Would he keep her there and make her continue to try and break the spell—perhaps until she died of old age? Would he reconsider and let her return home?

Or will he sink his fangs in to my neck and kill me?

She had tried not to think of Marcus as being dark and dangerous, though she knew he was a creature of the night. He was seductive and sexy, strong and manipulative. He had powers she was not privy to in his vampire state.

The witches drew near, paused at the door of the bedroom, as if listening for sounds inside, then, apparently hearing none, continued on down the hall. Ronna watched them disappear around the corner, their voices a low hum. The last time she had seen either of them they were cast upon the wall of the spell room. Perhaps Drucella had a change of heart—since being able to capture Marcus again.

She mentally berated herself again for being so foolish in opening the portal to the hidden room

and not warning Marcus before he stepped through the doorway.

If I could kick my own ass –

A noise startled her suddenly, making her shrink behind the candle stub. The door of Drucella's room opened and Drucella stood in the opening. She could feel her menacing presence. A wave of evil leeches into the hallway.

"You have infiltrated my domain. Present yourself."

Fear shot through Ronna's body. It was one thing to believe Drucella knew she was in her castle—but an entirely different thing to be suddenly discovered. Realization wavered at the edge of her brain. Should she materialize and do battle with Drucella—perhaps die at her hand before she got the chance to save Marcus?

"Come down."

A force stronger than any magic Ronna had ever felt suddenly gripped her bird body. She felt her feet moving from the metal perch and her feathered form inching forward. The next she was aware of she was landing on the floor and shape shifting into her human form.

She blinked her eyes as she took form right before Drucella. The force held her fast, filling her senses with a feeling of complete helplessness. She couldn't think beyond that of knowing she was returning to her mortal body.

"You dare to think you can defy me? You play games and insult my abilities."

Drucella's top lip rolled into a sneer, exposing perfectly proportioned teeth, white and gleaming amid bright red lips. Her eyes were dark sage, boring into Ronna's face with every bit of menace she could summon. She gnashed her teeth. Shaking her head in fury, she ordered Ronna inside the bedchamber.

Compelled to obey, Ronna entered the room. It was cold and dimly lit with one taper candle in a far corner. A breath caught up in her throat when she saw Marcus asleep on the big bed. She wanted to run to him and gather him in her arms, to protect him from the harm lurking inside the room. But, she was unable to perform any deed aside from staring at his motionless body.

Drucella swept past her, gliding on seemingly invisible feet. She stopped beside the bed where Marcus lay and whirled around, facing Ronna. A venomous look wreathed her face. She smiled slowly and calculatingly.

"You are very foolish to think you can save him from me." She raised her hands over her head. "He belongs to me." She levered her arms to one side and crossed them over Marcus' prone body. A spray of red sparks shot from her outstretched hands.

Ronna jerked back in surprise as Marcus' body

began to tremble. He shook violently, his body at Drucella's mercy. He flailed about, though still in his vampire state of sleep.

Drucella waved one hand and he stilled.

"You see. I have all power over him." She sneered. "And over you—for you are one of my coven." Her eyes lowered to the amulet around Ronna's neck.

Ronna raised one hand and grasped the amulet. A million questions came instantly to mind but she was fearful of voicing even one of them.

Drucella rounded the bed and came closer to Ronna. "You are fearful of me." She pulled herself up to her full height, towering over Ronna. "And rightfully so. I have the power of the dark one at my fingertips." She raised one arm and clenched her fist. "I will destroy you and then I will end Marcus' life. He has betrayed me."

Ronna swallowed nervously. Drucella had just voiced her worse fear. She intended to kill her and then Marcus.

What have I got to lose?

"You are angry at Marcus because he did not return your love."

Drucella clenched her jaw in anger. "He laid with me on that very bed—"

She whirled round and aimed a clenched hand at the bed. A bolt of lightening slammed against the wall above Marcus' head, echoing into the

room with a loud boom.

"Sex and love are not the same!"

"And what do you know of love? I know the vampire has taken his liberties with your body—I know he has given you pleasures beyond compare." She drew in a shuddering breath. Her sage green eyes darkened with menace. "I saw him atop you in my viewing pot. I saw you climax and cling to him—I once knew those same sensations—"

Ronna took a step back, fearing any moment Drucella would raise a hand and strike her dead.

"You are a woman scorned. We are not in charge of our hearts. We fall in love not because we want to—but because of circumstance." She clamped her mouth shut—sounding much too philosophical for the occasion.

"Marcus was not aware of the power I commanded when he betrayed me. He was too confident in his vampire state to believe I could hold him with a spell." She threw back her head and laughed loudly. "I sentenced him to sleep ten thousand years!"

Ronna drew in a quick breath. She stole a glance at Marcus lying so still on the witch's bed. What if she put him under the spell again?

"You fear for him. I see it in your eyes."

"Yes." Ronna shook her head. Tears welled up in her eyes. "Darrias turned him into a vampire.

Isn't that torture enough? Must you condemn him to a fate worse than death?"

A slow smile crept along Drucella's lips. "Perhaps you would prefer I drive a stake through his heart while he slumbers?"

"No." Ronna shook her head. "No. He is helpless while he sleeps. He would have no recourse against your hand."

Drucella laughed low in her throat. She strode about the room, her eyes on Ronna. "Nor do you."

Drucella thrust out her arms sending a blast of magic so strong that it knocked Ronna off her feet and slammed her against the stone wall of the chamber.

Ronna struggled to get her breath. Her arms were pinned against the wall at her sides, her legs were splayed open, her head was held as though by iron restraints. Her chest felt crushed with the force Drucella exerted against her.

"You will gain nothing by killing me," Ronna bit the words out, forcing them from her throat with what little breath she could pull in.

Drucella moved so quickly Ronna barely had time to blink her eyes before the witch was so close she could feel her breath on her face. She hovered off the floor, glaring down at her.

"But I will gain much—much that you are unaware of." Her eyes lowered to the amulet. She reached out and plucked it from its resting place

between Ronna's breasts. "I will own your amulet and it shall do my bidding."

Bidding?

Ronna felt addled mentally but she caught the remark about the amulet.

Drucella laughed and flung the amulet from her hand, pounding it against Ronna's breasts. "You are ignorant of its powers." An angry brow lifted. "Marcus did not tell you of its wonders?"

Feelings were beginning to return to Ronna's arms and legs. She was managing to catch her breath—though her body still pained in most every spot.

"Why would Marcus know about the amulet? He is not a witch. It could have no meaning for him."

Drucella laughed. "You are wrong. It has great meaning for him." She turned suddenly, flying across the room to land beside the bed. She stared down at Marcus, her body rigid, her brow furrowed.

Fear increased inside Ronna. Surely she meant to harm Marcus right before her very eyes.

"Tell me the meaning of the amulet, Drucella. Reveal its powers to me."

She held her breath as Drucella turned her head and glared at her pinned against the wall, helpless.

"Before you murder me—tell me the powers of

the amulet."

A slow smile crept across Drucella's face. "It can do little harm—since you will soon be little more than ashes at my feet." She rose upward, hovering against the ceiling of the room.

Ronna pinned her eyes on Drucella. She hung in the air like a balloon filled with helium, her long black dress concealed her feet, her long hair floated about her face as though lighter than air. Suddenly she spun around, sending a torrent of cold wind and thick black smoke into the room.

The wind whistled and roared about the room, swirling in chilling gusts that whipped at Ronna's clothes and tugged at her hair. The smoke was so thick and choking that for a few seconds she thought she would suffocate. She closed her eyes in self-defense and prayed that the raging currents would cease and the stifling smoke subside.

Gasping for breath, Ronna was relieved when finally, the smoke cleared.

The wind continued however, swirling about the room and making awful howling sounds. A large black pot sat in the center of the floor and Drucella stood beside it. She waved one hand and Ronna slid along the wall to collapse on the floor.

"Come. See for yourself the magic of the amulet."

Ronna's body ached but she picked herself up off the floor, slowly and with great difficulty, and

made her way across the room to the pot before Drucella. All her life she had wondered about the jewel suspended around her neck—could this evil witch really be on the verge of divulging its true meaning? A note of curiosity intensified inside her as she walked across the room.

Or could this be another of Drucella's tricks?

On guard, she approached the pot carefully. Drucella's dark eyes were pinned to her face, reading her expression of wary caution. Drucella waved one hand and the wind stilled.

A wisp of smoke rose from the pot, garnering Ronna's attention. She inched closer, keeping the pot between herself and Drucella, just in case the witch chose to cast her inside or some other equally distasteful fate.

"Look. See for yourself."

Ronna peered over the edge of the pot. The smoke was dense and heavy and seemed to settle to the bottom of the large kettle. She stared into it, noticing it beginning to clear as more seemed to form from somewhere within the vessel itself. She bit her lip, realizing she was gazing into the witch's viewing pot that Pemi had spoken of.

A vision began to form, clear and bright upon the murky smoke. Seven yellow jewels appeared and then seven faces. The vision lingered, as though giving Ronna time to view each portion of the message. She studied each of the faces

presented to her, identifying Drucella and herself among the seven.

She gasped and drew back slightly, causing the vision to waver before her eyes.

“Do not look away.”

She gathered her nerve and peered once again into the smoke, seeing a face she did not know but feared with all her being. Her stomach tightened – fear gripped her insides. She jerked her head back, dissolving the picture on the smoke.

“Who is that?”

“The dark one.”

“I don’t understand.” She felt shaken inside, wanted so badly to know the origin of the jewel she had worn all her life, yet apprehensive about its history. “Does the devil command the power of the amulets?”

Drucella waved her hand across the mouth of the pot. “Look.”

Nervous, but curious nonetheless, Ronna once more approached the pot. The smoke curled upward in a swirling wisp, leaving the top of the pot and spiraling toward the ceiling. Ronna’s mouth went suddenly dry, fearing the entry of an unknown entity into the room.

The smoke curled and disappeared, reformed and swirled inside the pot. Another vision began to take shape, drawing on the darkness inside the pot and taking form upon the sooty wisp. Seven

faces appeared surrounding the male face. They began to spin, slowly at first, then faster, until one face suddenly vanished, leaving only six. The smoke billowed suddenly, claiming the inside of the pot in a rushing fog that rolled and tumbled. All at once it halted its motion, and another picture formed. Ronna blinked surprised eyes at the sight of a small girl child standing amidst other children, an amulet around her neck.

She knew in her heart that the child was herself. She raised her head and locked gazes with Drucella. A quiver of surprise raced through her insides at the glimpse of compassion in the witch's eyes. Ronna drew back, afraid to trust her eyes.

"You did not choose to obey the dark one. And he cast you out. But because he had already presented you with the amulet, he could not take it from you."

Ronna grasped the amulet in one fist. It warmed her hand. She caressed its faceted edges, felt the smoothness against her fingertips. For the first time in her life, she didn't want it gone from her neck.

She pulled in a steadying breath. "So I came from this era? You are my..." She couldn't bring herself to say the word. She stared at Drucella.

"Sister, of sorts. We are of the same coven. Your amulet can do many things but the most significant feat it possesses is the ability to travel

through time.”

Shock filtered through Ronna. For an instant she considered wishing herself home—since she clutched the amulet in her hand—but then she glanced at Marcus lying on the bed, being at the mercy of Drucella—

“Each amulet has its own special ability.” She waved a hand and the pot suddenly disappeared with a loud crackle sound. “However, none of the amulets possess the power of renewed life.”

Ronna sensed her sadness at her statement. “Witches are not immortal.” She glanced at Marcus. “However vampires are immortal.” Her suspicions were confirmed. She knew the real reason Drucella had imprisoned Marcus. “You wanted Marcus to give you the gift of immortality—and he refused.”

Rage suddenly returned to Drucella’s face. Her eyes darkened as she pinned Ronna with a steady gaze. She opened her mouth and hissed noisily at Ronna. She waved one arm and a wooden stake appeared in her hand. She waved the other hand and a heavy mallet appeared.

“And therefore he shall die!”

CHAPTER 15

“No!”
The command tore from Ronna’s throat in a loud bellow as she hurled her body toward Drucella. She slammed against her side as she prepared to drive the stake through Marcus’ chest. The sudden force knocked the mallet from Drucella’s hand and upset her balance. She reeled back, clutching the stake and turning threatening eyes on Ronna. With gnashing teeth, she flung herself at Ronna.

Marcus!

There wasn’t time to glance at Marcus—Drucella was enraged. She grabbed Ronna’s hair and clawed at her face with her long fingernails. Ronna screamed and flailed her fists, landing only a few punches amidst the turmoil Drucella was causing.

Marcus! Wake up!

Ronna’s scalp was taking the brunt of Drucella’s punishment. She clutched her fist in her

long tresses and pulled brutally as though meaning to scalp her. Ronna lashed out with clenched fists and began kicking Drucella's legs, hoping to knock her down. The pain to her scalp was excruciating.

"You will regret your actions before I end your life!"

"Get fucked!"

Marcus! Dammit! Wake up!

Drucella was exceptionally strong. She quickly gained the upper hand and knocked Ronna against the wall, then immediately pinned her body against the solid stone with a spell that left her helpless.

Drucella stood in the center of the room and glared at Ronna. Her long hair flew about her head, her lip curled upward in an angry sneer. Her eyes were black as midnight. She propped both hands on her hips and walked toward Ronna.

Ronna tried to think – tried to conjure up a spell that would render Drucella helpless. Her body felt weak and useless, the sudden force of being thrust against the unyielding wall being felt in every bone and muscle. Tears suddenly sprang to her eyes. Was this the end?

"You turn against one of your own."

Her voice was a low hiss, echoing in the cold dim room. She walked closer to Ronna, her hands on her hips, her eyes holding her gaze with mortal

threat.

"This vampire gets his powers from the dark one. He is bound by the curse of the dark one. He has little worth—aside from murderous rampages to feed his lusts and to quench his blood thirst."

"We are life mates."

Drucella's eyes flashed from sage to ebony and the look of menace on her face intensified.

Marcus! Wake up!

She threw back her head and laughed loudly, bellowing into the room at Ronna's words.

"You are an inept witch. You barely know up from down. You cast your little pitiful spells—making me wretch and spew puke—what good would you be to a creature of the night? You cannot summon him food. You cannot go into the bowels of the earth with him." She sneered and shook her head, sending her long hair swishing about her shoulders. "You can only spread your legs and offer your body to him." She raised one fist into the air. "Lust will not sustain his vampire urge for blood."

Ronna tried to shut out her words. Marcus was more than the blood-sucking vampire she insisted he was. Tears rolled down the crest of her cheek, spilling onto her sweater. She blinked bleary eyes at Marcus' still form lying so quietly on Drucella's bed.

Marcus! For God's sake – wake up!

She blinked her eyes, trying to clear the moisture away as Drucella drew near. She glimpsed a movement at the witch's hand and saw the appearance of a blazing torch. She raised the fire above her head and drew closer, a look of finality on her angry face.

"I shall put the flames to you—since death by fire is a witch's curse."

Ronna shuddered and pulled in a quick breath. Her arms and legs were pinned tightly to the wall. No amount of effort on her part could lift either limb from its rigid position. She was at Drucella's mercy. She tried to conjure up a spell—tried to knock her off balance as she crossed the room to slay her.

A slight movement at the bed and suddenly the room was filled with a loud murderous bellow. Ronna's stomach knotted in fright as she glimpsed Marcus darting across the room with such speed that his big body was merely a dark blur.

A scream tore from Drucella's throat as Marcus grabbed her by the nape of the neck and hurled her body across the room. She smacked against the wall and crumbled on the floor. A leaping bound and he was grasping her again as she lay limply on the floor. A loud threatening roar and he held Drucella by one big hand and cast her against his chest.

Ronna gulped in a frightened breath. The

sounds Marcus was making chilled her to the bone. He roared and bellowed, rumbled unidentifiable threats from deep in his throat. She stared in horror as he hissed loudly, throwing back his head on his shoulders and opening his mouth. Sharp fangs appeared and he lunged them into Drucella's neck, her body hanging limply from his clenched fist.

Ronna closed her eyes, but the ugliness of the moment was too much to offer to chance. She looked on as Marcus drank from Drucella's neck, feeding on her life's blood. Finally, when he had drained the last drops of nourishment from her lifeless body, he turned toward the fireplace in the room. Blood smears dotted his face and shirt. He licked his lips, swallowing the final visages of victory down his throat. He cast a hand toward the hearth and instantly a fire roared to life, an inferno that cast itself out into the room with hungry yellow tongues of flame. He flung Drucella's lifeless body into the blaze.

Ronna gasped in horror and tried to look away. Drucella's body was immediately enveloped by the angry flame, her long black dress quickly catching ablaze and disappearing—and instantly breaking the spell holding Ronna against the wall. She slipped quickly to the floor, landing on her butt with her legs bent up beneath her. A surprised cry leapt from her mouth.

Marcus stood before the fire and watched, keeping guard to make certain the witch couldn't escape his wrath.

Ronna stared at Marcus. Could this be the man she thought she was falling in love with? Could she love someone as vicious and brutal as the man she had just witnessed killing Drucella?

He turned toward her suddenly and she saw the full measure of his anger. His eyes glowed red, two live coals situated deep in his skull. He came toward her and she shrank against the wall, a horrified scream inching up her parched throat.

"Ronna, my love."

His voice was hoarse, though it caressed her senses like soft velvet. He reached for her, raising her from the floor. He took her into his arms and held her.

The feel of his body pressing so firmly against hers sent a wave of comfort washing through her insides. She felt her knees buckle and the next instant, Marcus was scooping her into his arms and crossing the room to the bed. He lowered her to the place where he had laid, her head on the pillow belonging to Drucella.

She objected at first, crying out and levering herself upward in an effort to escape the dreaded place, but Marcus pushed her down, his hands on her shoulders and quiet words of assurance on his lips. She gave in and allowed him to push her

back. She settled her head on the pillow and let out a long breath of relief. She had almost died. Drucella had almost killed her.

She stared up at the man who had rescued her. He looked different now from the vicious vampire she had witnessed killing the evil witch. His face no longer harbored the wealth of anger that had fueled his big body. His clothing was straightened and his long dark hair was smoothed upon his shoulders. She blinked curious eyes up at him. He showed no signs of the once deadly killer he actually was.

She pushed his hands away. The sight she had witnessed was too gruesome to ignore. Her insides were still churning from the fright the act generated inside her body. She knew the memory would be with her forever—hovering at the edge of her consciousness. She licked dry lips. Her throat felt parched.

“Are you all right?”

His voice was laden with concern. His dark eyes were filled with compassion. He raised one hand to brush her hair off her shoulder but Ronna grasped his wrist before he could complete the act.

“I just want this to be over, Marcus.” She swallowed to ease her dry throat.

He smiled down at her. “And soon it shall be.”

She couldn’t bear to have him touch her. She rolled to her side and sat up on the edge of the bed

in preparation of getting up. Her head felt dizzy and she thought she was going to throw up. She blinked her eyes and found she was staring at the dying embers in the fireplace. A cold shard of dread gripped her insides. Were those embers the remains of Drucella? Had her body burned up and really turned to ashes—as she had heard witches’ do when they die? For an instant she felt the pangs of temptation gnawing at her insides. Would she regret not having the guts to investigate the remains in the fireplace to make sure when she finally managed to return home and put the frightening episode behind her?

She placed her feet on the floor and stood up, shaky and unsteady. “Did she really burn up, Marcus?”

He rose and crossed the room to the fireplace. Stooping, he reached amid the glowing embers and retrieved the amulet Drucella had possessed. He held it in his hand, the gold chain draped across his fingers.

“She is dead.” He held the amulet out, offering it to Ronna. “This belongs to you now. Take it.”

Ronna raised her eyes to his face. He was smiling, pleased with his having destroyed Drucella forever. She didn’t hesitate to lift the amulet from his hand and slip it into her jeans pocket. The thought gripped her that with Drucella’s death, the amulet might be put to better

use. What, she couldn't rightfully say, given the circumstances with which she had come about it, but since her own amulet had never been used to do harm —

"What about the rest of the witches?"

"We will destroy them before we leave the castle." He reached out and pulled her into his arms. He stroked her hair with one hand, gently, lovingly. He kissed her temple.

His nearness unnerved her. She bit her lip and closed her eyes tightly. Things had happened so quickly. One day she was happily running her little witch shop and the next, she was falling in love with a vampire. A lone tear squeezed out the corner of her eye and slid slowly down her cheek. How could she justify the fact that Marcus had just murdered Drucella? How could she have feelings for a man—a creature of the night—that could be so vicious and murderous?

"Come. We must search the castle for my brothers."

She pushed out of his arms, turning to hide her tear-stained cheeks from his view. She crossed her arms over her chest, wary at revealing her fears to him.

"What is it? I sense your distress."

"I may not be able to awaken your brothers. Drucella sentenced them to sleep for ten thousand years. I may not be able to break the time spell."

"Drucella is dead." He combed one hand through his hair. "Surely her spells can be broken now." He heaved a long sigh.

Ronna felt his unease at her news. She resisted the urge to comfort him—though every fiber in her being urged her to reach out to him. She studied his face, so distraught with worry that the sight brought her emotional pain. She bit her bottom lip. If only her heart didn't melt at the sight of him. She released a long breath and fought the battery of emotions tugging at her insides.

"We must search the castle, Ronna. We must find my brothers." He took hold of her hand, urging her toward the door.

Ronna's uncertainty increased. Her feet inched reluctantly across the stone floor. Her fear of not being able to awaken his brothers clung to her insides.

"We will search the remaining rooms along the hallway first."

"I suspect your brothers are imprisoned in the suits of armor standing at the front entry of the castle, Marcus. Tiana told me as much."

"Tiana?" He glanced around, as though searching for the tiny fairy.

"Yes. I tricked her. She revealed that your brothers were in plain sight and holding sentry. I think they sleep inside the suits."

He smiled suddenly, a broad smile that lit up his handsome face. He pulled Ronna into his arms and hugged her tightly.

“I love you.”

CHAPTER 16

His admission unnerved her. Could he know the meaning of love? Could a creature with dark powers know the true meaning of what he had just said to her? She stifled a shiver of remorse. Surely there was some way she could come to grips with her feelings for the man – vampire.

They hurried down the hallway toward the great room of the castle. Their footsteps echoed along the empty space and somehow drilled the feeling of dread deeper into Ronna's gut. Any second the remaining witches of the coven would appear and God only knew what the outcome would be.

The interior of the castle was dark and without benefit of lit candles along the walls or on the long table setting before the hearth. A low fire burned at the back of the opening, sputtering yellow sparks as it dwindled and neared extinction. Ronna was alert to the sounds around them, listening intently for the arrival of the remaining

witches. It was eerily quiet. She clutched her amulet in one hand, deciding to call upon its powers to whisk her home in an instant, if need be. She stole a peek at Marcus as they crossed the room to the front entry. Could she stand to leave him—return to her time and know that she had left him behind? A knot rose in her throat. Could she ever forget that she had awakened a vampire and traveled back in time to his domain? Could she forget that she had made love to him on a bed that was centuries old? Or slept in a medieval fortress?

Damn!

She could feel his excitement, his joy at the mere chance that he might find his brothers again. He didn't seem wary in the least. She sighed and mentally hoped for the best. With Marcus' vampire powers—his ability to shape shift and take flight at a moment's notice—she suspected he was confident he could handle any situation, and especially now, since Drucella was dead and it was night, the time when his vampire powers were so powerful.

The suits of armor stood against the wall beside the heavy wooden door leading outside. They were tall and broad, with massive helmets—so like the suit Marcus had been imprisoned in. She held her breath as they approached, caution gnawing at her insides. How innovative to

imprison each of Marcus' brothers in suits of armor. They could remain unknown for centuries.

Perhaps, forever. But then, that was Drucella's intention. She was without immortality—why not punish Marcus and his brothers by preventing them from living forever?

Marcus turned curious eyes on Ronna. She hung back, afraid of failure in her attempt to waken the sleeping vampires.

"Hurry, before the others discover us."

"I may not be able to—"

He grasped her shoulders suddenly, giving her a little shake. "You have to try, Ronna."

She pulled in a deep breath and approached the suit of armor nearest to her. It loomed at her menacingly from the darkness, its massive size feeding her uncertainty. Suddenly, a quiver of amusement touched her lips despite the seriousness of what she was about to attempt. The sight of the armor brought back memories of the afternoon in her apartment when she had drank too much and thought she was seeing things not of her own making. If only she had that bottle of merlot now —

Or whiskey. I could get drunk fast and...

Ronna, once this is over — I'll personally see that you get drunk.

She jerked her head around, spying the smirk on Marcus' face.

“I’m not making any guarantees —”

She skimmed one hand along the cold metal of the suit. The uncompromising feel of it sent a jolt of fright racing up her arm. The mere thought that she was on the verge of trying to free another creature of the night lurked at the back of her mind. Should she really be attempting such an unsavory thing? She bit her lip and glanced over her shoulder at Marcus. The sight of him, the way he stood and looked at her, the way he tipped his head, the way his long hair cascaded across his broad shoulders—how in hell could she deny the man anything within her power? He had quickly found his way into her heart. Her temples pounded suddenly. Was that how it felt to finally admit she had fallen in love?

She pressed her palm against the chilly metal of the breastplate and paused a moment, trying to convince herself that what she was about to do was for the good of all involved. Marcus’ brothers had been victims of Darrias and then Drucella therefore they didn’t truly deserve imprisonment for all eternity.

“Lower, Ronna.”

She turned at Marcus’ urging.

“His balls are hanging between his legs, my sweet.” He chuckled and folded his arms across his chest. “Pretend it is my cock—put your hand on it.”

A tingle of lust raced through her insides with his words. She felt very naughty suddenly. The thought that another man watched while she caressed the private parts of another made heat rise in her body. She drew in a long breath and lowered her palm to the covering of iron mail hanging at the suit's crotch. With shaking fingers, she lifted the scrap of cloth and thrust her hand inside.

She almost shrieked when she felt the solid bulge of male genitalia graze her palm. Shock shot up her arm and she almost pulled her hand back in protest. The erotic feelings she had been experiencing suddenly vanished, leaving behind cold fear.

"Is one of my brothers in there? Do you feel his cock?"

She chuckled at Marcus' words and turned a red face to him. Thank God it was too dark in the room to reveal her embarrassment.

"Yes, I think so. I feel a large pair of balls."

He sounded so excited that Ronna laughed out loud.

"It has to be Jarharis. He is the oldest and the most robust of us all."

She rubbed the bulge pressing against her palm, wondering whether her touch had any significance at all on the sleeping vampire. By this time, her touch had awakened Marcus—but not so

with the brother bound inside this suit of armor.

She pulled her hand from the armor. "I'm sorry. I've done everything except jack him off and he appears to still sleep."

Marcus pulled her aside, his gaze pinned to the helmet on the suit of armor.

"Wait." He raised one hand and pressed a finger to his lips, warning her to silence. "You have awakened him."

Ronna felt elated and fearful at the same time. She inched back, taking cover behind Marcus. She peeked around his arm, her gaze wafting over the armor in search of the emerging vampire. She saw the wisp of iridescent vapor then, emerging in a downward spiral from the shield on the faceplate of the helmet. In much the same way as Marcus had escaped the metal shell, so was one of his brothers leaving his prison.

The mist shimmered with silvery luminescence as it poured forth upon the floor. Gradually a form began to emerge, the lower half of a body, then the formation of the chest and arms. She stared in wonder as the spell unfurled and a man seemingly grew right before her eyes.

A well-chiseled face with long blond hair stared straight ahead as though still under a trance while his body materialized to its complete stature. His eyes were deep set, a characteristic that mirrored Marcus' handsome countenance. Broad shoulders

filled out a dark jacket and a white ruffled shirt gaped, revealing a well-muscled chest.

It was both all consuming—the wonder of it all—and frightening as hell at the same time. Ronna couldn't seem to drag her gaze from the sight—even when the dark eyes latched onto her presence and tried to draw her forward. She clutched Marcus' arm, but was unable to voice her concern. The force with which he summoned her was quickly overpowering her will to keep her distance. She dug her nails into Marcus' coat sleeve trying to tell him what his brother was doing.

"You can't have her, Jarharis. She belongs to me." Marcus grasped Ronna by the arm and pushed her back, concealing her body behind his.

The body, now completely formed, slowly turned his gaze on Marcus as he stepped from the shadow in the room. The force of the two vampires filled the space with fright and an eeriness that brought coldness bounding in like the winter wind.

Jarharis glanced down at his body as though trying to reason what had happened. He moved slowly as though cold and sluggish. The realization slammed into Ronna's brain.

He needs to feed.

And so he shall.

Ronna felt the force with which Marcus

summoned the other witches into the room it was all consuming and fierce. She inched backward into the shadows of the room, fearful of what she was about to see.

Within seconds a witch entered the room. She paused, turning her gaze on the two men near the front door. She came forward, paused, then tugged at the neck of her dress.

Ronna drew in a quick breath. Marcus was willing the witch to obey his command and he was offering her up to Jarharis for nourishment. She covered her surprise with one hand.

Jarharis moved and the witch glided in his direction as though on wheels. He reached out and grasped her by the throat, pulling her against his chest with a swiftness that belied the seriousness of the moment. A low growl sounded from his throat. His long hair fell about his face as he bent his head and sank his fangs into the witch's neck. He began to drink. The witch struggled for a moment, then stilled, her body limp in Jarharis' fist.

Ronna stared in disbelief.

How in hell did I get into this mess?

By feeling cock, my sweet.

She felt silly suddenly—forgetting that her thoughts weren't her own since she encountered Marcus. She pulled her gaze away from the sight of Jarharis drinking the life force from the helpless

witch and tried to pretend she was somewhere else. She chuckled at her own stupidity. Short of wishing herself home, she had little choice but to see the ordeal through.

The witch's body hit the floor with a dull thud. Jarharis straightened, pulling his body to his full height, and squared his shoulders. He wiped his mouth on one sleeve of his jacket and turned toward Marcus.

"That wasn't your hand on my cock, was it, brother?"

His voice was low toned, melodious like his brother's, with a deep timbre that zinged along Ronna's sensitive nerves. She peeked around Marcus' sleeve to get a better view of the eldest of the vampires. Her eyes were met with a very pleasant sight as his gaze locked immediately with hers. A shiver of awareness grasped her insides. He was a devilishly handsome vampire with an exquisite face and well-proportioned body.

He's a bloodsucker!

Because he was turned into one by a monster. But rest assured, my love, he is not the monster you think he is.

Assaulted by her own thoughts toward Marcus' brother, Ronna found his hand and gave it a gentle squeeze, trying to convey her apology for having such a thought before she got to know the man. Would she get to know the man? She rolled

her eyes at the audacity of the situation. How many vampires could she befriend?

Marcus strode forward and embraced his brother.

“It is good to have you back, Jarharis.”

CHAPTER 17

Jarharis embraced Marcus, but his eyes were pinned to Ronna lingering in the shadows. She felt the heat of his gaze, the keen inspection with which he allowed his eyes to trail over her body. She bit her bottom lip, uncertainty flooding her insides.

“You brought a witch to awaken me, my brother?”

Jarharis stepped around Marcus and strode toward Ronna. His gait was slow and calculating. His long limbed body graceful and rhythmic as he closed the distance between them.

Ronna clutched the amulet around her neck and stared at the vampire. Surely he wouldn't harm her—but then, he was the eldest of Marcus' brothers and perhaps the one in command. She watched him draw nearer, her heart caught up in her throat. If only there was more light in the room—suddenly she waved one hand and commanded all the candles in the room be lit and

a fire to blaze in the hearth.

The explosion of magic within the room garnered the approaching vampire's attention. He whirled around, glancing about the area as the candles jumped to life and the logs in the fireplace ignited.

Ronna stole the opportunity to make her way across the room to where Marcus stood.

Jarharis spied her racing movements and turned a smiling face in her direction. He bowed from the waist, a slow movement that caused his long hair to cascade off his shoulders and momentarily cover his face. When he straightened, he held a look of amusement on his face.

"Perhaps you should introduce us, Marcus. She seems to be frightened of me." He chuckled low in his throat.

Marcus pulled Ronna against his side. "You may call her Ronna, Jarharis. But you may not touch her—nor take her blood. She belongs to me."

Marcus' words vibrated through Ronna's insides. Obviously she had been right assuming Jarharis was dangerous.

Jarharis tipped his head, nodding that he understood his brother. He grasped his coat lapels with either hand and strode toward the dead body of the witch lying on the floor. "Pray tell, brother, is your lady akin to this witch?" He looked toward

the door of the room. "And where is Drucella? I have some unfinished business with her?"

"Drucella is dead. I killed her with my own hand."

"Then I am in your debt, brother." He bowed to Marcus. "But what of this witch, Ronna? Is she of the same coven? Even though she magically awakened me, should I be wary of her powers?" His gaze was steady as he stared at Ronna. "You see how easily she lit the room." He smiled slightly, one corner of his full mouth pulling upward mockingly.

Ronna's throat felt suddenly dry. The threat in Jarharis's eyes sent a chill up her spine. No doubt he would kill her in an instant—thrust his fangs into her vein and drain her blood, then cast her aside much as he had the witch lying on the floor.

"Ronna is not of our time, brother. She came to help us—to break the spell Drucella cast over us." Marcus pressed Ronna against his side and urged her toward the two remaining suits of armor standing near the front entrance of the castle. "I suspect Duella and Chandler are also imprisoned against their will in these very suits."

Ronna's insides were quivering with uncertainty. She hurried to where the suits of armor stood and prepared to investigate them. The sooner she found the other brothers, the sooner she could return to her own time and get

on with her life. She swallowed nervously as she took hold of the mail covering hanging at the crotch of one of the armor shells.

Jarharis laughed suddenly, a loud bellow that echoed inside the large room.

Ronna jumped and jerked her head around, pinning him with her gaze.

"Do tell, brother, you have found a witch that likes to feel cock! Such a prize you have at your disposal!"

Marcus chuckled. "I agree, brother. But her powers of witchcraft are beyond compare." He winked one dark eye at Ronna. "And I should warn you, Jarharis. She is quite expert at turning men into toads."

Ronna smiled at the look of surprise that suddenly appeared on Jarharis's face.

"Have no fear, Jarharis. I promise not to cast any spells over you – unless you piss me off."

The look of surprise intensified on Jarharis's face.

"Don't make her mad, brother," Marcus advised.

Well, now that you've got your brother wondering about me – incidentally, Marcus, I doubt that he's the least bit concerned about my powers –

Don't be too hasty in judging Jarharis. I see the way he looks at you.

Please, Marcus. She rolled her eyes in

consternation. The very idea that there could be anything between her and his older brother –

It has been a long time since Jarharis has rutted with a woman – he is in need of satisfaction and from the sizable bulge in the front of his britches – he is having delicious thoughts of you, my sweet.

It was impossible for Ronna to keep her mind on the business of trying to awaken another of the Morganford vampires—especially with Marcus making remarks of the sexual kind. She couldn't keep her gaze from straying toward his brother and the front of his pants. She sucked in a quick breath as she realized his words were true. The front of Jarharis's pants was tented with a sizable cock. She felt her crotch grow immediately damp and struggled to keep her thoughts from Marcus.

She felt sweat pop out on the back of her neck as she tried to turn her mind back to the job at hand. She lifted the iron mail and thrust her hand into the crotch of the armor all in one quick movement—only to be astonished when her fingers felt nothing.

She gasped and turned a surprised face to Marcus.

Marcus hurried across the room to her, shock filtering across his features.

"It's empty." She shook her head, spilling her hair across her shoulders in disarray. "Your brother isn't inside." She leaned down and peeked

beneath the mail, only to see blackness.

Marcus released a loud bellow and whirled around, enraged that the suit of armor was empty.

Ronna quickly turned to the remaining suit and lifted the covering concealing the crotch. Hoping there was a sleeping vampire inside, she thrust her hand beneath the mail.

"I'm sorry. This suit is empty too, Marcus."

She felt defeated. Her hopes flagged. She bit her lip as she watched Marcus become wild with rage. He turned suddenly and grasped one of the suits, toppling it on the stone floor. A loud crash echoed in the room. The giant helmet broke free of the wide shoulders and slid across the floor, finally coming to rest near the hearth.

Marcus, his face mirroring his outrage at finding the suits empty, turned his aggression on the remaining armor. He lifted the heavy object and hurled it across the room. It smashed against the wall and separated into several pieces, each skittering across the floor in different directions.

Ronna cowered against the wall. Marcus' anger would only draw the attentions of the remaining witches and then they would have them to deal with. She bit her lip and tried to think. Tiana had confessed that Marcus' brothers were holding sentry. Puzzlement clouded her thoughts.

"That fucking little fairy lied to me."

Marcus continued around the room, smashing

the contents in his rage. Jarharis watched for only a moment before he too vented his rage. He lifted the dead body of the witch from the floor and threw her across the room into the fire in the hearth. A shower of glittering sparks sprayed forth, arching into the air and across the stone floor as the fire quickly engulfed the body.

Ronna stared into the inferno as the dark dress of the witch quickly ignited and disappeared. The fire swallowed her body up, raging in intensity and then waning as its fuel turned to mere ash. The amber amulet suddenly appeared at the edge of the embers, glowing yellow on its gold chain, freed from the neck of the witch. Jarharis stooped and picked it up.

Ronna remembered the amulet Marcus had given her after Drucella's body burned. It was tucked into her jeans pocket. She could feel its unyielding bulge against her hipbone. Perhaps it could reveal something of the other vampires' whereabouts. She pulled it free of her pocket and studied it. It was identical to the one she wore around her neck. But could she utilize its powers? She clutched the amulet and tried to think of a spell to unlock its magic.

She felt an ache at the back of her head as she tried to command the amulet into service. It neither gave off any warmth against the palm of her hand nor changed properties that she could

see. It just lay on her palm as if it held no magic at all.

Irritated with her own inept abilities, she let out an exasperated breath and turned her gaze on Marcus. He had perhaps, gotten over his rage at not finding his brothers in the armor. He strode about the room, a contemplative look on his handsome face. Jarharis sat perched on the wooden table in the room, his pensive gaze on his brother.

"I grow weary of this, my brother. Shall we not call the other witches of the coven forth and feast on their blood?"

"Duella and Chandler will need to feed when we awaken them, Jarharis. But rest assured, we shall destroy the remainder of the coven before we leave the castle."

Ronna felt a chill travel up her backbone at Marcus' words. He sounded so bloodthirsty. So determined. She gazed down at the amulet lying across her palm. Perhaps it held no powers that she could summon. She closed her fist around it, feeling its faceted sides bite into her flesh. It was useless to her—and perhaps anyone else in the world.

Aggravated with the whole affair, she threw it suddenly, flinging it sharply against the adjacent wall in the room. It hit the wall with a loud crack and burst as though it were made of crystal glass.

Vivid rays of amber light spilled from the shards, filling the room with blinding rays. Ronna threw up one hand to shield her eyes from the intense brilliance but not before her vision suffered a terrible assault. Suddenly a series of images danced before her face. For a brief second she saw the magic portal she had opened in the dungeon of the castle. A long black casket or chest lay near the door Marcus had stepped through. The image wavered, then disappeared from her sight only to be replaced by what appeared to be a statue of a hideous figure perched atop a turret.

The images quickly disappeared, leaving her blinking in disbelief. She rubbed her eyes with both hands, trying to make her vision return to normal and mentally trying to make sense of what the amulet had revealed to her.

“Are you alright?”

She heard Marcus at her ear and felt his hands grasping her upper arms as she struggled to regain her vision.

“Marcus, what do remember about the room in the dungeon? Do you remember seeing anything?”

He shook his head and drew her against his chest. “I only remember waking up in Drucella’s bedchamber and seeing her attacking you.”

She sighed and held him tightly. “When the amulet splintered, it revealed the doorway to that

room and a long black casket, or chest. We have to go to the dungeon and open that room again." She gazed up at him, her eyesight gradually returning to normal. "But we have to be careful this time."

He smiled down at her. "I am grateful for your concern, my love." He lowered his head and brushed his lips across hers.

She sensed his arousal. It fueled her own. She wound her arms around his waist and returned his kiss.

I wish to rut with you.

Marcus, it's rather inconvenient, right now. I'm certain Jarharis would be rather put out when we refused to let him join in.

She stifled a shiver at her own teasing words. She broke off the kiss and stepped out of Marcus' embrace—only to bump into Jarharis's sturdy chest. She pulled up short, a breath catching in her throat as she realized Jarharis had been about to act on his own intentions.

CHAPTER 18

It seemed to be quite crowded in the large room suddenly. Ronna found herself caught between the two powerful vampires, her body heated from Marcus' kisses. She realized she needed to take steps to protect herself from one or both of the men. Jarharis had quickly shown signs of lusting for her moments after he was released from Drucella's spell, and Marcus truly had no intention of allowing him to touch her. No doubt the two would eventually come to blows—or bites—over her before too much time lapsed. She stepped from their midst and silently cast a spell that prevented Jarharis from getting too close to her.

“We have to go to the dungeon, Marcus.” She headed across the room, the two vampires trailing her. She tried to remember the spell she had used to open the portal into the hidden chamber as she turned down the passageway to the lower level of the castle.

The hallway was dark and she paused at the top of the stairs leading down to the dungeon. If she failed to open the room, Marcus' brother might well have to sleep out his sentence. She crossed her fingers and began the steep descent into the dank bowels of the old subterranean vault.

The chill of the old cellar quickly seeped into her body. She shivered and summoned up a jacket to warm her. Drawing the coat tightly across her chest, she inched her feet along in the direction toward the room she had managed to open earlier. Marcus' hand on her waist was a reassuring gesture of his faith in her and she smiled at the show of confidence. She hoped she didn't disappoint him again.

She summoned light to the area and numerous torches appeared blazing on the walls of the chamber. The heavy ropes of chain links and manacles were illuminated, revealing the torture place of the dungeon. Ronna reached the spot where she had magically opened the doorway to the concealed room and began calling on her powers. At first nothing happened and she quickly grew resigned to the fact that the door might not become visible again. Since Drucella had captured Marcus within the room and imprisoned him again, perhaps the room no longer existed. Drucella had had enough time to

change her spell before Ronna returned to rescue Marcus.

But I saw the doorway and a casket.

You struggle, my sweet.

Marcus, I can't open the passage. Forgive me for being such an inept witch.

She raised her hands and with every fiber inside her body, commanded the portal to appear. The torches surged their fire up to the ceiling of the low room, licking yellow tongues of brilliance spewed forth, inflaming the room in heat. Ronna reached deep inside herself, calling the very source of her existence to the fore.

The room grew dark, then sprang to light.

Ronna drew in a quick breath. On the very spot where the door had appeared, an outline began to form. It grew intense, engulfed in witch magic, an open doorway appeared. The room grew quiet. The blazing torches subsided, their flames returning to normal size flaring upward to lick about the stone wall.

"Careful." Ronna grasped Marcus' coat sleeve as he lunged forward toward the open doorway.

"Drucella is dead, my sweet. She can no longer harm either of us."

He took her hand and together they stepped through the magic doorway into the secret room once belonging to Drucella.

It was freezing cold inside the chamber.

Ronna's breath hung in the air in a thick white vapor. She hurried to make a torch materialize in her hand. She held it aloft, pointing its illuminating end into the darkness.

"Over here."

She turned the torch in the direction of Marcus' voice to find him bending over the long casket she had seen in her vision. A quick breath caught in her throat. Approaching she held the light over the chest. Its rounded top was laden with dust and when Marcus brushed a hand across its surface, deep carvings appeared across its top.

"I know Duella lies within, Ronna. I feel the kinship with his silent body."

Ronna hoped he was right. She stood holding the torch while he searched for a way to open the chest. The realization that what had appeared to her after she smashed the amulet was actually coming to pass, encouraged her thinking. Perhaps one of Marcus' brothers lay within the chest and soon they would be down to searching for only one.

The creak of a rusty hinge and the sound of splintering wood sounded within the small room. Ronna peered at the chest, eager for Marcus to push aside its heavy lid and reveal his brother.

A terrible odor quickly filtered into the small space. Ronna covered her nose with her free hand. The aroma of rotting flesh and moist loam almost

made her wretch. The torch sputtered and sparked, as dust rose from the top of the casket and filtered into the fire. Gradually Marcus pushed the heavy lid aside enough so they could peer inside.

“It is Duella, Ronna.”

He grew excited with the sight of a body beneath the lid and rushed to give the cover a push off the casket. It clamored loudly onto the floor, sending up a cloud of choking dust as its heavy weight stilled.

Ronna held the torch over the casket. A man was inside, indeed. A large man dressed in dark clothing with an exquisite face and long dark hair. He looked so peaceful that she found it hard to believe that he had been summoned to sleep for ten thousand years under Drucella’s spell. For a moment she couldn’t take her eyes off him. He was so handsome, so incredibly handsome.

“Hurry. Wake him.”

Marcus’ voice was filled with urgency. Ronna glanced at him, able to read the joy on his face. Returning her eyes to the man in the casket, she suddenly felt embarrassment flood her insides. As previously, when she clasped Jarharis’ cock, she was overcome with shyness. It was one thing to lay hand on a man’s cock in privacy, but to have to do it with another man looking on—a brother to the intended—added a bit of eroticism to the act.

She drew in a shaky breath. At least Jarharis hadn't been allowed into the room. There was only Marcus to witness her fondling of Duella's cock.

"Ronna. Why do you hesitate?"

She glanced at Marcus, then lowered her eyes.

Marcus chuckled, suddenly realizing her dilemma.

"Here, give me the torch." He reached for the torch Ronna held over the casket. "Now give me one of your hands." He caught her right hand and brought it to his cock. He pressed her palm against his erection.

"You're hard, Marcus. I swear —"

"Forgive me, my sweet, but I find it very arousing to think of you touching my brother's cock while I stand by and watch." He chuckled. "I find it amusing too that I can hardly wait for you to do it."

She giggled, then hid her amusement behind her free hand. "I could conjure up a bed and we could have sex —"

He shook his head and pressed her palm against his rising cock. "Awaken Duella and we will sate our lusts after we destroy this witch's haven."

The thought of destroying Drucella's castle made her wince. Did Marcus really intend to demolish the fortress? Would the powers of the

dark one allow such destruction? After all, he was father to the coven. He had given the witches power to work their menace.

Suddenly in a rush to end the curse Drucella set against the vampires, she leaned down into the casket and grasped Duella's cock, twining her fingers around the mass between his legs.

He's big.

It is the Morganford legacy. He chuckled aloud. *We have big cocks to satisfy our wenches.*

She sensed his jubilation, then his sorrow. As quickly as he began his teasing comment, he was reminded of his own lack of mortality and that of his brothers. She heard his loud sighing release and wished she could find a way to comfort him.

The body in the coffin moved suddenly, slightly, then lunged upward in a flash.

Ronna screamed and jumped back, only to find a large hand had attached itself to her throat. In the next instant she was hurtling across the room, the body of the vampire she had managed to awaken, pressing against her with enormous force. She slammed into the stone wall, her breath forced from her lungs as she gazed up into a savage face. Bared fangs and glowing red eyes bore down on her as her breath was being choked off.

Fright congealed inside her body as she realized Duella intended to end her life. His long fangs

were coming at her with fierce determination, his mouth stretched wide as he aimed at her throat. She struggled to push him away but her strength fell short of his power. He pinned her against the wall despite her best efforts.

“Duella!”

Marcus' voice cut through her pain as all hell broke loose in the room. The big hand grasping her throat was suddenly jerked away and the foul smelling body bearing her against the wall pulled away. The two vampires scuffled, wrestling as though they were enemies, until Marcus pinned Duella against the floor.

Ronna gasped for breath, clutching her throat with one hand.

Why in hell didn't I cast a spell over him before I played with his cock? She coughed and wheezed, trying to get her breathing back to normal. *I have got to get this witch thing under control – before I get killed.*

The room grew silent suddenly and Marcus picked up the torch he had cast aside when his brother attacked Ronna. She saw the two then. Marcus had a firm grasp on his brother's arm as he pinned him against one wall of the room. Duella's chest was heaving from exertion. He leaned heavily against Marcus' powerful arm, weak from hunger.

“Marcus, beware! Drucella—” His breath came

in loud gasps.

"Have no fear. Drucella is dead." Marcus turned toward Ronna. "Are you all right?"

She felt Marcus' concern for her and quickly scrambled up off the floor. Her neck hurt and her chest felt nearly crushed from Duella's powerful weight when he pinned her, but she hurried across the room to reassure Marcus that she would survive despite the attack.

"I'm okay." She eyed the vampire pinned against the wall. He appeared weak and had it not been for Marcus holding him erect, he would have sunk helplessly to the floor. "Let's hurry. Bring Duella." She took the torch from Marcus and extinguished its blaze, then she took his hand and prepared to step through the portal she had opened in the room.

Marcus wound one arm around his brother's waist and held his body against his side while he stepped through the opening Ronna created in the stone wall. In an instant they were back in the dungeon and Jarharis was rushing to aide his brothers.

"Quick. Summon a witch so that Duella can feed. He is very weak."

Ronna shivered at the commanding tone of Jarharis' voice. He sounded as though Marcus would be doing no more than ordering take out. She hurried to lead the way back to the main floor

of the castle.

The remaining witches were secreted away, hiding for their very lives, no doubt. Ronna thought perhaps they were aware that Drucella had met her fate and therefore took precautions of their own. Though Marcus' powers were strong enough to tempt them from their hiding places.

She returned to the main room of the castle, the floor littered with debris from Marcus' angry tirade. The fire glowed with dying embers, and the vast room was eerily cold. She turned to look at Duella as Marcus and Jarharis helped him into the room. He seemed near collapse though minutes earlier he was on the verge of taking her life. She raised one hand and covered her neck. She felt bruised from his attack.

He was as handsome as his brothers, tall and swarthy, with shoulder length auburn hair. His facial features were handsomely chiseled, high cheekbones and a full mouth. Long dark lashes framed deep-set ebony eyes. She bit her lip. He too, appeared as sensuous as Marcus and Jarharis, even in his weakened state.

A movement at the door of the room caught Ronna's attention. One of the remaining witches suddenly glided into the room. Ronna drew in a quick breath and turned from the sight. She knew Marcus had summoned the woman to be used for Duella's feeding. She could only imagine the

horror as he clutched her neck and sank his fangs into her vein. She tried to close her ears to the sounds of struggle the witch made as Duella took her life.

The witch was cast aside, dead, limp and of no more use to Duella. Curiosity pulled her eyes to the vampire, now in a revived state. She felt surprise travel through her body as she gazed upon him.

He stood tall, perhaps taller than Marcus, his complexion now rosy with new life after his feeding. His clothes were dotted with red smears of blood. The amulet once around the witch's neck hung from his hand. He smiled at Ronna, his dark gaze pinning her with a measure of curiosity and gratitude. He straightened his shoulders and strode toward her, his hand outstretched.

"I can only say that I am sorry I attacked you and beg your forgiveness."

His deep toned voice filled the large room. Ronna felt compelled to place her hand in his large palm as he stopped mere feet from where she stood. The fright she had felt earlier had magically vanished and she felt herself smiling as he tipped his head in a polite bow to her.

His palm was cool and when he closed his fingers around hers, she felt somewhat of a kinship with him. It puzzled her but then she thought perhaps it was because of Marcus'

presence in the room. She felt safe with him so near. Her brows drew together as a question came to mind.

"Do you by any chance know of your brother Chandler's whereabouts? Did you see where Drucella imprisoned him?"

He shook his head, making his long hair spill across one shoulder. "I have little memory of Drucella's trickery." He paused and raised his hand to stroke across his chin. "I have only the memory of being in her bed." He smiled at Ronna. "She fooled me with the belief that she couldn't live without me." He chuckled softly. "The next I recall, she screeched her discord and I saw only blackness. I dare say, perhaps I didn't live up to her expectations—in the male way of things." He bowed at the waist. "I hope to one day thank you properly for rescuing me."

Ronna felt her cheeks pink. He sounded as though he had more in mind than a thank you card or a bouquet of flowers. She pulled her hand free of his and turned toward Marcus as he appeared at her side.

"What of your vision, Ronna?"

"I saw a statue—a grotesque statue perched on a turret."

Marcus glanced around the room. "Clearly there are no turrets within the walls of this castle. We will have to look beyond." He took Ronna's

hand and led the way to the front door. "Bring torches, Duella, Jarharis."

The night was pitch black with clouds obstructing the moon. Rain was threatening. A fierce wind began to blow the second the three left the security of the castle. It howled menacingly through the trees and around the towering turrets of the castle mingling with the sounds of the ocean splashing against the rock façade beneath the stone fortress.

"It's too dark to see, Marcus." She felt helpless once again, straining her eyes trying to see through the darkness. If there was a statue and the remaining brother was trapped inside, it was too dark to locate it.

"Come. We'll fly up to the tower and have a look around."

She called upon her witchcraft and shape shifted into a bird, then took flight, winging her way upward to the towering roof of the castle. Earlier she had perched on one of the turrets while waiting for someone to open the door of the castle so she could slip inside. Alas, she had no recollection of seeing any grotesque statues like the one in her vision.

She lit on the tall tower, her eyesight now keen because of her bird state. She peered around, feeling remorse flood her body. There were no

grotesque statues in sight. She had failed Marcus again.

CHAPTER 12

“I am certain Chandler is here. I feel the kinship.”

“As do I, brother.”

Ronna looked from Marcus to Jarharis, then back to Marcus. His dark eyes were imploring, beseeching her to find their remaining lost brother. She glanced at Duella standing across the room. He appeared resigned to whatever fate Drucella had brought upon his brother. His attention was turned to the amulet lying in his palm.

“We have to search every room in the castle.” Ronna placed her hands on her hips and gazed at the three vampires. “And we need to find the other witches and question them.”

“Summon them forth and we shall drink their blood.”

“Easy, Jarharis. You shall have your fill of witch blood before we leave this place.” Marcus turned a weary face to Ronna. “The time grows short. It

will soon be light.”

She knew he was saying that soon he would be unable to help her search for Chandler. It made her feel pressured to hurry and locate him. But they had searched the castle roof and found nothing. She was doing her best to interpret the vision from the amulet. What more could she do?

“Perhaps the witches know something of a grotesque statue.”

Before she could finish her thought, the three remaining members of the coven glided into the room. They were cloaked in long black dresses reaching to their ankles and fright wreathed their faces. They stopped once inside the room, their eyes darting from one vampire to the other.

An aura of impending death permeated the vast room. Ronna glanced from vampire to witch, identifying the threats from the bloodsuckers. The witches cringed, knowing their fate. Ronna’s insides shook with anticipation. Any second she expected one of the brothers to grab a witch and end her life—without benefit of interrogation.

Feeling as though it was up to her to keep the brothers separated from the witches, she hurried across the room, putting herself between the groups.

“You are one of us.”

Ronna shook her head. “I do not cast evil spells and imprison people. I am not like the witches in

the coven."

"Please, do not let the vampires kill us."

The witches drew together in a tight knot, their arms entwined as though forming their own protective prison.

Ronna sensed their fright and rightfully so. The vampires were bloodthirsty and it was evident from the way they leered at the young witches. Their fate was doomed.

"I have seen a statue in a vision," Ronna began. "It is ugly and perched on a turret."

"We could look in Drucella's viewing pot," one of the witches hurried to say.

"Nay. The viewing pot is for Drucella's eyes only. It will tell us nothing."

"And the dark one is angry."

An arched brow lifted. "Why? Tell me, or I'll turn you all over to the vampires."

The witches gasped in unison.

"Drucella only imprisoned the vampire. She did not kill him." The witch glanced at Marcus. "She disobeyed the dark one. That is why he is angry."

Ronna glanced at Marcus. Drucella truly loved him and because of her feelings, she had dared to defy the dark one.

"Drucella desired immortality—for herself and the coven—but..."

Her voice trailed off as Marcus took a step

toward the coven.

“You were all aware of my fate? The coven knew of my imprisonment? Then where is my brother Chandler? Drucella has hidden him within these castle walls—reveal his hiding place or I shall sink my fangs—”

“Marcus!” Ronna grasped his coat sleeve, pulling him back. His eyes were red glowing coals in his head. Already he was planning an attack on the witches should they not divulge Chandler’s whereabouts.

Ronna thought briefly of Tiana and what she had said when she captured her. Jarharis had been standing sentry at the front door of the castle and Duella had been lying right at the door of the secret room in the cellar—could Tiana be telling the truth? She raked one hand through her hair, agitated with the whole affair. Wouldn’t it ever be over?

Anger stiffened Marcus’ big body. He allowed Ronna to push him aside, though he didn’t go far. He lingered near the huddled witches, his threat very visible and deadly.

Ronna knew that she couldn’t keep the vampires from feasting on the witches. They were set to carry out their threats the moment they were deemed of no further use. The fright on their faces tugged at her heart. But then, she cautioned herself, they were adept at using their powers—so

unlike herself. A shiver of awareness raced up her backbone as she gazed at the frightened three. Were it not for Marcus' commanding their wills, they would surely be gone from the castle.

They can't help us, Marcus.

Stand aside, my love. It is my duty to destroy the coven before I take leave of this place.

You frighten me.

I mean you no harm.

It's your love of blood that frightens me.

I cannot help what I am, my sweet. My fate is sealed.

Ronna turned and walked to the far side of the room, her hands covering her ears. She couldn't bear to watch or hear the witches' pleading cries. Tears sprang to her eyes as she hurried to shape shift and fly from the room. Her sense of right and wrong was taking a severe beating.

The castle was eerily quiet once she flew from the great room. She flew the length of the corridor and found herself inside Drucella's bedchamber before she dared land and shape shift back to her human form. The realization that the vampires were murdering the witches down the hall in the great room brought tears to her eyes. And her growing feelings for Marcus were being questioned. How could she fall in love with a vampire—knowing what she did about vampire life?

Tears of anguish rolled down her cheeks as she

questioned everything about her association with Marcus. How could she bear to let him kiss her? How could she make love with him?

“He has this uncanny power to bend my will.” She sniffed back a new barrage of tears. She threw both hands into the air suddenly. “For Pete’s sake! He knows what I’m thinking right now!”

She had been through a previous episode before—only it was when Marcus was asleep. Only when he was asleep was she privy to her own thoughts. It was an unsettling realization. She had fallen in love with a man who was a vampire—a creature of the night who had manipulative powers over her.

She felt helpless suddenly. The need to be consoled raced through her insides. She shook her head, ordering the feelings to subside. She forced her eyes to look about the room, to search for something out of the ordinary, something that might give a clue to where Drucella had hidden Chandler.

The room was as they had left it. The large bed sat in the middle of the floor, its linens askew where Marcus had lain when he was under Drucella’s spell. There were no telltale signs of the feminine side of the witch. There was no closet bulging with clothes, or bureaus teeming with perfume—

“This is eleven-eighty-five for Pete’s sake. There

isn't any mall with clothes and perfume for sale." She laughed suddenly, then grimaced. She was so lucky to live in the future. She gazed around at the stark appearance of the room.

"I doubt Drucella hid Chandler in her bedchamber."

Ronna whirled around as Marcus appeared in the room.

"Damn! Haven't you scared me enough tonight?" She clutched her heart as if having a heart attack. "Is the carnage over?"

He cocked an eyebrow at her. "The witch coven has met its end. And the bodies are mere ashes in the hearth. My brothers are well sated." He smiled. "They have taken leave of the castle as well."

Ronna pinned him with her gaze. There was something about the way he was smiling that gave her the impression his brothers had gone looking for sex. She stifled a shiver of lust. It would be simply delicious to partake of Drucella's big bed and get laid—except for the fact that the whole castle gave her the creeps.

"I sense your arousal."

"Forget it. Let's just find your brother and get out of here."

"Suppose we have a look at Drucella's viewing pot."

"It's worth a try." She led the way out of the

bedchamber, a bit relieved that she didn't have to worry about Marcus tricking her into sex—out of sight—out of mind—and headed down the dark hallway.

They found the spell room and pushed through the door, caution at the fore. A fire burned in the hearth and a bevy of candles lit the area. The long table she remembered from when they hid in the wall and peeped through a tiny crack, sat near the single window in the room, laden with vials filled with assorted liquids. Numerous jars of dried herbs and powders sat lined up on one corner of the table. And in the center of the floor, sat the black pot that belonged to Drucella.

Ronna approached the pot with caution. In the pit of her stomach she dreaded looking inside—afraid that the dark one would somehow steal her soul and make her do his bidding—as he had commanded the others of the coven. She felt sweat pop out on her forehead and nervousness well up in her chest.

She hesitated, allowing Marcus to approach the pot first. He peered into it, then raised his head and locked gazes with her.

“There's nothing inside.”

A nervous smile pulled at her lips. “Perhaps it only works for Drucella, as the witch said.” She knew as she uttered the words that Marcus, being a vampire, would have no power over the viewing

pot. He could neither conjure up the dark one nor be able to view anything the pot produced. She pulled in a steadying breath and stepped up to the pot.

She laid one hand on the rim of the vessel, feeling the cold clay beneath her palm. It held no menace in its inert state. She felt its rough surface and peered cautiously over the edge into the abyss below. As Marcus had said, it appeared empty.

She thought of several different spells she could cast to evoke the pot, but the idea that came to mind first was to cast an object belonging to Drucella into the darkness and see what happened. She glanced about the room—there was little to choose from. Drucella had few possessions—unless she had them concealed from the other witches.

The idea dawned on her then to cast a revealing possession spell. She chanted a few chosen words and peered about, spying a small decorative box sitting on the high window ledge. She quickly shape shifted and flew up to retrieve the box.

It was jewel encrusted, displaying many ruby gems along its rounded top. An oval crest bearing crossed swords decorated its center. She picked up the box in her talons and flew back to where Marcus stood. She dropped the box on the floor at his feet and shape shifted to her own body.

“This box belonged to my mother.” He gazed at

Ronna with a surprised look on his face. "Drucella must have stolen it." He sighed and lifted the lid.

Ronna watched as he removed a small brooch from the box.

"I remember my mother wearing this brooch. It was a gift from my father. I was just a boy." His brows drew together. "My mother died a suspicious death. She was wearing this when—"

His anger engulfed her, made her reel on her feet. She grabbed the rim of the viewing pot to keep from falling down.

"Marcus. Marcus. Don't. For God's sake. I'm going to be sick."

He shape shifted right before her eyes and left the room so quickly she couldn't believe her eyes. One second he was standing before her, enraged over the death of his mother, and the next, he was changing into a bird and flapping his wings so rapidly that the wind currents in the room nearly whipped her hair off her head.

"What in the hell—"

She dropped to the floor at the side of the viewing pot and held her head in her hands. Of all the things to happen—Marcus becoming irate and leaving her to hunt for his brother on her own—where had he gone in such a fit?

CHAPTER 20

"**T**hrow this unsavory leech into the pot and see what appears."

Ronna raised her head and saw Marcus. He stood in the middle of the floor holding Pemi. The frightened little man clung to Marcus' arm with shaking hands. The pleading look in his red-rimmed eyes begged Ronna to save him.

She scrambled to her feet as Marcus tossed Pemi onto the floor. He fell with a thud and scampered around behind Ronna.

"Please, do not kill me."

"Marcus?" She turned a puzzled face to Marcus. "What are you doing?"

"Pemi is the thief who sneaked into my father's house and stole my mother's brooch. He carried it back to Drucella so she could cast the spell that took my mother's life."

Anger wreathed his features. His eyes began to glow in prelude of taking Pemi's life.

Ronna glanced at Pemi. He cowered behind the

viewing pot, soft sobs choking his throat.

"I had to obey the witch. She tortured me and threatened to take my life."

Marcus moved so quickly Ronna hadn't time to help Pemi. He snatched the little man up by the nape of his neck and thrust his bedraggled body into the witch's black pot. His pitiful cries for help quickly died out as a torrent of black ash spewed from the open mouth of the tub.

"Marcus!" Ronna covered her eyes with her hands, shocked that he had so callously ended Pemi's life. "Enough killing!"

He crossed the room and took hold of her shoulders. "Ronna, you mistakenly label me a murderer. I assure you I do not kill just for the sake of killing." He heaved a laden sigh. "Drucella and her coven have menaced my family for many years. You see the consequence of my brother's fate. She doomed them to sleep for ten thousand years. Had it not been for you —"

"I know, Marcus. My curiosity started a succession of events that I can't seem to end." She allowed him to pull her into his embrace. She laid her cheek against his solid shoulder and closed her eyes. She was weary. Her body was tired. She needed sleep though she dared not close her eyes. She had to find Chandler so she could return to her own life.

Marcus smoothed one palm across her hair,

soothing her senses with his light touch. He held her tightly, supporting her body with his own. He kissed the top of her head.

"You have had a long night. You need rest. I can feel your weariness."

"We have to search the castle again. We have to find your brother." She pushed out of his embrace suddenly. "I wonder if Drucella has another hidden room where the statue sits." Her brows drew together in contemplation. "If the statue was in plain sight, we would have discovered it by now, Marcus." She felt buoyed by her realization.

"I will have to leave you soon."

She glanced at the window in the room. The sun was about to rise.

"Go. Be safe, Marcus. I will search the castle by myself."

A look of concern wreathed his handsome features. "Should you find Chandler, and awaken him, he will need to feed."

"I won't touch him until you come to me again." She forced a smile. "Both your brothers wanted to bite me the second they laid eyes on me—"

"They wanted only to feed, my love. They were famished after their long sleep."

A question suddenly came to mind. She hesitated, then felt prompted to voice it after seeing the questioning look on his face.

"Is it not that way with you, Marcus—are you not famished after you awaken?"

He shook his head. "Being a vampire requires me to replenish my body's energy source on a regular basis. Going so long without blood weakens the mind and the body. When you awakened Duella and Jarharis they were crazed with the need for blood because they had gone so long without it."

"As you had when I...touched your...cock and awakened you. You bit my neck and drank my blood." She raised her hand and touched the place where he had bitten her neck. "You drank my blood twice, Marcus. How many times before—"

"I took only a small amount of blood each time I fed on you, my love." He raked one hand through his hair. "I will bestow the gift of immortality upon you—when you decide you want me to, not before."

She stared at him, keeping her thoughts from forming because of his ability to read her mind.

The room was growing light. She sensed his need to leave, to sleep the slumber of the undead.

"I fear for you here alone. Come. You must return to Morganford Manor with me."

He reached for her and once he touched her hand, she lost all ability to refuse him.

You control me so easily.

You are my soul mate, Ronna. I can sense your

every mood, know your every thought, anticipate your every desire. We belong together, forever.

* * * *

Ronna awakened with a start. Her heart was thundering in her chest like she had been running a marathon. She sat up in bed and glanced around the room. She was alone—except for Tiana sitting in the glass cage in the corner of the room.

She swung her feet over the edge of the bed and stood up. She had slept—once the images of Marcus’ brothers killing the witches stopped bombarding her mind. She raked her fingers through her hair. Would it be such a terrible crime if she just wished herself home?

Tears suddenly burned the back of her eyes. The situation was one she had little control over. Marcus bent her will at every opportunity and if that wasn’t enough, she couldn’t halt her growing feelings for the man. Being separated from him even for a short time made her ache inside.

“You promised to release me. Open the door.”

“Shut up.”

“I told you Drucella’s secrets. Now let me out.”

Ronna crossed the room to the cage and glared at the fairy. She cringed against the far wall—her tiny wings wrapped around her little body in an effort to hide her trembling from Ronna.

"Drucella is dead. All the witches are dead. The coven no longer exists."

Tiana gasped and flew against the glass walls of her cage, distraught.

"The vampires will pay! You will pay!"

"And you have no mistress now. What will you do, Tiana? Will you fly back to the black abyss? Will you serve the dark one?"

"You are a cruel witch. You torment me for no reason. Open the cage and set me free."

Ronna studied the tiny face peering up at her. Tears stained the little pink cheeks and the glittering blue eyes were moist. Her bottom lip trembled, on the verge of tears. Her gossamer wings drooped as though she had lost all will to live.

"I'm not a cruel witch. I'm a good witch."

Tiana moved across the cage and pressed her body against the mirrored bars, staring up at Ronna.

"I will reveal one more thing to you—if you release me."

Ronna smiled slightly. Tiana was trying to trick her.

"I will tell you where Drucella hid the vampire Chandler."

A note of surprise zinged through Ronna. How did Tiana know she could not find Chandler?

A blond brow lifted. "Why do you think I

haven't already found him?"

"Because you said so in your fitful sleep."

Shit!

"I know where he sleeps."

"I don't believe you."

"He sleeps within a statue. I know where the statue sits. I know where Drucella hid it."

"Tell me."

"Release me first."

"Not a chance. I'll keep you imprisoned for the rest of your little fairy life—"

"All right." She sighed and crossed the floor of the cage, turning her back to Ronna. She folded her tiny arms across her chest in a show of defiance. "The statue is in a secret room within the spell room."

Ronna sucked in a quick breath. She had been right about one thing—there were hidden rooms within the castle that Drucella had magically sealed for everyone except herself and, apparently, the nosy fairy.

"But beware." She laughed loudly in her high-pitched fairy voice.

"Beware of what?" She bit her bottom lip.

"That's for you to find out."

Ronna left the bedchamber, her anger raging because of Tiana's insolent manner. One more minute in the room with her and she might be tempted to pull off her little gossamer wings. She

heaved a long sigh. It was becoming easier and easier to have destructive thoughts. She shook her head and turned her thoughts to breakfast. Conjuring up a plate of pancakes and sausage, she sat down at the table in the great room and began eating.

Marcus was asleep somewhere in the manor, deep within the lower level. She felt a bit of relief just knowing he was near by. Her brows drew together in contemplation as she remembered his words about giving her the gift of immortality.

Would immortality really be a gift?

She knew in the near future, she would have to decide whether she wanted to become immortal or not.

At least Marcus is willing to let me decide.

"He could very easily take the decision out of my hands." She touched the spot on her neck where he sank his fangs into her vein. "I'm not so sure I want to be a vampire witch."

She pushed aside the thoughts and returned her mind to the castle of the coven. When she returned to search again for Chandler, she would cast a revealing spell and look for the secret room where he slept.

Tiana's warning came suddenly to mind. Did she dare trust the fairy?

"She has no mistress to return to therefore she has no one to serve."

She thought suddenly of the spell book Marcus had taken from Drucella—the book she had been unable to open because of the fire ring guarding it. Without further hesitation, she cast a revealing spell to locate the book within the fortress. It appeared to her in a vision, safely tucked within a recess in an upper room of the building. She rushed from the great room to search for the book.

It lay safely within a wall cavity in a room that appeared to have once been a bedchamber. She gazed at it for several minutes before attempting to touch it. Finally, she raised one hand and held it above the book, testing the spell Drucella had placed around it.

A wide smile broke across her face when the book yielded no heat against her palm. She quickly pulled it from its hiding place and hurried back to the great room. Perhaps all of Drucella's spells were null and void with her death.

She laid the spell book on the table by the fireplace and opened its leather back. Dust billowed from the pages and rose into the air in a wispy fog. Waving one hand into the air, she cleared the haze so she could see the writing on the yellowed pages. The script was quite elegant, penned in black ink that magically withstood the test of time. She gazed at the pages as she turned them one by one, carefully laying them one on the other, for fear they would crumble like old

crackers and leave nothing behind except crumbs.

The book was indeed filled with spells, each listing the ingredients to be used and detailing the chant to voice while mixing. She marveled at the array of spells, everything from childbirth to death wishes. She stifled a shiver when she discovered a spell to bring about death on a birthday.

“Damn! What a present that would be!”

She turned the pages of the book, briefly reading the spells and their ingredients until she came across one that sounded familiar to her. The spell she commonly used to entice customers to buy in her shop appeared very similar to the spell of old written in the book. Her jaw dropped as she realized she uttered the very same words and only the ingredients were off a bit. Instead of mixing a series of herbs into a fine powder to be sprinkled on the intended victim, she simply bestowed a look of intention upon the intended while she silently chanted the words of the spell.

“This book is my heritage. I have to take it with me when I return to my time.”

She bit her lip and tried to figure how she could manage to transport the book ahead to her time. Would holding it when she wished herself home be enough to get it there? Or would it disintegrate when she tried to take it beyond that time period?

She sat for the longest time paging through the book. The spells were fascinating to read though

the lists of ingredients were foreign to her as a witch. Most of the herbs and powders mentioned she had never heard of. The thought that perhaps the book would be useless to her even if she managed to transport it ahead to her time grew in her mind.

She glanced at the tall window in the room. It would be hours before Marcus was up and could accompany her back to the coven's castle. The notion that she might be able to find Chandler on her own was growing stronger by the second now that she had the spell book in her possession. She closed its heavy cover and rose from the table, tucking the book under one arm. She would go the castle and find Chandler, then when Marcus awoke, she'd communicate with him telepathically to tell him she was at the castle.

She clutched the book and walked outside the manor, thinking about flying. Her feet rose off the gravel yard of the fortress and she took to the air, the book clutched in one arm. Higher and higher she soared, a smile on her face because of her new ability. For a second she thought about all she had learned to do since knowing Marcus. Aside from learning she could take to the air with just a mere thought, she had learned she could shape shift into a bird and be able to do all the things a bird was capable of like soaring above the trees, and landing on a branch.

As she spied the castle in the distance, she realized a new idea was forming in her mind. She needed to destroy Drucella's viewing pot before she returned to her time era. The thought that perhaps the pot might fall into the hands of someone equally as menacing as Drucella or other members of her coven—if indeed others existed—would not bode well with the inhabitants of Morganford. She wondered which spell within the old book would eliminate the pot. A shiver of fear shot through her insides. Had Drucella used a spell from the book to summon the dark one and thus their communication had come about through the viewing pot?

She felt cold suddenly, her insides chilled at the thought that the dark one may hold too strong a power over the pot and she might not be able to destroy it. God forbid she fall under his power like the coven.

She descended to the ground at the front door of the castle. It was ajar, as she and Marcus had left it earlier. She clutched the book to her chest and pushed the door back on its heavy hinges. The high-pitched squeak set her teeth on edge and echoed throughout the empty main room of the building. She stepped inside, her eyes straining to see through the dim light illuminating the interior.

The fireplace was cold with only ashes spilling from its mouth and the destroyed furniture lay

about the floor. The tallow candles lay scattered and broken amid the remnants of Drucella's meager possessions. She stepped over the debris and made her way to the long hallway leading to the other rooms of the castle. The first act of business would be to destroy the viewing pot, then turn her thoughts to finding the secret room where Marcus' brother was confined.

She entered the spell room and paused near the door. The black pot sat near the hearth. Though it was only an inert object, it somehow seemed foreboding to gaze upon. Perhaps it was the reminder of its service to Drucella and the coven that clung to its façade.

Ronna shook her head and willed the flood of apprehension filling her to dissipate. She needed to be in control when she cast the spell that would shatter the pot into a million pieces. She approached the long table in the room and placed the book on one corner. Flipping through the yellowed pages, she decided to try a spell that required only her mental abilities to break the pot. She made herself ready, taking a deep breath and limbering up her muscles. She aimed a steady gaze at the pot and began to chant, commanding it to crack and splinter, then disintegrate.

Her temples pounded. Her heart raced. Sweat popped out on her forehead.

The pot remained unscathed, sitting in the floor

as though it were impervious to any spell she should cast.

“Damn!”

Realizing that she might have to put a bit more effort into demolishing the pot, she stretched out her right arm and commanded the pot to break into a billion tiny pieces.

The pot defied her efforts.

She screamed the order to disintegrate.

The pot defied her words.

She sighed. Had she practiced her witchcraft, as she probably should have, she might not be having this difficulty now. She laughed in spite of the situation. She had never tried to destroy anything in her life—so why should she be able to now?

She leafed through the spell book, searching for a spell that might possibly work, when the jars of herbs and colored powders caught her attention. She had no idea what any of them were, only that the coven had probably used the ingredients in their spells of menace. An idea took root as she remembered Marcus saying they were a terribly evil coven.

She gathered several of the jars and carried them to the pot. Without thinking of the consequences, she cast the contents of each jar against the side of the pot. Foul smelling clouds of dust and particles billowed upward to obscure the

air in the room. She coughed and waved one hand to clear the air. Returning to the table, she gathered more of the jars and returned to dash the contents against the side of the kettle. The herbs flew against the black sides and fell to the floor, their potency useless against the magical container.

"You waste your time, witch Ronna."

The voice growled, echoing into the empty room and sending icy chills up Ronna's spine. She stumbled back, reeling on her heels, then fell. With wide frightened eyes, she searched the room, expecting that the dark one had risen from the pot and was hovering near the ceiling.

"Your witchcraft is useless against me."

The low growling timbre of the voice filled her with a new jolt of fear. She scrambled up from the floor realizing that the voice still came from the pot. Her first instinct was to race through the door of the room, but she pulled up short when she realized she left the spell book behind. She wanted so badly to take it back home with her. For a moment she considered running out of the castle and never looking back. The dark one, seemingly voicing his presence from within the coven's magic pot, knew she was trying to destroy his vessel.

She turned and gazed through the door at the pot. If she were home and had the pot, she would

merely toss it off the balcony of her loft apartment. It would have to be made of rubber to survive such a fall. A blond brow lifted. The pot was made of clay, thick, aged rock hard, yet clay nonetheless. Clay could not withstand a fall as great as the one she proposed it have.

She stepped back into the room.

"The damn thing is too big for me to pick up. And much too heavy."

She looked upward at the only window in the room. It would be impossible to throw it out the small high space.

She crossed the room and picked up the book. Perhaps her idea of destroying the pot was unrealistic. She hadn't the power to do so. She hated to admit defeat, but it appeared to be staring her in the face. She clutched the book to her chest and decided to cast a revealing spell to locate the secret room where Drucella had hidden Chandler.

"Come here, Ronna."

The voice cut into her thoughts, and at first she thought someone else had joined her in the room—the voice was so clear and held none of the malice it first had—then she cast an eye toward the pot and saw a wisp of white smoke curling from its upper rim. Her stomach knotted in fright. Her hands closed tightly around the binding of the old book.

"Do not fear me. You are the last of the

Morganford coven. You have a multitude of power at your beckoning.”

Her feet felt frozen to the floor. She hadn’t envisioned the pot summoning her and now that it had, she felt at odds over what to do. She had no desire to be caught up in the former coven’s menacing antics, nor did she wish to be drawn into any conversation with the dark one. The thought of conversing with him sent shards of terror traveling through her insides.

“Come. Peer into the pot, Ronna. I will bestow upon you the power of the coven. The world will fear you.”

Ronna bit her lip. Her thoughts were muddled. She tried to conjure up a spell of silence—at least for as long as it took for her to cast the revealing spell and find the room where Chandler slept. She found it difficult to concentrate. She raised one hand and raked her nails through her hair.

Marcus! Marcus! Are you certain you can’t help me? Marcus!

“The vampire sleeps.”

She yelped out loud and scampered to the door of the spell room. The dark one had heard her thoughts—read her mind—as Marcus was capable of doing. For a second her mind rationalized the fact. Marcus was bound by a curse that originated from the dark one—an existence in an undead state. She clamped one hand over her mouth to

keep from screaming. If she aligned herself with Marcus—she would be consorting with the dark one.

Ribbons of fear coiled within her body. The whole business of witchcraft and vampires, of traveling back in time, Marcus—

She felt tears sting her eyes. She raised one hand and clutched the amulet nestled between her breasts. God forgive her! She needed to go home!

“Come and taste the power I offer you, Ronna.”

Everything seemed unsavory just then. She glanced down at the old book she clutched so tightly against her chest and suddenly the whole idea of taking it back home with her nearly made her wretch. She let out a scream of distress and hurled the heavy book toward the pot!

As though in slow motion, the book rose into the air, turning end over end, its yellow dusty pages spilling from its binding as it hurtled toward the black pot. A trail of choking dust arched into the air, then dissipated as the book landed with a loud crack against the upper lip of the pot. It teetered on the black rim for a moment, then toppled inside.

The pot shook, black smoke billowed upward, then the pot splintered and exploded filling the room with chunky black shards that sprang forth and vaulted into the room.

Ronna screamed and fell to the floor as the

explosion shook the very air. Black smoke filled the space, a terrible rancid stench spewed forth, making her cough and gag.

The smoke cleared, and the smell dissipated. Ronna lifted her head and looked around. The pot was gone. And the shards that she had witnessed spraying forth had disappeared as well. She rose slowly to her feet, leery of the disappearance of the pot. Had it really gone? Had it really shattered and exploded when the book fell into it?

CHAPTER 22

When the air cleared, the pot really was gone. Ronna walked about the room and mentally congratulated herself for destroying it. She had, however, lost the spell book in the process. She managed to salvage a few of the pages that had fallen out of it as it hurtled through the air just before colliding with the pot. She picked them up and folded them gently, then stuffed them into a back pocket of her jeans. Whether the spells written on them would have any significance in her life when she returned home, she didn't know. She was aware however that the pages had warmth about them. Her buttock was tingling where they pressed against it.

She turned her full attention to casting the spell that would reveal Chandler's hiding place and put thoughts of the lost book out of her mind. It was growing near sundown and soon Marcus would be waking up and coming to her. She shivered with the thought. A part of her yearned to see him

again, ached to be in his arms, but another part of her being knew of the dire consequences she risked just knowing him.

He was perhaps the most sensual man she had ever met. He had a way of looking at her that turned her bones to mush and when he touched her, she lost all sense of right or wrong. She thought about him more than she should, and hungered for his presence in her life. She shook her head. She felt weary with the ordeal of trying to decide what to do about him. She was too young to be faced with choosing immortality, but on the other hand, what he was offering her was beyond compare. She would always be twenty-eight, never have to see her skin wrinkle and shrivel with old age, never have gray hair –

“But I’d have to bite peoples’ necks and drink their blood. Yuck!”

When she thought of becoming a vampire she couldn’t imagine the consequences of having eternal life. It was one thing to know that her skin would never wrinkle but a completely different bag of tricks to know she would have to live on human blood. The thought made her gag. How could she possibly consider such a thing?

She was suddenly overcome with the desire to leave the medieval time period behind and wish herself home. She clutched the amulet hanging around her neck. All she had to do was think

about going home—to wish she were in her living room—

“God! It’s so tempting. I could pretend none of this ever happened. I could return to my shop and resume my life. I could visit with my friends.”

She halted listing her wild wishes and gazed at the yellow gem peeking out between her fingers. Its magical powers would only take a second to transport her back home. And soon it would. But first, she had to find that room and Marcus’ brother. Then she would go home. She would transport herself back among the living.

Her words pained her. It was horrible to think of Marcus as anything less than the man in her life—but he was a vampire and undead. If she returned home right that moment—would she be able to forget him?

“Who am I kidding?”

Tears burned the back of her eyes. What she was contemplating made her sad. But how could she possibly be as Marcus wanted her to be? She couldn’t stand the thought of drinking blood to survive. And the idea that she would really be more dead than alive—well, it was more than she could understand.

“It’s best if I just disappear while Marcus sleeps.”

Knowing he didn’t have the ability to travel to her time period, she would be safe. She would

never have to worry about meeting him again. And in time, perhaps, she would be able to put the whole affair behind her.

So, her mind made up, she returned to stand in the center of the spell room. Slowly she gazed about the space, silently chanting the revealing spell that would identify the secret room where Drucella had hidden Chandler. At first she saw nothing unusual taking place. The gray stone walls yielded little past a few cobwebs and cold jutting stone, but then a motion began right before her eyes. The air seemed to waver, moving slowly at first, then expanding as it grew wider and taller. The space grew dark, then ceased movement as the mouth of a room appeared. She sucked in a quick breath.

The wall behind where the long table sat revealed the opening to the secret room. Ronna walked slowly toward it, her breath caught up in her throat. Soon she could be leaving the castle and heading back to her era—if she could just summon the courage to find Chandler and awaken him. She took tentative steps in the direction of the room.

Suddenly she halted her feet, Tiana's warning coming to mind again. Had the fairy been warning her of the dark one and her difficulty in trying to destroy the viewing pot? Or had she been warning her about trying to awaken the vampire? She

stared at the dark opening yawning before her.

What if she became trapped inside the room and couldn't get out? She hurried to think of a spell that would keep the portal open. And what of the vampire inside? She should cast a spell to prevent him from attacking her when she woke him.

Her temples pounded. Her nerves quivered in anticipation. Of all the adventures—she would never in a million years dream up one of this magnitude. She laughed suddenly. If she was half the witch she should be—well, she would never have fallen under Marcus' charms and allowed him to get the upper hand over her in the first place.

She shook her head. She was having far too many thoughts of the man.

"He's a vampire, dammit! Stop thinking of him as merely a man. He's far beyond any man I've ever known."

She dashed the thoughts from her mind. The situation called for a cool head. She quickly chanted the spell that would keep the door of the room visible and open and then invoked a protective aura around her self so that when she woke Chandler he would be unable to harm her.

Satisfied that the necessary spells were in place, she conjured up a lantern and stepped through the dark opening in the wall of the room.

The space was cold, dank, and completely dark. She inched forward, sliding her feet along the floor. She held the lantern high above her head, trying to see into the space. The cold in the room immediately penetrated her sweater and jeans, making her shiver. Her brows drew together in contemplation. Why had she found each of the secret rooms so cold? What was Drucella thinking when she conjured up the magical spaces? Surely she hadn't been under the assumption that should anyone manage to open the concealed doorways, they would want to spend any more time inside than absolutely necessary.

She reached a dead end and turned to follow the wall, one hand grazing the cold stone façade. So far she had not encountered anything and was beginning to wonder if she had opened the wrong room. But then, just as she was on the verge of looking for the opening to leave, the light of the lantern fell upon an object.

She paused and drew her light forward, illuminating the object on the floor. Very near the opening of the portal sat a small statue. She set the lantern on the floor and stooped to get a closer look.

"Shit."

The word leapt from her mouth as she looked upon the small object. It was indeed a statue of a grotesque figure but it was no bigger than a foot

high and most definitely too small for a vampire to be hiding in. Puzzlement drew her brows together. It appeared to be the object she had seen in the vision brought by the breaking of Drucella's amulet.

"This can't be."

She picked up the statue and crossed the space to the doorway. Stepping through the portal she immediately closed the room off, taking all risk of anything happening by chance, out of the picture. She carried the statue to the table and sat it down. Backing away, she surveyed the item. It looked like a small, deformed man hunkered down on the top of a turret, its back bent as though it were peering over the edge of where it perched. It didn't look at all like the vampire she imagined she would find.

Further inspection revealed that the figure had no male cock for her to place her hand on to break Drucella's spell.

CHAPTER 23

“Well, it’s obvious that Drucella cast some sort of shrinking spell over Chandler else he would never have fit inside the statue.”

She realized she would have to resort to witchcraft to free the vampire but first she had to figure out how to break the shrinking spell. She bit her lip and gazed about the spell room. There were a few jars of herbs left on the table, and she had three pages from the spell book tucked into the back pocket of her jeans.

“They’re burning my ass anyway.”

She pulled the pages free of her pocket and unfolded them. If there was anything of value on the pages, she needed to know it now. The urge to hurry and leave the castle before risking seeing Marcus again was urgent in her mind. She scanned the pages, unable to decipher most of the ingredients listed in the spells, then decided to toss the pages aside. They were useless to her now and she would probably never be able to

understand the spells or find the ingredients mentioned.

She held the pages in the air and conjured up a flame. Setting fire to the old pages proved futile however when they seemed to reject the blaze. She watched in wonder as the fire licked along the yellowed edges of the pages, its intense heat unable to scorch the paper. After a little while, she realized the pages weren't going to burn and blew out the flames.

She studied them again, this time reading each ingredient listed and trying to understand what the significance of each item meant.

One of the spells made sense. Directions became clear about concealing a magic room from the vision of others. Ronna's jaw dropped. Further reading revealed how to shrink an object.

"Oh come on! This is unreal!"

A blond brow lifted in contemplation.

"What are the odds that these pages would be saved from falling into the viewing pot?"

She realized she was talking to herself. She raised her head and glanced around, hoping no one would answer her foolish statements. Of all the crazy things to happen –

She returned her gaze to the crumpled pages and the scrawled writing. Well, she supposed she should try the spells –

She gathered the ingredients from those

remaining on the table, a bit unnerved that each item seemed to be clearly labeled now. She could have sworn the jars held no identifying labels before. She pushed aside the doubt flooding her mind and began assembling the potion. Within seconds a small powdery substance sat in a clay bowl on the table.

According to the written spell, she should sprinkle the powder on the shrunken object and it would magically grow. She smiled at the notion. The act would be something right out of a Disney movie – only with a PG rating.

“Okay, Chandler, if you’re in there – get ready to come out.”

She raised the bowl over the statue sitting on the table and poured the herbal contents on its head. The powdery substance flew every which way when it hit the unyielding surface, flying into the air and falling about the stooped shoulders.

“Bullshit!”

She tossed the bowl at the table and took a step back. Nothing was happening. Maybe the witch’s potions had lost their potency. She scratched her head, dumbfounded. Why had she wasted so much time reading and mixing? Absolutely nothing was happening.

Disappointed, she lifted the statue from the table, with intentions of inspecting it further, when it suddenly shot out of her hand and sailed

half way across the room before crashing to the floor. She screamed and raced to the door of the room, then halted her feet. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw the statue hadn't broken into smithereens, but was shimmering and glowing. A rainbow of colors passed over its hard clay surface.

Ronna stared, disbelieving.

The statue had landed on the floor on its side. When the rainbow of colors began to shimmer across its surface, it turned, as though lying on its back. The colors swirled, gathering speed as yellow shimmered into red and violet turned into vivid purple. Soon the dominant dominant red color overtook the others and consumed them.

Blood red and pulsing, the aura gathered and grew until the statue was totally consumed. Ronna blinked her eyes, the urge to draw nearer almost overcoming her. She had never seen the rainbow come and go as she was witnessing. The blood red hue grew and swirled, collapsed and regained strength, concealing the statue completely.

She stepped closer—her curiosity peaked. Obviously the spell from the old book had worked after all—or was in the process of working. She inched closer, wanting to see, needing to see that she had used witchcraft from an ancient spell book successfully.

Suddenly she felt a strong gravitational pull on

her body, caught the infraction that propelled her forward. Before she could manage to draw back, she was hurtling forward and crashing into the ruby red swirl. It drew her in, covered her body with its rosy hue.

She felt the urge to scream but at the same time knew it would have no effect on what was happening to her. She reached out one hand and collided with an object that at first was totally foreign – then upon further inspection realized she had her hand on a sturdy chest.

A scream leapt from her throat as she realized the spell had freed Chandler from the statue prison. She pulled her arm back, blinking her eyes against the red blur obscuring her vision.

Hands grabbed her upper arms and pushed her down, pressing her against the cold stone floor. She gasped and found she had no willpower to stop the force overtaking her body. The breath was knocked from her lungs as she hit the hard floor. Within seconds she caught the slight clearing before her eyes to reveal a handsome face hovering just above her own.

“Well, well, well.”

His voice was velvet soft, seductive, alluring. Ronna gazed upward with wide eyes. The face of a very handsome man was mere inches from hers. He gazed down at her with deep-set black eyes. A well-chiseled jaw and high cheekbones

accentuated the fall of ebony hair framing his face. His mouth was wide and well proportioned with a bottom lip slightly fuller than the top. He smiled slowly, one corner of his mouth pulling upward as though mocking slightly.

Get a grip!

"You...must be...Chandler." Her voice was a hoarse croak, straining from her throat in an effort to sound calm.

"You are not Drucella."

He frowned at her, holding her hands above her head and flattening her body with his weight. His chest pressed against her breasts, forcing her round mounds over the cups of her bra and exposing a good bit of cleavage through the neck of her sweater. His eyes didn't miss the sight of the creamy orbs or the surprise on her face as he inspected them.

"Let me up. Get off me and let me up."

"Maybe later."

She was suddenly aware of the erection pressing between her legs. She sucked in a quick breath. She had no desire to be fucked by Marcus' brother.

Fucked or bitten!

"Now. Let me up now. Get off me."

She tried to lift her legs, to turn on her side, to wrench her arms free of his powerful hold, to no avail. She was pinned against the floor and at his

mercy.

"I can't remember when I've been between the legs of such a desirable wench." He rubbed his erection against her crotch.

"You wouldn't remember. You've been under Drucella's spell. Vampires tend to forget things when they're magically imprisoned."

She couldn't be certain, but she thought she saw a flicker of recognition cross his impressive features. It was fleeting and gone in an instant, replaced by a look of lust that weakened her senses.

"I have no memory of being imprisoned." He stared down at her, studying her face as though etching her features on his mind. "You are very beautiful."

"And you're heavy. You must weigh a ton. Get off me!"

He chuckled as though what she had said was funny.

Ronna glared up at him, fighting the arousing feel of his cock rubbing erotically on her crotch. God forbid she should allow her lust to blossom.

"Please." She swallowed down her pride and resorted to begging. A bit more of his erotic rubbing at her crotch and she would be aroused to the point of no return.

He lowered his head, slowly, and took her mouth.

She moaned and closed her eyes. Something inside her told her she had little resistance against this handsome vampire. While she had cast a spell to prevent him from hurting her, she had neglected to cast any spell that would prevent him from seducing her.

His lips were cool against hers. Expertly he pushed his tongue between her lips and thrust inside her mouth. His tongue began a sensuous dance with hers, sending erotic tingles throughout her body.

"No!" She rolled her head to one side, breaking the kiss.

His breath wafted across her throat as he proceeded to nip at her silken skin.

Immediately she sensed he was about to sink his fangs in to her throat and jerked her head back, colliding her cheek against the side of his head. He drew back and gazed down at her.

"When I get ready to feed from you, you'll know it." A slow smile graced his lips.

She stared up at him, trying to access his motives. He wanted sex. His erection was undeniable. His face was pale, yet not overly so. She wondered how he had emerged into the light of day without any of the ill effects Marcus feared. On a whim, she jerked her head toward the window high on the wall.

"It's night time." A shiver of awareness

traveled through her insides. "Marcus will be here any second."

His dark brows raised upward in a show of surprise. "Marcus?"

"Your brother. Now get off me."

"Not before I sate my lust."

He moved so quickly she barely had time to scream. He shifted his body, holding both her hands over her head with one of his, while he fumbled with her jeans, trying to push them from off her hips.

"Ouch! You're hurting me!"

"Why do you wear men's britches?"

"Because I'm from the twenty-first century, you moron! Now get the hell off me!"

He chuckled loudly but he didn't stop trying to rid her of her jeans.

Ronna struggled to free her hands. Why in hell couldn't she think of a spell to make him get off her? Her witchcraft was no good under pressure.

She dashed the thoughts and concentrated on trying to free her hands. His strength was immense, and well it should be. She had learned over the course of knowing Marcus that a vampire had incredible strength when he was awake but totally helpless when he slept. It seemed ironic—so much strength and brutality gathered in one male body yet useful only at certain times.

"Your squirming is delightful."

Ronna stilled. She had not considered that her movements should be arousing to him.

My God! He's hard as a hammer!

But I've only awakened, my love.

Marcus!

Yes, my darling.

She felt his humor.

Is it not a fact that you know of my arousal for you upon my waking? Does that not prove that we are soul mates?

Marcus, help me! Chandler is...

She cleared her mind. How could she tell Marcus that his brother was holding her down with intentions of fucking her senseless?

I sense your distress...and something more, Ronna. You are aroused.

She sucked in a quick breath. Chandler had managed to figure out the zipper of her jeans and pushed them off her hips. All that lay between her moist crotch and his hard needing cock was a thin film of silk panty.

He was barbaric as he tried to bare her crotch. In his hurried fumbling, his knuckles brushed her clitoris and sent her into a gasping fit. She lunged upward, surprising him, and freeing her hands at the same time. She yelled and pushed him backward, causing him to lose his balance and roll on his side.

Ronna scrambled to her knees, fumbling to pull her jeans up over her hips.

*Marcus! Get here now! Chandler is here –
I am moments away, Ronna.*

Chandler caught her around the waist and pulled her back, pushing her down on the floor.

She screamed and tried to get away, only to end up beneath him once more. She scuffled with him as he tried to grab her wrists.

“Stop! You’ll be sorry when Marcus gets here!”

He stilled suddenly and fear shot through Ronna. His eyes were glowing red, like Marcus' did when he became angry or was about to feed. She saw the white tips of fangs poking out of his mouth as he slowly lowered his head toward her.

“Oh please, don’t bite me, Chandler.”

“I feed first – then we rut.”

“Marcus will be mad.”

“Why would Marcus object to my feeding? I am famished.”

“Because...I’m Marcus' woman.”

CHAPTER 24

Chandler paused, pulled back, stared down at her with glowing red eyes.

Ronna hurried to take advantage of his hesitation. She rolled to one side and scrambled to her feet. Racing across the room, she almost collided with Marcus as he appeared in the doorway.

"Marcus!" She rushed in to his arms.

She felt Marcus' uncertainty as he gazed at his brother sitting on the floor.

"Chandler." He hugged Ronna briefly and then released her to cross the room. "You are a free man again." He reached one hand to his brother, helping him to his feet.

Ronna leaned against the wall near the doorway and stared at the two. Had she really confessed to Chandler that she was Marcus' woman? The thought clung to her mind. Under the circumstances, it had been the right words to utter. Apparently there was honor among the

brothers.

Or a little respect for whatever wench he was fucking at the time.

She saw the curious glint in Marcus' eyes as he glanced over his shoulder at her. Surely he would question what had gone on once Chandler had been freed – the curiosity in his black eyes said as much.

Marcus embraced Chandler and the younger brother appeared genuinely happy to see him.

“You must nourish yourself.”

Marcus drew a sharp nail across his wrist and offered his blood to Chandler.

Chandler grabbed the opportunity to feed. He clamped his mouth over the flowing vein and drank.

Ronna turned away, horrified at the sight.

* * * *

Ronna stood across the room and gazed at the gathering. Duella, Jarharis, Chandler and Marcus were having a happy reunion. She looked on, the sight of Chandler drinking blood from his brother's wrist, still very vivid in her mind.

The notion to leave and never think about Marcus again materialized in her brain. She had hoped to be gone before Marcus awoke. She chewed on her lip. The urge to grasp the amulet

and wish herself home grew strong within her. She raised one hand and curled her fingers around the gem. Perhaps she could disappear while Marcus was occupied with seeing his long lost brothers. Maybe he wouldn't miss her for a while. Maybe he wouldn't even remember her after a few years.

She fought the onset of tears. The life of a vampire was too horrific for her taste. She could no more imagine herself surviving on blood than she could envision herself being voted the witch of the century.

As if there is such a thing as witch of the century.

Her silent thought drew Marcus' attention away from his brothers. He turned curious eyes on her standing across the room.

She tried to smile at him, tried to convey the feeling that all was well now that all his brothers had been found and freed, but she fell short of convincing him. The look of puzzlement in his dark eyes said as much.

"My brothers, we are very much in Ronna's debt. She found each of us and freed us from the witch's evil spell." Marcus turned a smiling face on Ronna.

She glanced from one brother to the other, her gaze falling lastly on Chandler. He looked a little sheepish when their eyes met. Well, she told him he would be sorry.

They came toward her all at once, their arms open, smiles on their faces. She felt a rush of warmth surge through her insides. The sincerity on their faces spoke of their gratitude. They were genuinely grateful to her for saving them from the horrible fate bestowed on them by Drucella.

She returned their hugs when they enfolded her in their arms. Chandler appeared the most standoffish of the brothers, perhaps because of his desire to take her sexually before Marcus arrived. She smiled up at him, letting him know that all was forgiven. Had it been under different circumstances – well, he was incredibly handsome – and the size of his cock –

“Enough,” Marcus announced, pulling Ronna from the circle his brothers had formed around her. “She is mine. You are free now to find wenches of your own.” He laughed and was joined in laughter by his brothers.

“What will you do now, Marcus?” Jarharis inquired, his handsome head tipped in Marcus’ direction so as not to miss a word of his brother’s plans. “The manor is not as it once was. Many of the villagers have left the area. There are few to service your wishes. And too, there is no longer a massive army needing leadership into battle.”

Marcus glanced at Ronna. “This lovely witch has stolen my heart.” He embraced her. “I will go where she goes.”

Ronna tried not to show her surprise. She hadn't even thought for a second that Marcus was planning on returning with her to her time period—once his brothers were found. She had foolishly been under the impression that he wanted her to stay at Morganford with him. She lowered her eyes, aware that if she met his gaze, he would read the turbulent message in her eyes.

"My brother," Jarharis said. "Perhaps we all could return together."

Ronna almost choked. Surely he was kidding! How could she justify turning four vampires loose in Brooklyn?

"Life in another century? I would relish it!" Duella said. He smiled broadly, looking from one brother to the other. "But is such a thing possible?"

"Indeed it is," Marcus assured them.

"But how?" Chandler inquired, a puzzled look wreathing his handsome face.

"Ronna is a very powerful witch," Marcus said.

Ronna felt relief travel through her. For a second she feared Marcus was going to reveal her secret.

"She wears the amulet around her neck—like the witches of the coven," Jarharis noted, his voice flat and emotionless.

Ronna's relief was short lived. She darted her gaze toward Jarharis. The studying look on his

face revealed his puzzlement—and his determination to unravel the mystery of his brother's words.

"But unlike the witches of Morganford coven, Ronna is not evil. She is a good witch. Can you not see from her efforts to free all of you?"

"We are all grateful, Marcus. We have expressed our gratitude," Jarharis qualified. "But what is the meaning of the amulet she wears? We removed the talisman from the necks of the other witches—but we do not know their secrets." He poked his hand into his britches pocket and pulled out one of the amulets he had taken off the witch he had killed when he awoke and needed to feed. "How do we unlock their magic?"

All eyes turned to Ronna.

She glanced from one vampire to the other, finally pinning her gaze on Marcus. "I can't answer your queries. I don't even know the full capabilities of the amulet I wear." She raised her hand and grasped her amulet.

"I too have an amulet I took from the neck of a witch," Duella announced. He pulled aside his shirt and revealed the bead hanging around his neck.

Ronna was shocked to see that Duella was wearing the amulet. All her life she had been unable to remove the necklace—how was it that Duella had managed to place it around his neck?

Had it lost its powers?

She gazed at the charm suspended around his neck and nestled in the fine black hair splayed across his chest as a terrible thought occurred to her.

Perhaps the amulet serves only to enhance the relationship between the vampire and the dark one. If that is true, then the dark one allowed Duella to place the amulet around his neck.

The thought made her shiver with dread. Why hadn't she made it a point to see that the amulets were destroyed? Having them remain in existence only gave the dark one more power with which to manipulate unsuspecting people.

No, she couldn't allow them to come back to her century. She couldn't allow them to be free in the time she knew. True, it was an unpredictable time—but to deliberately allow vampires armed with amulets loose in Brooklyn—

I've been called crazy —

"My love," Marcus said. "Now that my brothers have been rescued..." His voice trailed off as he tightened his arm around her waist.

She realized then that he knew of her thought about the amulet and the dark one.

"Perhaps it would be wise to allow them to return to your time with us."

He had voiced the very thing she didn't want to let happen. She lowered her gaze, trying to think

of some way out of the situation.

"Tiana. I forgot about the fairy, Marcus. I left her cooling her heels in a cage at Morganford. I should go release her." Actually, she didn't give a shit about the saucy little imp but if it would buy her some time away from the vampires...

"I'll take care of Tiana," Jarharis announced.

He was gone in an instant, shape shifting and flying from the room.

Ronna felt her stomach tremor. Jarharis had taken any chance she may have had to escape away in the blink of an eye. She sucked in a deep breath and turned her gaze upward to meet Marcus' curious black eyes.

"What is it? You are uneasy about something."

She forced a smile.

"Come. We will talk." He took her hand and led her from the room. Within seconds he lifted her into his arms and took to the air.

Ronna held tightly to his neck and wondered where in the world he was taking her. He had left the grounds of the castle far behind and she could see the dark waters of the ocean beneath their bodies.

Marcus held her and traveled a great distance through the darkness, silently.

Ronna tried to keep her mind blank for fear he would question her reluctance to have his brothers accompany them to her time period. She bit her

lip. Thank God the darkness concealed her face from Marcus' scrutinizing eyes.

The breeze was chilling against her face and just about the time she thought she was frozen, Marcus descended. He released her gently, setting her on the ground as if she were a prized possession.

His tenderness almost made her cry. She had wanted to be gone by the time he awoke, but Chandler's rambunctious behavior—and her madcap antics to destroy the viewing pot—had caused her to run out of time. She felt her temples pound. What could she possibly say to Marcus to make him understand?

She found they had descended to a small island. It was lush with greenery and tall, towering trees that swayed softly in the breeze off the water. So unlike the coldness of winter surrounding Morganford and Drucella's castle. She looked around, marveling, as the moonlight illuminated everything in a beautiful silvery glow.

He clutched her elbow, grabbing her attention away from their surroundings. He pulled her into his arms and lowered his head to claim her mouth.

She released a sigh and kissed him back, twining her arms around his wide shoulders. She leaned into his strong body, forgetting for a time that he was a vampire and she had wanted to flee from him. In some incredible way, his familiarity

was comforting to her senses.

His hands rose to stroke her back, slowly, sensuously. His mouth was gentle on her lips, taking her sweetness with soft kisses that served only to arouse the need within her. She moaned and pressed her breasts into his chest.

He lowered his hand to grasp her buttocks, pressing her abdomen against his crotch. A hard cock was forming between his legs and a breath caught in her throat when she realized he intended to make love to her.

She thought briefly of her decision to leave him, of her selfish need to return to her old life without bothering with him any longer. She felt a sharp pain cut across her insides. She could no more deny him then she could deny the fact that she wanted him to take her right there in the soft green grass of the island.

She snaked her hands up his shirt, feeling his back. The muscles there were long and ropy, taut beneath the covering of smooth skin. He was cool to her touch—a shard of regret stabbed her insides.

He is not mortal.

My sweet, I cannot change what I am. He pulled his mouth from hers and gazed down at her.

His face was only a shadow in the moonlight filtering through the swaying treetops. Though she could not make out his handsome features,

she felt his plight at her thoughts. She fought the onset of tears.

"I don't want to hurt you, Marcus." There was a tremor in her voice. "But we both know why you brought me out here."

He pulled in a long breath and stroked her hair before he released her. "I love you, Ronna."

His words brought tears spilling down her cheeks. She turned her back to him, afraid he might see how his words affected her with his keen eyesight. She bit her lip when he placed his hands on her shoulders and drew her body back against his. His erection was firm against her buttock, making her close her eyes and regret that she had not encouraged him to make love to her.

"I am sorry you can not return my love."

The tone of his voice shot straight to her heart, making her wince. "Marcus, we have only known each other a short time —"

"And yet you cannot come to terms with my being a vampire."

"I'm sorry. I —"

He grabbed her shoulders, turning her around to face him. "I've never loved a woman as I love you, Ronna. When I say that we are soul mates, I mean that you are the only woman in the world for me. We belong together."

His voice was tinged with authority, as though he were trying to make her believe as he did. She

placed one palm against his chest. "Maybe if we had met under different circumstances —"

Why did I say that?

He chuckled and tugged her into his arms. "My sweet Ronna. You are confused. You need time to think things through."

"Yes. You're right. I need time." She rolled her eyes in consternation and released a sigh of relief.

"Then my darling, you shall have time — time to think and consider things."

CHAPTER 25

Marcus sat her down in the courtyard of his estate, gently, her feet touching the gravel while he steadied her with one hand. He had been silent on the flight from the island and Ronna had been unable to sense his mood, though she doubted it was anything but jubilant since she had just as well said she wanted to return home without him or his brothers. She considered their conversation about her taking time to decide if she could ever love him. Her heart pained with the regret that sounded in his voice.

Marcus led the way into the house. Ronna followed a short distance behind. She felt as though she had erected a wall between them, a wall that would forever be standing. She could no more bring herself to admit her love for him than she could understand why she had not returned home the minute she understood that the amulet could transport her there. Her temples throbbed with the ordeal.

Marcus lit a fire in the hearth and took a seat nearby. Ronna glanced at him as she entered the room. He was seated in the straight-armed chair she had tied him in when she thought she could force him to answer her questions. She smiled slightly. She had been silly to think she could control him. In the end, he had allowed her to see that he had been compliant just to placate her.

"Marcus." She crossed the floor to where he sat and took a seat on his knee. She wound one arm around his neck and kissed his temple.

He pulled her against his chest and covered her left breast with his hand. "I may be a vampire, Ronna, but I have all the sexual needs of a mortal man." He moved her suddenly, splaying her across his lap, her legs open to his investigative hands. He cupped her crotch. "I intend to make love to you. Do you want me to take you here, in this damn chair, or do you want me to carry you upstairs to bed?"

His voice was gruff, his erection straining at his crotch.

Ronna released a shiver of longing and leaned in to kiss his mouth.

He moaned and clutched her face in one hand, pressing his lips solidly against hers.

She tasted blood on her tongue as his kiss broke the skin on her lip. She closed her eyes tightly and allowed him to take control.

He lifted her from his lap and stood, then crossed the room to the stairway. With little effort he carried her up the winding stairs and down the long hallway to the bed she slept in. He lowered her gently, his lips still clinging to hers.

Tears flooded her eyes as she realized she had hurt him and for her own selfish reasons. What did it matter that he was a vampire? He held all the emotions of a man—mortal or immortal. He could make love to her and fulfill every one of her expectations. He was everything she wanted in a man—and more.

Marcus, please forgive me.

Shhhh. There is nothing to forgive.

He removed her clothing so quickly that she barely had time to realize she was naked. He joined her on the bed, his body big and pressing against hers as if he would never let her go. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and drove her mouth against his.

All her life she had been searching for something. Foolishly she had thought it was family. As she kissed Marcus and felt his love for her seep into every pore of her body, she realized with wonderment that he was her every fulfilling desire.

She tore her mouth from his, choking back a sob. “I’ve been wrong, Marcus. I’ve been so wrong. I do love you—with all my heart. And I

want us to be together — forever.”

She felt lightheaded as the words left her mouth.

He kissed her so hard, driving her head against the bed with such force that she thought her neck would snap. He wound his arms tightly around her body and shoved his hard erection inside her.

She gasped and clutched his buttocks, digging her nails into the firm flesh. She arched her back and opened herself up as he began to thrust. He bowed his head and kissed her mouth, gently but with a possessiveness that went straight to her heart. A tear squeezed out the corner of her eye and rolled down her cheek.

He thrust into her, driving home the promise of love everlasting. As she neared climax, she arched her throat, offering herself to him.

“Are you sure, Ronna? Are you sure you want me to take your blood?”

“I’m sure, Marcus. Make me like you. Make me immortal.”

He licked her throat, tasting her velvet flesh. “I will stay with you always, my love. I will never leave you. You will always be my woman. I promise you my undying devotion.”

“Bite me already, Marcus!”

He chuckled and lowered his head to her throat.

His fangs raked along her vein, then sank in,

drawing forth the red flow. He drank.

Ronna drew in a quick breath at the initial bite, the sting she had experienced only twice before only moments before she began to climax. She yelled her delight and dug her nails into his buttocks as he thrust deeply into her cavity. The orgasm came full bloom as the exquisite hurt of Marcus' bite sent her over the edge.

* * * *

She was aware that there were others in the bedchamber without opening her eyes. She felt tired and weak, strained like never before. She labored to open her eyes, a million questions coming to her mind. The last she remembered she had given in to Marcus and let him bite her.

Her eyes jerked open suddenly.

"Son-of-a-bitch!"

"Such a mouth you have, my sweet."

She saw Marcus standing by the bed. Her eyes were bleary. Her head ached. Her body felt as though it had been run over by a truck.

"What happened?"

He sat on the side of the bed. He pushed a pillow beneath her head, raising her up a bit. He drew a sharp nail across his wrist, bringing forth blood. He pressed his wrist against her lips. "Drink, Ronna."

She gazed upward at Marcus as her mouth settled greedily over his vein. She drank, feeling the blood gush into her body and her strength gradually return. She closed her eyes and savored the barrage of new feelings racing through her insides. It felt so right—to drink blood.

“What happened?”

“You died.”

His words brought her upright in the bed, her eyes wide open. “You mean I’m a vampire now?”

“Full fledged.”

“Oh shit!”

Movement at the end of the room grabbed her attention. She blinked bleary eyes at Jarharis and Duella and Chandler. Suddenly she realized she was naked and hurried to pull a blanket over her breasts.

“Why are they here?”

The vampires rose from their seats and came to the bed. They stood at the foot looking at Ronna.

“We’re ready to go with you to the future—now that you are one of us.” Jarharis smiled at her, his eyes washing over her bare arms and shoulders. “You drank from each of us so I suppose that makes us kin.”

She jerked her gaze to Marcus.

Is that his way of saying that I married the whole family?

We are all one family now, my sweet. We will

protect each other and console each other –

And fuck each other!

He shook his head. *The only one who will fuck you will be me.*

So we aren't going to share everything? She smiled slightly, giving Marcus a wink. For an instant she recalled the hard cock Chandler forced against her crotch after she awakened him.

"How do you feel?"

"Much better." She stretched her arms above her head, feeling her body renewed in a way she had never experienced. *"Will I have to sleep during the day – like you and your brothers?"*

Marcus shrugged his shoulders. *"That will be for you to find out. You have witch's powers and now you are a vampire with vampire powers. I can only guess at your abilities."*

This might not be so bad.

She waved one hand and the vampires turned their backs. She quickly rose from the bed and dressed. A series of thoughts zinged through her mind. She was anxious to try out her new powers—just as soon as she got back to the twenty-first century. And, now that she was one of the Morganford vampires, she supposed she had to take the brothers ahead to her time.

She clutched the amulet around her neck and gathered the brothers around her. *"I want each of you to promise me that you will stay out of*

trouble.”

Jarharis grinned and nodded.

Ronna glimpsed the mischievous look in his dark eyes. Like hell he would stay out of trouble. There wouldn't be a woman safe in all of Brooklyn when that handsome devil arrived.

Duella bowed to her and nodded his head.

She studied him for a second. He was the most serious of the lot. Or at least he hadn't tried to seduce her yet. But he was a hunk like his brothers. No telling what he would do when he arrived in Brooklyn.

Chandler stared at her, a grin spanning his face.

“You remind me of the Cheshire cat.”

“Who?”

“Never mind. I can tell by the way you grin at me that you are going to be the troublemaker.” She shook her head and smiled. “Marcus, it will be up to you to keep them in line.”

“I'll do my best, my love.”

She didn't really know how to go about getting them all ahead in time at once, but she supposed that if they all held hands...

The room spun, a rainbow of colors passed before her eyes, the noise of thunder pierced her ears. She felt the pull of the universe as it opened and drew them into its swirling vortex...

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I began writing freelance almost twenty years ago and eventually my short stories became longer. The characters seemed to take over and draw their stories out. I first submitted a novella length story to Extasy Books in 2003 and it was accepted. That was Captive Heart, the historical romance now on the site. I have eight titles with Extasy Books. New ideas come to mind every day and some of them find their way on the computer screen. When I'm not writing, I enjoy traveling with my husband Dave.