



Taking Eve

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Chapter One

Eve Flynn was breathtaking to behold. She was a lethal predator on the hunt. The vampire she fought didn't stand a chance against her.

Lazarus never tired of watching her, especially when she was killing. She was violence in motion. She used her opponent's strength and speed against him by using his momentum to flip him over her shoulder. She feinted left and then struck from the right. Eve was the star of a beautiful but deadly little ballet.

Lazarus was the most powerful vampire in Full Moon Bay. While it was a relatively small Ohio town, Full Moon Bay had its share of supernatural creatures. Lazarus had given Eve a small dose of his vampiric blood two months ago in order to save her life. While Eve was human, more or less, she possessed an increased predatory instinct and heightened senses. Although she acknowledged these new powers, she refused to believe that she had changed on a fundamental level. Because of his blood, she was a much more lethal vigilante than ever. It made Lazarus proud.

What a fighter she was! By all rights, he should have been offended, watching her slaughter his brethren, but he was transfixed by the sight of her. He was pleased with the way she handled herself. Eve belonged to him. She was *his* Consort. A Consort was a rather formal way of saying a human being that shared her or his master's blood and had an intimate association with the vampire. It was a sacred union that usually involved blood and sex. Soon, he would make their relationship more permanent. Lazarus was waiting for the right time to sire her, and she'd walk the night at his side until the end of days.

Lazarus watched as Eve pounced on the vampire, tangling her arms and legs with his and bringing him down to earth. They struggled for a while, and the vampire flailed about, but she was the one who came out on top.

Eve growled at the minion, low in her throat, a dangerous and almost animalistic sound. Lazarus noted that her little sassy quips seemed to fail her in those last moments--then she lived only for the kill. Lazarus could relate. Eve sliced the vampire's head off, and he vanished beneath her, leaving her alone on the damp grass. She rolled over on her back, breathing heavily, her skin slicked with sweat. She looked like a woman in the throes of sexual frustration.

Lazarus recognized it for what it was--a letdown. She had grown bloodthirsty. There was no satiation in the kill without drinking. Just like there was no pleasure in sex without an orgasm.

She needed a release. He would be only too happy to oblige her.

* * * *

Eve's head turned and she spotted him, sensed *him*.

They were yards away, yet Eve's breath caught. Eve could see him standing alone beneath a tree. He had an imposing presence, like some fierce pagan god come to life.

His blond hair was highlighted by the glow of the moon, giving him an otherworldly air.

She felt like Lazarus had physically touched her with his gaze. The street was deserted save for them.

Lazarus was wearing a pair of faded blue jeans and a black button-down shirt. It was June and the nights were still cool in Ohio. The clothes hugged his tall frame in all the right places. He was six and half feet tall and rippled with muscle. It gave her a little thrill, knowing that she was intimately familiar with the body beneath those clothes.

She knew that Lazarus had been watching her the whole time. His blue eyes were fastened on her with a yearning so powerful that it startled her. Being the focus of that much desire made her dizzy, made her feel powerful and weak at the same time.

Eve's long dark hair was wrapped up in a neat bun at the nape of her neck. She wore her quintessential boot-cut jeans and a black T-shirt with a picture of Bela Lugosi on the front. It said *I like men with bite*.

"Are you going to stand there all night and stalk me, or are you going to say hello?" Eve called.

"I suppose I'll say hello." In a flash, he'd closed the distance between them. "While I abhor your wardrobe, I must admit that you are feast for the eyes tonight."

"Hi, yourself." Eve pulled herself to her feet. She turned her leg to stare down at the bottom of her boot. "Eww, I got some mushroom guts on me." She ran the bottom of her boot over the dew-dampened grass. "I accidentally stepped on one when the vampire rushed me."

"You spend your evenings hunting down vampires, and yet you're worried about mushrooms?" Lazarus asked, cocking his head to the side.

Eve shrugged. "Mushrooms kind of freak me out. They're not vegetables. They're not really a food at all. They're fungus. They smell all musty and dirty, too."

"As scintillating as this is, I didn't come here to discuss fungus. I came here to observe you. Your powers are growing, Eve. You were able to detect me."

"Maybe." Eve rolled her eyes. "Or maybe I was downwind. I could smell your cologne on the air." Her lips twitched. "Old Spice, right?"

"Was that a crack about my age?" Lazarus asked.

"My bad. When you were human, they didn't even have cologne. I guess you're wearing No Spice." *Of course, that meant he naturally smelled that good. Damn.*

"Yet another joke at my expense. I must have hit a sensitive topic. Does talking about your newfound powers upset you?"

Busted. He'd found her out. She had a tendency to attack when she felt vulnerable, and talking about power gained through vampire blood qualified. She had noticed that she had increased speed and stamina. She also noticed that she was more predatory since she'd been dosed with his blood, but she hated talking, or even thinking about it. A lot.

"I don't really have all that much power--other than intelligence. I have to say that minions aren't really all that smart. You guys should get a better recruitment strategy. People who walk around by themselves at night probably aren't that smart to begin with."

Lazarus threw back his head and laughed. "Perhaps you are just angrier than

usual.” His blue eyes twinkled with mischief. “Is my sense of smell off? I didn’t think you were on your courses.”

Her brow furrowed. “Courses? I’m not taking classes.” Understanding dawned. “Ew! That’s gross! You can actually smell--that? You know, when women menstruate.”

“I’m a vampire, pet, of course I can scent blood. That’s what we do.” He waggled his eyebrows. “Although tampons usually decrease the scent, but I can still--”

“Yuck. We are sooo done with this topic.”

“I meant to congratulate you, anyway. You were amazing out there. You had the upper hand in that fight,” he praised.

“Oh yeah, I kicked his ass! Did you see how I flipped him over like that?”

Lazarus nodded. “Very impressive.”

He looked like a proud teacher smiling at a prized pupil. That was disturbing. Eve tried to never let herself get too comfortable with him. While they were involved, she could never completely trust him. He was a vampire and had his own agenda. He didn’t abide by human rules. Even now, he stalked her--watched her with his unblinking eyes. She was never quite sure what she saw in his gaze. Was it hunger for her body? Hunger for her blood?

“Wait, you’re actually complimenting me on how I kill your friends?”

“They’re my minions, not my friends. Master vampires don’t associate with them. We order them around. Perhaps you are doing me a favor of sorts? If my minions are stupid enough to confront you, perhaps they deserve their fate.”

“Good enough to kill, but not good enough to talk to, huh?”

“I told you, we don’t kill them. We bring them over. Vampires can’t be made unwillingly. They all agree to it.”

“Is death the alternative?” Eve asked. It was a sore subject with her.

“I’ve ordered my vampires not to kill, Eve. You know that.”

“No, assaulting people for blood is much better. You deserve an award for sainthood,” she said sarcastically.

“You haven’t felt a vampire’s true bite. It is ecstasy beyond compare,” Lazarus said thickly. She could sense the signs of his arousal, the way his eyes dilated, the way his hands fisted at his sides. “Your precious human beings aren’t hurt and find the experience pleasurable. What more do you ask?”

Eve wanted him to feed off of animal blood. No, she wanted him to be human. Things would be so much easier if he was, but wishing was useless. Eve didn’t live in a world of absolute right and wrong. Everything was gray. For now, everyone was safe in town. She’d pick her battles and worry later on down the road. *Yup, Denial. Party of One.* “Nothing, I guess.”

“Perhaps I can cheer you up. Can I interest you in a little recreation after your kill?” Lazarus asked.

Eve’s breath caught. “What kind of recreation?”

“I think you already know the answer to that question, pet.” He yanked her closer, pulling her in against his body.

Eve moaned at the contact. Of course, it only made her want more. She wanted to feel his bare skin against her own.

Lazarus's mouth swooped down to capture hers. The kiss was all eager heat and anticipation. They rubbed against each other, fueling their mutual longing. With a growl he cupped her ass, kneading her cheeks as he wrapped her legs around his waist. She could feel his cock grow to monumental proportions.

She wanted him inside her. Now. "Please," she entreated. "I need you. Let's go back to my place."

"Too far away," Lazarus mumbled. He reached between their bodies and rubbed her sex. "That's why I'm going to fuck you. Right here. Right now."

"What?" she asked dazedly. She tilted her head back as Lazarus kissed and licked a path down her neck. Lazarus set her down on top of cemetery statuary. She got the vague impression that it was shaped like a book, a bible. He started to undo her jeans.

They had made out in cemeteries before, as well as done some heavy petting, but she didn't want to have sex in one. It all seemed so sordid.

"It's time," he growled.

"Wait!" Eve said. She shook her head, trying to clear the fog. "We can't have sex in a cemetery."

"Yes, we can." Lazarus got her zipper halfway down.

She placed her hand over his. "No."

He closed his eyes, obviously struggling to regain control. His hand shook from the force of his desire. "Eve, I need you right now."

"I can't do this. We're not animals."

His jaw clenched. "Are you sure about that?"

"I know that I'm not an animal. I'm not sure about you," she said quietly.

She could see pain in his eyes, before he quickly covered it. He bit his lower lip, fighting to regain control of his raging body.

Eve cleared her throat and put her clothing to rights. She gave a shaky laugh, trying to restore the peace between them. "This conversation is going downhill. First the tampon talk and then necrophilia."

Thankfully, he seemed to play along, but she got the impression that she had really hurt him. "I'm undead, not dead. Unless you suddenly have an undiscovered interest in--"

Eve shook her head. "Enough of that! Sex is the last thing on my mind after that. I may need therapy after that last remark."

"Well, if you won't allow me to seduce you, at least you could let me buy you some breakfast."

Eve had a weakness for breakfast food, especially after she did rounds at night. It was comfort food, and she usually needed some comfort after a hard day's night in the cemetery. "Like a date?"

"Yes, a date."

"But that is so--we are in a relationship." She made little air quotes when she used the 'r' word. "Before long we'll be picking out China patterns."

Lazarus thought it was funny how she made relationship sound like a four letter word. "I think we can have breakfast without falling madly in love."

While Lazarus wasn't in love with her, he was concerned about her. He genuinely

liked her. Eve didn't take good care of herself. She didn't sleep very much, and she seldom allowed herself to skip a night patrolling. Eve didn't share her emotions very well either, preferring to keep her feelings to herself.

"I don't know...."

"It's only breakfast. It's not dinner and dancing by candlelight," Lazarus cajoled.

"I suppose it's not romantic. Unless it's breakfast in bed or something. Wait a minute, I've seen you drink, but do you eat? Besides blood, that is."

"I've been known to eat now and then." Lazarus enjoyed the taste of food, even though it didn't nourish him.

"Okay, we'll get some pancakes then. Let's go. I know a place in town that's still open." She turned to walk in the direction of the restaurant.

"I know this amazing restaurant in Cleveland, just off the beaten. It's open all night and they make the most wonderful goose egg omelets filled with shrimp, crab, and a pinch of--"

"I have to get up really early for work tomorrow. I don't want to drive all the way into the city and back again. Let's keep it local, okay?"

There was only one place open all night in Full Moon Bay. "No, you mean we're going *there*?"

"Oh, yes, we are. I've made up my mind. Let's get a move on!" She took off again.

He had a grin on his face, stretching from ear to ear. He tried to put his arm around her.

"Hey, what do you think you're doing?" She moved far away.

"I should think that was obvious," Lazarus said. "Come here."

"No! We agreed that this wasn't a date. Walking arm in arm is for couples who are in love. We're not in love, we're in lust." Her lips twitched. "We're not a couple. We just, you know, *couple*."

"Yes, aren't you droll?" Lazarus attempted to put his arm around her once more. "Come here."

Eve dodged him and kept walking. "Weren't you the one who was all *I'm such a villain. I want to screw you but I don't want to date you*," she mocked, doing an impromptu Lazarus imitation. "Now you're trying to cuddle with me? Vampires don't cuddle."

"You are making too much of this."

"No, *you* are. We agreed that this isn't a date. We're just two people eating together."

"Yes, of course, it's not a date. We're just two people who are sexually involved who are eating together," Lazarus said sarcastically. "That's not a date in anyone's book."

Eve scowled as she pushed past him. "I'm going for the pancakes. Not you."

* * * *

"I love *Pancake World*! There are so many choices! Hmm, I either want chocolate chip pancakes or apple cinnamon ones. They both taste so good." Eve looked over at him. "What are you getting?"

"Coffee," Lazarus said as he crossed his arms over his chest. "This beastly place doesn't even serve tea that isn't in a bag."

"Didn't you say you liked to eat?" Eve asked skeptically.

"I do. Judging by the chipped linoleum floors and the Formica countertops, I doubt this place meets my standards. When I suggested breakfast, I hoped to dine in a more reputable establishment."

"There are fancy restaurants open all night?"

"You would be surprised. Many establishments cater to the undead, and those that slay them. But if you don't want to go to Cleveland, why don't you allow me to prepare a meal for you? Do you like Eggs Benedict?"

Eve was a little hurt that he didn't like *Pancake World*. She thought it had charm. "Oh, this place is gross, but an all-night blood party is the height of sophistication?" She sighed. "You can be such a snob sometimes."

"You didn't answer my question."

She scrunched up her nose. "Eggs are evil. They're all wiggly and filled with yucky, runny yellow goo. I haven't eaten once since I was a child."

"That's because you haven't had my eggs."

"Nope, I'm having pancakes. Deal with it." She sat back in the booth.

"You have a lot of food issues."

"Yep," she agreed happily.

"Did anyone ever tell you that you're a pain in the neck?" Lazarus said with a straight face.

"I'm sure you've heard that, too. Only I don't draw blood." She looked at him over the top of her menu. "I can't believe we're here. It's so, well, normal."

Lazarus picked up his plastic-encased menu by the very edge and tossed it aside. He surreptitiously wiped his palms on his jeans. "What do you mean?"

"You shouldn't be at a little diner eating breakfast. You're a vampire. You should be lurking in the shadows or plotting to kill someone, not sitting here at a table."

The waitress came over with her little pad ready. "Hey, Eve! Where's Nicholas?"

"*Bloody Nicholas*," Lazarus muttered under his breath.

"Oh, he's probably at his new boyfriend's house," Eve said with a smile. "I'll tell him you asked, Cinnamon. He'll be sorry he missed you." The name suited her. She was tall with fiery red hair and a spicy sense of humor, too. Cinnamon was their favorite waitress at the diner.

"And who's this?" Cinnamon asked, looking Lazarus up and down. "He's a cutie."

"Uh, he's just my friend," Eve said quickly.

"Ah, so he's a Nicholas type of friend," Cinnamon said sagely.

"I can assure you that is not the case, madam," Lazarus corrected. "Are you going to question her about her personal life or are you going to take our order anytime soon?"

"Sure." Cinnamon made a face. "What can I get you folks?"

"I'll h--"

"I shall order for you," Lazarus interjected.

"No, you won't. Chocolate chip pancakes and coffee, please." She gave Lazarus a

dirty look. "I don't live in the 1950's."

"Coffee for me," Lazarus snapped.

The waitress gave Eve a meaningful look before she walked away. It was clear that she didn't approve of Lazarus.

"Could you have been more rude?" Eve snapped.

He smirked. "With the time constraints I had? No, I don't think so."

She slouched down in her seat and partially covered her face with her hand. "I don't know if I can show my face here again after you acted like a jerk. She's probably going to spit in your coffee."

"What?" Lazarus asked incredulously.

"Haven't you ever heard about that? Don't be rude to your waiter or waitress because they will spit in your food."

"I've never heard of such a thing," Lazarus said. "This is such a common place."

"Hey! I like it."

Lazarus's jaw tightened. "So this is *your* restaurant, huh?" He looked around the room as though he stood ankle-deep in a cesspool.

She frowned. "What? No, I don't own it or anything." She was deliberately being obtuse.

"You share this restaurant with this Nicholas," he spat.

Eve was bewildered by his anger. "Actually, we share it with the town."

He raised an eyebrow in an extremely irritating, aristocratic way.

"Okay, I get it. You're not happy. Enough already."

"I asked you a question," Lazarus reminded her.

"It was more of a statement, but I'll play anyway. Actually, *our* place is the Apropos Café. We go there for dinner all the time, but we like this place, too. Besides, Nicholas is just my friend. The only thing we share is food."

"And nothing more? All you bloody talk about is Nicholas. Why don't I believe you?"

"Because you evidently had a crazy pill with your blood. Will you calm down and lower your voice?" Eve said, glancing around self-consciously. A few of the truckers gave them looks but no one approached the table. "People are starting to stare."

"I don't give a bloody damn. Explain yourself," Lazarus growled in a slightly lower tone.

"I don't have to explain myself to you. He's just my friend."

"But you come here with him. You share his meals."

"Yes, on Sundays. We get pancakes and the paper, so we can read it together. Our favorite section is entertainment. Do you want to know how many sugars he puts in his coffee?"

He had a mutinous expression on his face.

"Now, will you shut up about him? You have nothing to do with Nicholas and what we do together or how we spend our time."

"I see," he said tightly. "And what else do you two do?"

Eve blew out a breath. She wasn't getting out of this without more details.

"Actually, we're mean. We talk about celebrities and people we know. We go to dinner

and the movies a lot and then rip the actors and directors to shreds afterwards. Metaphorically, of course.”

She could see his fangs elongate. “You are intimate with this man. He shares your life.”

“Well, here’s your coffee.” Cinnamon set the mugs down. She smiled at Eve and looked at Lazarus like he was something that she had found floating at the bottom of a drain.

After she walked away, Eve answered his accusation. “Yes, we’re intimate, like friends are intimate but there’s no *intimacy*--not the kind you are implying at least. He’s gay.”

“Emotional intimacy is just as important as sexual intimacy, maybe even more important. Just because you aren’t sleeping with him, doesn’t mean that he isn’t your boyfriend.”

“He is my boyfriend. My *gay* boyfriend!” Eve hissed.

“You love *him*!” Lazarus bellowed.

Everyone stopped eating and turned to look at both of them. Even the wait staff paused to stare at them. “Yes, I do love pancakes! Yum!” she said loudly. Everyone hastily turned away. She kicked him in the shin. “Will you shut up or at least lower your voice?”

“You love him,” Lazarus repeated stubbornly, although his tone had lowered to a fierce whisper.

“Yes, I love him. He’s my *friend*. We talk, we laugh, we eat dinner, but there is *no sex*. You have no reason to be jealous. Okay?”

“I am not jealous,” Lazarus said stubbornly. “I don’t give a bloody damn what you do when you’re not with me. I’m merely making a point.”

“Riiiiight,” Eve said snidely. “Tell me another one.”

“I’m merely saying that he is your boyfriend for all intents and purposes,” Lazarus insisted. “You two are romantic. You go on dates.”

“If he were a female friend, would you say the same thing?” Eve countered.

Lazarus looked down into the murky depths of his coffee as if the cup contained all the answers he was looking for. “I doubt you would act this way with another woman,” he said quietly.

Eve was troubled by that assessment. She didn’t think she was *too* close to Nicholas, but he did have a point. They were intimate, in a way. “We agreed to a physical relationship, Lazarus. Nothing more. Why do you even care if I am close to Nicholas?”

“I don’t.”

“Good. Drink your saliva coffee.”

* * * *

Eve spent the next morning going through packing slips at her bookstore, Flynn’s Books. She catalogued the merchandise and smiled after she balanced the books. The store was doing pretty well. Business would pick up even more in the summer as people came in for the hot summer reads and they had more free time on their hands.

While she busied herself going through boxes, her cat, Magic, jumped in and out of them. Magic was a stray she’d taken in shortly after her parents’ deaths. Eve wished

she had some sort of connection to them still, other than a scrappy little cat. She'd never really gotten over their loss. They had been murdered by vampires, which had set Eve on her quest to make Full Moon Bay safe from the undead population. She still missed them horribly, especially when holidays came or birthdays came up. That was one of the things she liked about the summer months--no family holidays.

Eve wondered what they would say if they knew she was dating a vampire. She couldn't imagine James and Susan Flynn being happy about that. She was literally sleeping with the enemy. Eve had only been hunting evil things a few months, but she hoped to run across the vampire that had killed her parents.

It was an obsession with her. She was haunted by images from the fateful day that she couldn't get out of her mind. She could still see them lying on the floor, arms clutching each other, throats ripped out. There had been so much blood.

Eve grimly began shelving books. Nothing would ever bring them back, but she would punish the vampires responsible. Eve owed her parents at least that much.

It was only a matter of time before she caught up to them.

* * * *

That evening, Eve slid into the booth across from Nicholas. They had both ordered coffee drinks. Nicholas had a thing for lattes, and Eve's drink of choice was a mocha because the combination of coffee and chocolate was irresistible.

Eve's brow furrowed as she looked at her friend. "You look depressed. What's wrong?"

"I'm jealous and I hate it."

"Of what? Of me?"

"Yes, you."

Eve blew on her mocha. The *Kool Beanz* staff always made them a little too hot. "You are delusional. There's no reason on earth that you should envy me. Lazarus is a great big pain in the neck, no the ass. That's it! He is an ass pain." "No, I'm not delusional. You're dating an undead hottie, and I'm stuck with ordinary, everyday men." He took a sip of his latte. "By the way, when am I going to meet him?"

"How about never? I don't think that's such a good idea. Oh, and for the record? You aren't missing anything. Vampires are more trouble than they're worth."

"That isn't fair. I mean, he's an actual long-term boyfriend. The best friend is entitled to a meeting to size the guy up. I don't want you giving your heart to some bastard who will only break it."

Eve laughed. "Believe me, the only kind of heart Lazarus would try to steal from me is the one in my chest. We're fucking. There's no love involved."

Nicholas's eyes rounded. "You said the 'f' word in relation to sex! I'm happy and shocked at the same time." He gave her a little round of applause.

Eve blushed. "I know, I swore I'd never do that, but then I couldn't help myself." She bit her lower lip. "If I were smart, I'd break up with him."

"I don't know about that. You seem happy with Lazarus. Are you sure you aren't falling for him?" Nicholas watched her carefully.

"It's pretty much a guarantee. He's a vampire, and he's got a century or two on me. I don't even know that much about his past--he's very mysterious about it all.

Besides, we have *nothing* in common.”

“Other than the mind-blowing sex?” Nicholas asked, flashing a smile.

“You’re not helping!” She licked some whipped cream from her finger. “I like sleeping with him, but I don’t *feel* anything for him.”

“Liar, liar, p--”

“Nicholas!”

“Pants on fire.”

Eve scowled at him.

“I didn’t even substitute the word I wanted to for pants. See? I’m on my very best behavior.”

“I doubt it. You’ve never been on your best behavior.”

Nicholas gave her a sly smile. “Did I say anything when you licked the whipped cream?”

“No, but you were thinking about teasing me. That’s nasty.” Nicholas was a world champion when it came to shocking her. While the two made a great deal of sexual innuendos, there was nothing even remotely sexual about their relationship.

“Oh, please. You should be so lucky. I’m hot.”

Eve rolled her eyes. “Speaking of, I’ve got something that’s going to blow your mind.” She shared Lazarus’s revelations with him.

“Is he high? We’re not intimate!”

“Not in the sweaty sex sense of the term, but he might have a point. We are close.”

Nicholas’s eyes danced. “Yeah, we’re close, but no cigar, Lewinsky. We won’t be having any sort of sex until you grow a penis.”

“Or until you get drunk and let your inner lech out again.”

“That happened one time,” Nicholas said, waving his index finger. “And it was in college so it didn’t really count. I was experimenting! Besides I only propositioned you. There was no actual touching involved.”

Eve giggled. She loved teasing him about that night. They’d gotten very drunk and had stumbled back to his dorm room. After a round of Jell-O shots, they’d collapsed on Nicholas’s bed. They were snuggled up together, and he’d drunkenly mumbled something in her ear about having oral sex. “You asked if I wanted to lick something of yours. There was no naughty touching.”

“It was dark, and you were wearing jeans and a ball cap.”

“I do admit that I was dressed boyish that day, too.”

“Thank you! Besides, after I’ve had a few, everything starts to look good.”

Nicholas’ dark brown eyes were filled with mischief.

“Oh, that’s very flattering.” She paused. “Actually, that’s worse for you. Are you saying that you are a man whore when you’re drunk?”

Nicholas was laughing so hard that tears were coming from his eyes. “No! I’m just not that picky.”

Eve had gotten bolder since experimenting with Lazarus. Besides, teasing Nicholas was safe. It was *never* going anywhere. “You would have liked it. I can do things with my tongue you haven’t read about, let alone felt,” Eve purred in the voice that

made Lazarus lose it.

Nicholas's jaw dropped. "Girl, you are naughty, aren't you?"

She sighed with satisfaction. Shocking him had gotten easier lately. "Say what you want, but I might have rocked your world that night. I might have sent you on the path to the straight and narrow."

He wiped his eyes. "Oh, honey, you got me that time. You are getting better at the Shock-Me Game. We're going to have to up the ante."

Eve gave a little mock bow. "Thank you very much."

Nicholas frowned. "I guess he has a point though. You and I are very close. I'm the man in your life and you're the ... man in mine. We tell each other everything. It would be hard to break into our little circle from the outside."

"Maybe you're right. You and I are sort of Will and Grace-ish," Eve agreed. "That's a sobering thought, huh?"

"We are, but I don't think it's just us. Face it, girl, he's the jealous type. Apparently, he's jealous of your very manly, charming, and wildly handsome, but very gay boyfriend. And why shouldn't he be?" Nicholas smoothed back his dark brown hair.

She had to admit that Nicholas was handsome, but she'd never felt even remotely attracted to him. "It's probably some weird macho vampire thing." She shook her head. "That's not everything either."

"Like what?" he asked, putting a hand over hers. "Is everything okay?"

"Nothing's wrong, it's just that he's trying to do things to me," she whispered. "Different things."

"What kind of things? You know I love details!"

She leaned forward and whispered, "Last night, he wanted to put his arm around me."

"You're right, that *is* kinky. What a freak!" He dissolved into laughter. "Lord, girl, I thought it was going to be juicy and you give me cuddling."

"Sarcasm off," she said, miming turning a switch. "Okay? He and I decided that we were strictly sex friends. Now, he wants to change the rules on me."

"There are worse things that could happen to you."

"No, there aren't."

"Be careful what you wish for," Nicholas warned.

"New topic. How's your dating life?"

"Excellent, Miss Avoidance. I've been seeing this guy I met at the mall. Michael is an athletic type, you know. Handsome, tanned, toned, and speaks very few words."

"Not to be the pessimist, but you don't exercise." Eve leaned against the wall and sat longwise in the booth.

"Oh, honey, he does enough for both of us. I just want to be his towel boy."

She grinned. "Hello! I'm interested again. So, did you two, er, hit a home run?"

"That's a new euphuism, but I like it. Oh, yes, we did. Several times."

"Sounds wonderful. I'm really happy for you, especially after that whole married man thing. You deserve a little happiness."

"It was better than wonderful. He's all heat and energy, and let's just say that the toned body is capable of stuff I hadn't even dreamed of." Nicholas fanned himself.

Eve had a dreamy expression, thinking of the delightful decadent things she'd done with Lazarus. "Yeah, I know what that's like."

Nicholas frowned. "You're up and then you're down. You're in heat, and then you're the ice queen. What the hell?"

"I don't know! I'm all over the place. That's the problem, I guess."

"You should be happy and in love and--what do you call it?--nesting! You should be picking out China patterns and cooing over baby furniture."

Eve slapped the table. "I'm not going to marry him!"

Nicholas pulled back, clutching his coffee. "Okay, no marriage for you. Calm down."

"I'm sorry!" She put her head in her hands. "I just wish I could stop it, somehow. It's kind of pervy, I know. He makes me all hot and bothered, and sometimes I don't even feel like I'm in the driver's seat of life. It's like he's pulling my strings, ever since he gave me his blood."

He made a face. "Yes, that was a little Billy Bob Thorton, wasn't it?"

"I don't wear it around my neck in a little vial or anything." She laughed and reached her hand out for his. Nicholas laid his hand over hers and gave it a squeeze. She looked up at him. "I guess that was kinda gross."

"Well, he's okay in my book. Lazarus saved your life."

"At what cost? I seem to have become some kind of sexed up girl who likes to kill."

"There is nothing wrong with being a slut. You've hardly gotten any action in your life. It's time to live a little."

"Are you sure that I'm not using him? Using him to make me feel better or to distract me or--"

He held up a hand. "You aren't going to like what I have to say, but I think that you won't allow yourself to love anyone."

"But I love you."

"Because I forced myself into your life. I wouldn't take any of your I'm-a-loner-let-me-brood-and-wear-goth-clothes crap. I got past your barriers."

"You think it's unhealthy to do what I'm doing?"

"Being with Lazarus?"

She nodded.

"Only if you let it just be sex. Honey, you are going to have to let go and be loved by someone sometime."

"I don't know if I can," Eve said. "Especially not with a vampire."

"Maybe you're right about that. But maybe with someone else? Maybe Lazarus is your rebound guy. I'm sure you can one day." Nicholas grinned, determined to make her smile. "Just tell Mr. Right you like him while you're in the throes of passion one night."

"I'll think about it." She took another sip of coffee and stifled a yawn. "I'm exhausted. Are you about ready to call it a night?"

"No, I'm ready to go over to my honey's house though." Nicholas sighed, fanning himself with a hand. "I needed all this caffeine and sugar for energy tonight."

“Pervert,” Eve teased.

“Takes one to hang out with one.”

* * * *

Eve was dreaming--at least she thought it was a dream.

Nothing seemed real to her. “Blood moon,” Eve whispered, stopping to stare as it changed before her eyes.

Rising as a pale circle in the blackened sky, the moon illuminated the night world of Full Moon Bay with silver light. But the moon had changed, turned crimson--the exact color of freshly drawn blood. Eve knew it was a bad omen of some sort, but she wasn't certain what it meant exactly. All she knew was she needed to get home and do some research.

Something wicked was coming.

Eve wrapped her arms around herself as she hastily made her way through the graveyard. There was a creeping mist on the ground that slid up her jean-clad legs. It seemed to cling to her, sapping the warmth from her body as it traveled over her. Eve reached into her boot and withdrew her blessed blade, but she doubted it would be much protection against the evil in the air.

Eve was a self-proclaimed vigilante against the dark supernatural forces in the world. She'd learned the hard way that things really did go bump in the night. Eve's parents had been killed by vampires two years ago, and she'd become obsessed with hunting them down. Along the way, she'd learned there were worse things than vampires.

While the scary setting didn't bother her, the crackle of powerful magic in the air did. Eve had never learned very much about magic, preferring a hack-them-to-little-pieces approach. Since violence seemed to do the trick, she'd never had to get her voodoo on.

Eve could feel the magic in the air, an overwhelming force. It tingled her senses and made the hair stand up on the back of her neck. She knew that she wasn't alone. Something was here. To be more accurate, *someone* was here.

“Blood on you,” a voice said from behind--an ineffably beautiful voice. “Or maybe I should say *in you*.”

Eve turned to see a handsome man dressed in a sparkling midnight robe. An impression of darkness surrounded him, as though he was blacker than the shadows themselves. His eyes were black as pitch and appeared to be bottomless. His pale face had aristocratic features and was framed by a shock of black hair. Eve could feel the power emanating off of him. It rolled off of him in waves that nearly brought her to her knees. She'd never felt anything quite like him.

“Funny. I'm not a vampire, although I have dated one.”

While the man before her was very threatening, she got the impression that he was not a threat to *her*, per se. In fact, the look in those black eyes was decidedly warm.

“You are lovely,” the man said, watching her carefully. His perusal wasn't *exactly* sexual--but there was an edge to it. “You look beautiful dressed in nothing but your bare skin.”

“How would you know?” Eve narrowed her eyes, stepping back a pace. She

normally had a punch first and ask questions later philosophy, but his magic was far too potent to ignore. She doubted she could survive a hex from him. "If you're going to hit on me, you could at least tell me your name."

"The more interesting question is--who are you?"

"I know who I am," she said defiantly. "I'm the girl who's going to be slicing your head off in a minute." Eve gripped the blade.

The man's laugh was infectious, as musical as it was mesmerizing. It made her want to hear it again. She had the odd thought that she could get lost in him. "Yes, you know all the particulars, your name and so forth, but you have no idea who you are about to become."

The whole mysterious air he gave off made her patience wear a bit thin. "Look, I'm kinda tired. I have to get up and look at purchase orders tomorrow morning. It makes me a little bit cranky, so if you won't tell me your name, then tell me what you are. Are you a wizard? Some kind of sorcerer?"

"Nothing so common as that." He bowed formally. "My name is Bayne. I am the Blood Prince of my realm, but I didn't come here to talk about myself. I came here to awaken you."

Eve was done. "Yeah, well, I'm awake all right, despite your efforts to bore me to death. It's time for you to go."

Bayne grinned. "I know nearly everything about you. You feel me, and I can *feel* you, too." He licked his lips. "I can almost taste you, my dear."

"That sounds dirty." Strangely, she found it attractive in some kinky dark place inside her soul.

"Maybe it was meant to sound that way."

She wasn't about to stand around while some supposed arch villain made quasi-sexual remarks to her. She deserved some respect.

"Look, I'm not some stupid co-ed who goes walking around cemeteries for the thrill of it all, okay? I kill nasty things all the time, and I wouldn't mind adding you to the list. You don't want to mess with me."

"Yes, you are a servant of the light." The man chuckled again. "But I know that there's a wicked streak in you, my dear. You can't help your true nature. Why serve, when you can rule beside me in the darkness?"

Eve had to admit she was fascinated by him and his power. Her relationship with Lazarus was a glaring reminder of her decadent side. But who was he? How did he get so much magic? "What the hell are you?"

"I'm going to offer you the proverbial apple, Eve. Your true self and I are going to become much closer."

"Fabulous. No offense, but I already have a boyfriend. Okay, maybe he's not my boyfriend in the traditional, romantic, white picket fence sense of the term, but I'm involved. I don't need to be hit on by Black Magic Man."

Bayne moved toward her, slowly sliding--not walking--over the grass.

She stepped back. "Holy shit! How the hell are you doing that?"

He smirked. "Magic."

He stopped just in front of her, and Eve found herself engulfed by his presence. It

felt right somehow. She didn't want him to leave her side ever again. Bayne touched his hand to her cheek.

"I have a gift for you."

"My mother told me to never accept things from a stranger," Eve whispered.

"Your mother's dead."

A tear fell from her eye, but she stood rooted to the spot.

From thin air, he produced a blue rose. It was perfect--every satiny petal and every sharp thorn. The rose smelled clean and fresh, faintly of the ocean. "It pales in comparison to your beauty." He ran the rose down her cheek, letting her inhale its sweet scent, before he pressed it into her hands.

He brushed a kiss over her bloodless lips. "Goodnight, Eve. Sweet dreams."

And from his kiss, came shadows.

Eve could feel it seeping into her pores and pushing out all that was good and decent in her. It slid under her skin, rose up on her pale limbs, and engulfed her in a magic so black that it was nearly fatal. Eve was being consumed by him, swallowed up by the shadows, and it made her thirsty for more.

Eve's scream woke her up. She was relieved to find herself in her own bed, but that didn't stop the chills that were spreading down her spine. Clutched in her hand was the strange blue flower.

It was no dream.

Chapter Two

“You accepted a gift from a fairy?” Lazarus asked incredulously. “I thought you had better sense than that!”

“Hello! I was dreaming, remember? What was I supposed to do? Run away? *Oh no! It’s a scary flower!*” she said, holding up her hands, pantomiming fear. Then she placed them on her hips. “He gave me a blue rose. I had no idea it could be dangerous. It’s not exactly a stick of dynamite.”

Eve was in Lazarus’s bedroom. She’d never gotten used to the oriental décor or the general feeling she had of being in a vampire stronghold. She never liked being on his turf. It made her feel too vulnerable. Eve also refused to interact with the vampires he ruled, preferring to sneak in and out, unnoticed. It had been a struggle to even tell him what had happened. She liked to keep him on the edges of her life.

“Anything a fairy would give you is dangerous, Eve--far more dangerous than mere dynamite. Even the best of them are tricksters. Do you still have the rose?”

“Yes, the creepy rose is still on my dresser. The weirdest thing happened, though. I threw it away before I went to work, and when I came back, it was lying on my dresser again. Also, it filled the room with perfume, but it smells like the ocean.”

“He’s probably worked a spell on it.” Lazarus looked her over, as if inspecting her for injuries. “Did he hurt you?”

She decided to omit the part about the kiss. If he’d gone ballistic about the flower, he sure as hell wouldn’t like that. “He gave me a little taste of his power, and it was nasty, scary black magic.”

“He’s dangerous, Eve. Fairies are unpredictable, they--”

“You don’t know that Bayne is a fairy. All we know is he floats and gives weird presents. He could be a sorcerer or a warlock.”

“Warlocks and sorcerers don’t have access to that much power. They just practice magic. Fairies *are* magic. It’s in their blood. A sorcerer or a warlock could never enter your dreams like that.” Lazarus ran a hand through his blond hair. “I don’t like this at all.” His worried blue gaze turned to her. “He’s connected to you in some way, Eve. He entered your unconscious mind without an invitation.”

“You entered my mind without an invitation,” Eve reminded him. The first time they had met, he’d spoken in her mind.

“No, I spoke *to* you. I didn’t enter your mind. I can only skim emotions, vague impressions. This being entered your unconscious mind unbidden and undetected. The only reason you knew that was he in there is because he chose to contact you in your dreams. Bayne is dangerous.”

That alarmed Eve. When Lazarus looked worried, it was time to panic. “Okay then. No big deal. He’s evil, and what he needs is a real good killing then. What kills fairies?”

"Fairies are immortal, pet. They can't be killed."

"So are vampires," Eve argued. "I kill them all the time."

"No, we're not immortal like they are. Vampires used to be human and are therefore vulnerable to being decapitated or staked. A fairy is a completely different kind of being. One can only be killed by another fairy. They don't exist on this mortal plane, so they cannot be killed here, at least in a physical body."

"There's always a way. I just have to find it," Eve said doggedly. "Or maybe we'll just find a fairy hit man."

"I admire your spirit, but you are going to need more help," he insisted. "Do you trust me, pet?"

"What do you mean?" Eve asked warily. She set down her glass of untouched wine.

"It's a simple question. Do you trust me?"

"The simple answer is no, and before you get all huffy, let me explain. You're still a vampire, even if I am sleeping with you."

"Yes, but I would never harm you," Lazarus reminded her.

She wasn't so sure about that. "What are you getting at, anyway?"

"I want you to move in with me, until the threat has been eliminated. I will watch over you."

"I don't need a bodyguard, Lazarus," Eve said irritably. "I don't run and hide from things."

"Yes, you do need a bodyguard. You have no idea what you're up against. I haven't known many fairies, but the ones I have met were fierce. They aren't the impish little creatures you've read about in fairy tales. They can be bloodthirsty," he warned.

"We don't even know for sure that it's a fairy."

"I do."

"I just came to you for information," Eve said, putting her foot down. "This isn't your problem, it's mine, and I will handle this my way."

"Why must you be so stubborn?" Lazarus said, a muscle twitching in his jaw.

"Because I'm an independent woman. I don't need a big man to rescue me."

"Fine, have it your way, but will you at least allow me to do rounds with you the next few nights? Just to give you some backup."

Eve had to admit that sounded like a good idea. "What if I have to kill vampires?"

"Then you will kill them. I cannot kill my own kind, but I won't prevent you from doing it."

Eve thought about it a moment. Having a little supernatural backup wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. She might need the extra firepower if this Bayne character showed up in the waking world. "Thank you. I would appreciate the help."

Lazarus seemed satisfied with her decision. "You're welcome."

"Don't look so pleased with yourself," Eve said irritably.

"Then why don't I please you? Do you think you could give control to me?" Lazarus asked, a sly smile playing about his lips.

"No."

"Not control of your life, control of your luscious little body."

“Oh, *that* kind of control.” She met his avid gaze, traitorous warmth spreading through her body. “Maybe.”

“Just maybe?”

“As long as it’s just a game.” Eve closed her eyes. She really was wicked. Just a few words, a glance from Lazarus, and she lost herself.

“Then we’ll play a little sex game. You need to choose a safety word.”

“A safety word?”

“Don’t play innocent with me, Eve. We’ve already tried bondage. I’m sure you know that a safety word is used during control games. That way you can stop me if I’ve gone too far.”

Eve blushed. She’d always been turned on by the idea of domination and submission--maybe because she had to be in control of her life. The idea of letting go held a wild appeal to her, while a secret place inside acknowledged that she was excited by the idea of being dominated by him in particular.

“What is your safety word?”

“Rainbow.”

“Rainbow it is. If you feel the need to stop the session, say rainbow and I’ll stop. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“Now, stand up and face the wall.”

Eve did, turning her back to him. Anticipation made her heart beat faster.

Lazarus brought cool fingers to her neck and began to slide the buttons from the holes of her shirt. Then he pulled the shirt open and gently removed her arms before tossing it on the bed. Next, he went to the waistband of her skirt. He had convinced her to wear one every once in a while. The first time it had been a battle, but he’d prevailed, especially when she figured out that it gave him easier access to her. He pulled the tie open on her skirt and it pooled at her feet in a heap of satin.

He spun her around and expertly opened her bra. When her breasts sprang free, he cupped them in his hands, placing a kiss on the top of each. “Such beautiful breasts.” Lazarus pinched one of her nipples, delighting in the way it puckered. “I love the way they jiggle when you walk.”

Eve moaned. “Do you?”

“If you would behave like a proper Consort, you’d never wear a bra. Then I could watch them bounce all the time.”

Eve flushed with hectic color.

“Does that idea excite you?”

“Maybe a little bit,” she whispered.

“Now, let’s see what we have here.” Lazarus knelt and rolled her panties down her legs, sensually sliding them down. She was now gloriously naked.

He circled her. She reminded him of an exquisite statue, pale and perfect. He slid a cool hand down her back and cupped her supple ass.

“Lazarus?” she asked.

“Don’t speak unless you want to say your safety word.” He paused a moment and she nodded. “Good girl.”

Lazarus slid off his own clothing. He was tall and powerfully built, his body rippling with muscle. He produced a black silk scarf from his bureau drawer which he folded into a two inch wide band and snaked around the back of her neck. Eve nodded when he asked her a question with his eyes.

He settled it over her eyes and tied a firm knot behind her head. He moved his hand back and forth in front of her eyes, but she didn't acknowledge it. She couldn't see at all. "Tell me what you want."

Eve bit her lower lip. "May I speak?"

"Of course, pet." Lazarus could feel what she was going through. Sometimes, he felt they only really communicated when they were touching one another. She was unbearably aroused. He could pick up on the slightest hint of caring for him, too. It was deeply buried, beneath anger and pain.

She felt the blush tinting her cheeks. The blindfold and the power she'd ceded to Lazarus made her bold. "Spank me." Eve knew that the feelings that she had for him were wrong. Maybe on some level Eve felt like she should be punished for feeling this way about him. Although his punishment felt a hell of a lot like pleasure.

Lazarus smiled. "Come here then." He led her to the bed and placed her bare bottom over his lap. He stroked her ass as he asked her another question. "How many smacks, pet?"

"However many you want to give me, Lazarus."

He grinned. She was a natural. He began to smack her luscious bottom, each stroke designed to enhance her pleasure with a burst of controlled pain. It would sting, but also create a fire between her legs. He knew she felt like she needed to be punished. Lazarus wasn't certain what sin she thought she had committed.

He loved her cries and the delicious way she undulated against him. With each slap, she wiggled on his lap or sighed. His cock strained against his jeans, as if it could penetrate her through the denim. He needed release badly. Lazarus smoothed his hand over her cherry red bottom when she'd had enough. Sliding a hand between her legs, he found her slick and swollen for him.

She rocked against his thigh, a fierce rush of lust rocketing through her. Lazarus slid her off his lap and onto her back. Eve writhed against the sheets.

"Glad you like it, pet. How do you feel about chains?"

"I knew you'd have something like that here."

"I'm a vampire. Of course I have a bit of iron in my wicked drawer."

Without further ado, he quickly shackled her arms to his headboard. Then he pulled two more scarves from his drawer and padded her wrists. He had no wish to mar her tender flesh. Lazarus pulled back to survey the results. She was blind, bound, and helpless to any demands he made upon her lush body.

"Know what the most remarkable thing is about being robbed of your sight?" It was a rhetorical question. "Increased sensitivity." Lazarus plucked an ice cube from the wine bucket on the trunk at the end of his bed. He moved to the end of the bed and slid the cold cube along her instep.

Eve shrieked. "What are you doing?"

"Playing with you."

He ran it up her leg and across her hip to rest on her stomach. The square of ice was rapidly melting, leaving a trail of cool liquid on her overheated skin. He swirled it around her belly button, delighting in the breath she sucked in. Lazarus moved it back to the apex of her thighs. With a small grin, he teased her damp curls. She hissed, hips bucking against his hand. He parted the engorged lips of her pussy and rubbed it against her clitoris.

Eve whimpered. "So cold."

"And you're so hot," Lazarus groaned.

Eve hissed again, and he took pity on her. With a careless motion, he tossed the cube over his shoulder, preferring to touch her with his hands. He applied pressure to her clit once more, causing her to cry out as she came against his hand. He felt like he never got enough of her.

When it came to Eve, Lazarus always wanted more.

Lazarus plucked the blindfold from her eyes and tossed it aside. He wanted her to see his need. He was in acute sexual agony. He needed inside her badly.

Eve gasped.

He brought his hand to his mouth and licked every drop of her from his fingers. She was spicy and sweet at the same time. But he wanted more contact. Now.

He slid a finger in once more, delighting in the way she arched for him. He'd never seen her like this before; she was released, in thrall to desire.

"Lazarus, please. I need you inside me. Please!" She lifted her hips up to increase their contact.

Lazarus growled, "Say it again, Eve!"

"I need you inside me!"

He sank into her and nearly came at the sensation caused by her slick, heated flesh. Lazarus slid in and out of her, claiming her with his cock. She wailed, wrapping her legs about his waist. He angled his body so that her clitoris rubbed against his pubic bone on the downward thrust. He knew she was close.

"Look at me!" he ordered.

Eve cried as she met his gaze. There was something new in his expression. Something as unexpected as it was unwelcome--care and concern. "No!"

"Yes!" Lazarus let himself go, filling her with his seed. He sank his fangs into her tender neck, needing the benediction of her blood. He hadn't bitten her since that night on the terrace. Eve came with a moan. When he'd taken as much as he dared, he pulled back, waiting for the inevitable storm to come.

"Damn you for doing that!" Even as she said it, Eve knew she was a hypocrite. She could feel the pleasure still ebbing in her belly. She was disgusted by the way his bite had aroused her.

Lazarus attempted to kiss her mouth, but she squirmed away. "You have my blood in your mouth."

"We both know you enjoyed it." He held her head in his hands, forcing her to meet his gaze. "I care about you. I'd like the opportunity to get to know you better."

"Don't be ridiculous. Let me go!" She pulled at the chains. "Let go!"

"Not until you agree to go out with me."

"You should respect my boundaries, for once," Eve snarled. "Why do you always have to blackmail me?"

"Because you refuse to take what you want," Lazarus said smoothly. "So I take the choice from you."

"Go to hell!" Eve said angrily.

Lazarus chuckled. "Easy, pet. Just give in to me, and let me worry about the rest."

She was silent for a few moments, but he patiently waited her out. "What are my chances of getting out of here without giving in?" Eve asked with a sigh. Of course, he'd waited until after her orgasm. She was drained and sleepy and too tired to put up much of a fight.

"Very slim."

"Fine, we'll go on a date." She slumped down in her chains. "Just one! That's it! Then, were back to just sex. Okay?"

"If that is what you want." Lazarus undid her bonds with a laugh. "You must be the only woman on earth who wants sex over romance."

"Yeah, well, most romances don't involve being bitten and chained up."

Once home again, Eve realized she couldn't remember feeling this worn out. While her encounters with Lazarus were always pleasurable, they were often very taxing. Tonight though, she felt like she could barely move. She managed to climb up the stairs, but her limbs felt leaden, heavy. Resignedly, she walked to the bathroom. She needed to get cleaned up before she could go to bed.

Eve made taking a shower into a ritual. She preferred to shower at night when the world had gone to bed. She'd come home from a sweep and toss her clothing into the hamper. Then, she'd pick out a CD and turn it on low, so the music was just the right volume. Eve liked to light a couple of candles and dim the lights in the bathroom. While it looked romantic, to Eve it felt safe and inviting. It was her ritual to shake off the remains of her day.

Eve liked showering versus bathing, because all the sweat, blood and grime disappeared down the drain. She could literally wash her troubles away and they would be swallowed up. She knew it was silly, but it made her feel better.

Tonight was no different. Eve got into the shower and quickly lathered her hair. She liked to do it first, so she could pull it up into a loose ponytail and scrub the rest of her body. She was a shampoo and conditioner aficionado. Eve liked so-called warm scents like vanilla or lavender. They always relaxed her. As she scrubbed her body, she thought about Lazarus and the futility that was their relationship.

It was ridiculous to think that they could ever be a real couple. They were far too different. But why did that seem to keep her so interested? Perhaps it was the fact that he couldn't die. Lazarus couldn't leave her like her parents had. Something to consider. But not now.

When she stepped out of the shower, she put on her old robe. She'd had it since college. When Nicholas described it, he used words like *ratty* and *dingy*. To her, it was like an old friend. Sure, the blue robe was threadbare and tattered, but it felt like a hug from an old friend when she put it on.

Eve brushed her teeth and then rubbed some lotion into her skin. All these little

niceties made her feel good. She towel dried her hair as she stared at her reflection in the mirror--only she got the distinct impression that she wasn't looking at herself.

Eve wasn't sure what tipped her off, but the image in the mirror was not her own. It was a more perfect version of Eve. The mirror reflected a woman who was slightly thinner and whose skin was impossibly pale, devoid of any blemishes. The eyes were different, too. They were sharper and black. Infinite. Eve traced the ideal line of her sculpted eyebrow, only the image in the mirror was just a second behind.

"Who are you?" Eve bit out. She slammed her hands down on the bathroom sink.

Mirror Eve smiled in a way that chilled Eve's bones, showing pearly white teeth. "You caught me. I only wanted to you see for myself."

"Who are you?" Eve asked again, an edge beneath it. Her hands slammed down on the bathroom sink. The sound was jarring.

"I think that is obvious."

"No, I am Eve. Not you. You are some kind of shape shifter or mirror monster. Why are you wearing my face?! Who sent you? Is it Bayne?" Eve hands clutched at the edge of the countertop. It was both maddening and terrifying to see herself. It took all her willpower not to reach up and smash her fist through the mirror.

"You're about to find out," Mirror Eve promised before she vanished.

Eve was left staring at her own imperfect reflection.

* * * *

Eve threw down the book. "What the hell? *Encyclopedia of Fairies*, my ass! If I wanted information on goblins or dwarves, they had the full scoop. I'm not getting very far here. There's nothing about killing fairies. Apparently, most people think they're kind of charming."

"And you don't?" Nicholas asked.

"No, they're horrible! They run around floating at you and give you weird gifts or show up in your mirror and try to scare you. You would want to kill them, too, if you were stalked by fairies."

"I haven't been." Nicholas smiled. "Not unless you count that big guy that followed me around our freshmen year."

"I thought that term was offensive. Fairy, I mean."

"It is, but the gay community has reclaimed it. Like the way some women use bitch."

"Whatever." Eve shrugged. "I'm still not down with it."

"You can't use it, because you aren't gay."

"Does that mean I can stop you from using bitch?" Eve asked.

"No."

"Fine. What's the deal with all the terms, anyway? I mean there's *fairy* with an *i* or *faery* with an *ae* and there's the term *fae*. What the hell?" Eve put her head down on the desk. "Dammit. All I want is a way to kill them!" She picked up a book again and tried to read it.

"That sounded bad. I hope I won't be interviewed about you on the news someday. I'll have to tell them you were really nice and that you kept to yourself."

"Are you going to help me research or mock me?"

"Mock you, of course," Nicholas said quickly.

"Read!"

"I'm reading, I'm reading!" he said tiredly. "When I offered to help, I assumed we'd make a couple of passes around a cemetery and then get some pie. I had no idea that we'd be doing the boring stuff. Christ, this is like being in college again."

"This is kind of interesting," Eve commented, holding on to a book.

"I doubt it."

"There are two courts that govern fairies. *Seelie* means blessed in Scottish, and the *Seelie Court* is full of the so-called good fairies. You know the ones who give wishes and help human beings."

"Like the Tooth Fairy?"

"Yes, only she doesn't exist. *Unseelie* means unblessed and the *Unseelie Court* governs evil fairies. They harm mankind by playing tricks on them or even killing them."

"Creepy. So, we're guessing your boy Bayne and his mirror monster are Unseelie?"

"It seems to track. I mean he definitely had the dark mojo going. I just need to find a way to kill them both."

"Got it!" Nicholas snapped his fingers. "All you have to do is say I don't believe in fairies!"

Eve was still perusing a volume on Ireland. "I don't believe in fairies?" she said absently.

"Yep, I don't believe in fairies. Say it again."

"I don't believe in fairies," Eve repeated dutifully.

"There you go! You we just killed three of them together. It was a mini killing spree."

Eve chuckled. Nicholas was the only person who kept her sane sometimes.

"Somehow, I doubt that *Peter Pan* is going to help me out on this one."

"How do you know? Besides, Peter never killed fairies. You know, because he was one."

"What?" Eve rolled her eyes.

"Don't tell me you haven't heard that. Peter Pan was the leader of the lost boys. His best friend was a fairy."

"And what about his relationship with Wendy?"

Nicholas smiled. "You really are naïve. Of course he loved her. He wanted Wendy as his mother, not his lover. Or maybe he wanted to keep her around for appearances sake. Wendy was the beard."

"No, you've got it all wrong. *Peter Pan* is about a straight man's wish to never grow up. They go looking for their mothers when they date women."

"My head hurts now."

"Mine, too." She tapped the stack of books sitting between them. "Let's do more research and less speculation on children's literature, okay?"

Unfortunately, they didn't find anything about killing fairies, but they did find a lot on Bayne.

“Check this out. Bayne is supposed to be the Blood Prince of the Zephyr Realm.” Nicholas showed her the little sketch in the corner of the page. The volume he was holding was called *Fairy Royalty and You*. “Is this your boy?”

“Yes, that’s him.”

“Hmph. Kinda cute in a scary kind of way. Anyway, his family was *Seelie* court and they ruled this realm for centuries. Only their rule was peaceful and people prospered. Yadda, yadda. Bayne was super powerful. After he’d learned the *Seelie* ways, he turned to *Unseelie*. The black magic turned him evil. Bayne took over about ten years ago, and apparently he’s a slum lord. Everything has gone downhill,” Nicholas summarized. “The sky’s black as night, the fairy villagers are losing their crops, and blah blah blah. I guess all the good fairies have gone. A whole big bunch of *Unseelie* moved into town, and it’s a big cosmic hellhole now.”

He moved further down on the page. “It says that he created an unholy union with this big influential fairy family.”

“A union?” Eve asked. “Like a marriage or a contract?”

“Both actually. Bayne was betrothed to their only daughter, who was sole heir to all of their magical abilities upon their death, which was a lot of power. So he married her five years ago, and they expect him to send his fairy army into the rest of the realms to conquer them.”

“Why hasn’t he done it already?”

“It doesn’t say.” Nicholas closed the book. “One thing’s clear though--this guy is dangerous.”

“So everyone keeps saying. Bayne also seems to be fixated on me.” Eve shivered. “This can’t be a good sign.”

Chapter Three

It was date night.

Eve would rather be facing a vampire-infested graveyard. At least she would know what to do with hungry vampires who wanted to eat her. Vampires who wanted to date her were far scarier.

Eve couldn't believe she'd let Lazarus persuade her to come to his mansion. He told her that there would only be one minion in the house to serve them and that was it. He had even asked her to wear a dress. Eve had only found one dress in her closet. It was black and shapeless, and fell all the way her knees. It had been purchased during her Goth phase in college. She thought it apropos for the occasion.

Eve was astonished by what she saw in the dining room. The table was at least eight feet long. Two ornate candelabras provided light for the meal that was laid out on the table. Beside her plate, lay a single red rose.

In short, it looked like Cupid had thrown up in the room.

"Wow, this is really, really, really romantic," Eve said, biting her lip.

"I figured we had a lot to make up for, since we've been so cold to each other."

Lazarus escorted her to a chair near the end of the table and held it out for her as she sat down. He sat right beside her. He pulled the two silver covers off their plates to reveal shrimp stir-fry.

Lazarus touched her sleeve. "When will you let me buy you clothes?"

"When you start walking around in daylight," Eve said cheerfully.

"Fair enough."

She winced. She was supposed to be acting like a date. "I love shrimp stir-fry," Eve murmured. "How did you know?"

"You mentioned it once," Lazarus said as he watched her reaction with delight. Surprising her was very hard to do.

"That was very thoughtful of you," Eve said carefully. It felt strange to give him a compliment. She was so used to fighting and well, fucking him. Being his date was a brand new experience.

He uncorked a bottle of white wine which had been chilling in a bucket of ice and poured them each a glass. They began to eat in silence. Eve was surprisingly hungry. She wasn't comfortable, but it was pleasant. He must want something from her.

"Is it good?" he asked.

"Very. Thank you," Eve said, plucking at her linen dinner napkin. "Lazarus? I don't want to upset you or anything, but you aren't planning to," she paused to give a little laugh, "have me for dessert, are you?" She looked back to the kitchen doors behind her. "The vampire family isn't back their sharpening blades or anything, are they?"

Lazarus grinned like the cat that ate both the canaries as he leaned back indolently in his chair and slid his eyes over every inch of her body. "You caught me. I do intend to

have you for dessert.”

Eve’s grip tightened on the case knife beside her plate. “I knew it!”

He chuckled. “No, not that kind of having. I’m talking about the other more pleasurable kind. Do you remember the last time I *had* you?”

“Are you talking about sex?” Eve asked. She still gripped the case knife. She wished there had been a place to put her blade in the dress. At least she had a cross beneath her dress.

He chuckled. “When will you learn? I don’t want to kill you. Now, do you remember the last time we had sex?”

“I remember. It wasn’t that long ago.” Eve flushed as she began to feel traitorously warm. She remembered last time all too well--the things he had done to her body.

A minion appeared and placed all of their dishes on a wheeled cart, which he took away. There was nothing on the table now except the tablecloth and the candelabras. Lazarus whispered something into the other vampire’s ear, and he nodded at his sire’s instructions. He was dressed in a tuxedo. What was it about vampires and black? Then he came back with a silver tray filled with various sauces and a small pillow in the crook of his arm.

Eve narrowed her eyes. “What’s going on?”

The minion stood at attention next to Lazarus’s chair. His expression was anything but servile. “You may go, Warren. Remember what I said. Stay away from the mansion tonight.”

The minion nodded. “Of course, sire.” He turned and walked into the kitchens. “Whatever you say.”

“Are we alone?” Eve asked, once he was gone.

Lazarus listened for the tell-tale sound of the door closing. “Completely.” He rounded the table and took her hand to brush a kiss over the back.

Eve shivered--just from that small contact.

With a flourish, Lazarus took the lids off the various sauces--chocolate, butterscotch, caramel, raspberry, and honey. They were all lined up on the table. “What is this for?”

He stood behind her chair, his arms on her shoulders. “You gave me a wonderful idea, pet. We were going to have a taste test of all of these poured over ice cream for dessert. I’m still in the mood for a tasting, but,” he paused to nip her earlobe and whispered, “I want to have you for dessert, too.”

Eve felt wetness begin to pool between her thighs. “Oh.”

Lazarus pulled out her chair and turned her around to face him. With gentle eyes he looked down on her upturned face. “I can’t get enough of you, pet. When I’m not with you, I want to be. I dream about you at night. You occupy my thoughts during the day.” He caressed her face as he spoke to her. “You are so beautiful, so lovely--”

“I want you too, Lazarus. Maybe too much,” she said as she covered his hand with one of her own. It was the first time she was able to admit it. She hadn’t told Nicholas how much he seemed to enter her thoughts. “I think about you all the time.”

“You do?” Lazarus’s face lit up in a genuine smile.

She leaned up on her tiptoes and gave him a sweet kiss on the mouth. "Still do."

It was enough for now, Lazarus decided. She wanted him and seemed to crave him as much as he did her. He'd gather the rest of what he wanted from her later. He was selfish. He craved all of her--heart, mind, body, and soul. "Now, I think I need some dessert. I'm feeling a bit puckish." His voice was husky with desire.

"You want to make me into a human sundae?"

Lazarus licked his lips. "Mmm, chocolate-covered Eve."

Eve trembled as his deft hands made short work of the buttons on her blouse. He slid it off to reveal a lacy red bra. "Mmm, I approve." He undid it expertly and pulled the straps down her arms. His hands shook a little as he slid them down to the waist band of her skirt. "You are a vision."

"I know how to take my own clothes off. You don't always have to--"

"But I want too, Eve. I like unwrapping my presents."

Lazarus knelt at her feet and removed her sandals with care. With hungry eyes he stared up at her. His hands skimmed her thighs as he made his way to the sides of her panties. He hooked his thumbs in them and pulled them from her quaking body. She now lay bare to his gaze.

Eve felt her stomach clench. She had slept with him last night, and he still got to her. She wondered if she'd ever really get her fill of him.

He put his arms around her waist and sat her down on the table. "Lean back," he said hoarsely. She did so and he placed the pillow under her head.

Lazarus took the bottle of chocolate sauce and anointed one nipple. On the other, he smeared butterscotch. He ran a line of caramel between her breasts. On one hip he slathered the raspberry sauce and on the other he placed honey. When he was finished, he stopped to look at her and survey the results of his handiwork.

Eve quivered with excitement. The various sauces on her body were cool, but the area between her thighs was warm and moist. She, Eve Flynn, was lying on a table waiting to be devoured by a vampire, and she was happy about it. She never thought she'd see the day.

Lazarus moved to her right side and slid his hand under the nape of her neck. He kissed her deeply. "You look good enough to eat, pet." He licked his lips. He bent over her chocolate-covered nipple. He lapped at it with cat-like strokes. When it was gone and her nipple was turgid, Lazarus seemed to mentally evaluate the taste. "Mmm. Never had chocolate-covered Eve before."

He then turned his attention to the thin line of caramel between her breasts. His tongue made short work of it, licking a cool path up her body. When he was finished, he winked at her. "Caramel Eve is good too. How am I going to decide what I like best?"

Eve moaned. "Maybe you should ask Ben and Jerry?"

He grinned. "Ah, I don't share well with others, pet." He gazed at her body once more. "Now, where was I?" He moved to her other side and began to lick the butterscotch away. He didn't take her nipple in his mouth--he merely licked the sauce away.

Eve's hands clenched the side of the table.

Lazarus stopped. "Maybe I'm doing something wrong?" He flicked his tongue over her nipple as he held her gaze. "I know. You're supposed to suck on butterscotch

candies, aren't you?" He sucked her nipple into his mouth, and Eve cried out. His hand played with her other nipple, and he leaned across her body to pay homage to it, too.

When he was finished, he began on her raspberry-covered hipbone. He licked it clean and then began to nibble on it. He caught her eyes again. "Eve's raspberry sauce tastes good too." He licked his lips. "I shouldn't be surprised though. I always like the taste of you."

Eve shuddered at the rush of wetness between her thighs.

Eve's legs were shaking now. She wanted him inside. He put his hands between her legs and held them open. She wanted him to touch the lips of her sex and push his fingers deep inside, but he just traced an imaginary line with his tongue across her abdomen, merely brushing the curls between her thighs.

"Damn you." Eve groaned.

"Easy, pet. You can't rush this." Lazarus began to feast on the honey. It was thicker than the other sauces, and his tongue had to work harder. Eve began to imagine that tongue inside her, lapping at the sweetness between her thighs as it slid over her folds. When the last of it was gone, he stood between her legs. "I like honeyed Eve best."

Eve trembled with need. "Please, Lazarus."

Lazarus sat down on the chair at the head of the table and pulled her sex to his mouth by hooking his arms under her legs. She groaned as his tongue plunged into her aching pussy. She teetered on the edge of orgasm, ready to explode, and he had just begun to touch her.

He pulled back to look at her once more, her juices on his face. "Yes, I definitely like honeyed Eve best." Lazarus began to lap at her once more. Then he took the swollen nubbin into his mouth and sucked.

Eve came, screaming his name.

Lazarus sank his fangs into her thigh.

"You bit me?" she asked, still dazed. Tomorrow, she'd probably be pissed, but it felt too good to bitch now.

"I need you," he whispered, weltering in the agony of his need. Lazarus climbed on the table and positioned his cock at the entrance of her lips. "I need you."

With delicate hands, she eased him out of his jeans. She grinned up at him wickedly as she licked a tiny pearl drop from the head. "I remember how much I like the taste of this." It was his turn to groan. Eve sucked him into her mouth, ever mindful of her teeth. It didn't take him long to give into the persuasiveness of her talented lips and tongue.

Lazarus came with a roar.

* * * *

After they took a shower together, Eve and Lazarus lay down on his bed. Their arms and legs were entwined.

Eve was cuddled in his arms and he softly stroked her back. Lazarus was slowly battering down her defenses, one by one. She only hoped he wouldn't hurt her in the end.

"You're awfully quiet," Lazarus said.

"I'm too tired to talk. You've worn me out." She playfully nipped his chest. "And you've ruined ice cream sundaes for me. Now, I have them mixed up with sex."

“Does that mean you’re going to get aroused at Baskin-Robbins?”

Eve giggled. She felt strangely lighthearted. “Probably. I’ll take two scoops of chocolate in a sugar cone, sir, and an orgasm to go!”

He kissed her shoulder and rolled her beneath him. “Well, if the lady wants another helping, I think I can oblige her.”

“Mmm, I’d love some more. Let’s make it Rocky Road this time.” Eve gave into Lazarus. She wanted to feel just like this forever.

* * * *

Eve thought it might have been the best night of her life.

It was the most time they’d spent together since they’d met. Eve was happy, almost blissful. They were walking through *Shady Acres Cemetery*, talking and laughing. Except for killing things, it was really quite romantic.

She could get used to relying on someone. Maybe that was the crux of her problem. She didn’t want to be hurt again if--or, more likely, *when*--something took Lazarus from her.

“You’re awfully quiet.”

“Just thinking,” Eve said. “Actually,” she lied, “I was thinking about what happened to me the other night.” She decided to tell him about the Eve she’d seen reflected in the mirror. It was something to talk about, and he might know about her strange mirror monster.

“So, what do you know about seeing your reflection in the mirror?”

“Was that some sort of a crack about being a vampire?” Lazarus asked. “I know I don’t have a reflection, but I do have feelings.”

“Aren’t you sensitive lately?”

“Aren’t you *insensitive* lately?” he countered.

Eve sighed. “Let’s not fight, okay? I’m not even mad about the blood thing. Quit while you’re ahead.”

He wagged his eyebrows. “Speaking of head--”

Eve ignored it. “I was looking in the mirror and I saw myself, only she wasn’t me. She was a more perfect version of myself. Does that make sense?”

Lazarus stopped and turned to face her. “Are you certain that is what you saw?”

“Yep, the evil version of me in the mirror. That’s what I saw.”

He tilted his head. “You’ve been under a great deal of pressure lately. I know that our association is very threatening to you, and you’ve also had this fairy stalking you.”

“I’m not threatened by you!” Eve crossed her arms over her chest. “Are you suggesting that I went mental and imagined seeing her?”

“I’m not aware of any demon that appears in mirrors.”

“What about fairies?” Eve asked.

“Hold on,” Lazarus said pensively. “She really looked just like you?” Something had evidently triggered his memory.

“She *was* me,” she admitted. “Only, she looked like she’d lost weight, got plenty of rest, ate right, and had amazing skin care.” She rolled her eyes. “She also had bigger breasts, if you like that sort of thing.”

“Bigger breasts?” Lazarus asked, momentarily distracted.

"That wasn't the point of the conversation. She was me, only better."

"That is hard to imagine," Lazarus said softly.

"What?" Eve waved her hand in front of his face. "Come away from Dolly Parton Land."

"Not about the breasts. It's hard to imagine someone better than you."

Eve cleared her throat. "Uh, oh. Thanks. Um, you looked like you were making a little mental connection a minute ago."

"What? Oh, yes." He blinked. "Have you ever heard of a changeling?"

"No. What are they?" Eve asked curiously.

"There are old legends about fairy or fae who will steal a human child and leave a fairy child in exchange. Only, the fairy children have been bespelled to look exactly like the human child that was taken."

"So, you're saying that I have some sort of fairy doppelganger?"

"No, that's not what I'm saying." Lazarus stopped and looked down into her face. "You live in the mortal world. You could be a fairy."

"That's impossible!" Eve shrugged off his hold. "I'm human! I don't have any magical powers."

"You've been here all of your life. Your fairy magic may have been depleted by being in this plane of existence." Lazarus seemed to be carried away by his own thoughts. "When you think about it, it makes perfect sense. You've been able to fight off demons for so long without any real powers. You must have some residual fairy magic that's been keeping you safe," he said softly.

"You have lost your mind. I'm not a fairy."

"Whatever you say." He looked doubtful, though.

As they rounded a corner, they ran straight into a couple of Veltis demons. They were tall demons, nearly seven feet. Their mouths gleamed with black fangs, and they had long protruding tongues they used to suck out bone marrow. They used their long, hooked talons to shred their favorite prey--people.

"Great. Bone-suckers," Eve said. She pulled her blade from her boot. "Do you have a weapon?"

"I have super strength. I think I can hold my own."

Eve took the smaller female demon, recognizable by her three breasts. Lazarus took the larger male demon. They both began shrieking, which was almost scarier than the talons and teeth as far as she was concerned.

Eve managed to stab her bone-sucker in the side, which brought her down to the ground. These demons had a vulnerable spot on their left side, where their hearts were located. Eve plunged her knife home, causing a spurt of thick blood to cover her hand.

When she finished, she found that Lazarus had simply ripped the head off his opponent. In a few seconds, both of the demons had vanished.

Lazarus was standing in the distance, watching her.

"What?" Eve said nervously.

Lazarus stalked closer to her. He moved deliberately across the grass, his footfalls making no sound. She could see the craving in his eyes. His jaw tightened, and his eyes flared with lust from the mere sight of her.

She shivered. She could only imagine what he was going to do to her tonight.

"Eve," Lazarus said, his voice raspy with barely leashed passion. He closed the distance between them in a blur. His hand shot out and grabbed a thick handful of her hair, curling it around his fingers. He pulled her close and held her immobile against his chest. The position left her neck completely exposed to him.

She breathed heavily, both aroused and a little frightened.

He placed his mouth against hers and whispered, "Who do you belong to?"

Eve struggled with that. She was a self-sufficient woman and Lazarus was a dominant man.

It was a match made in hell.

"Certainly not you," she managed to say, but she wasn't sure if she really meant it. Tomorrow she would, but in this moment, she wasn't exactly sure that he didn't have a hold on her.

He licked a path from her collarbone to her ear. "Liar," he whispered.

"I can't help it if you can't accept the honest truth," Eve rasped.

"Then, indulge me with more truth. Who is the only lover you've ever known?"

"Lazarus," she managed to say.

"That's how I want it to stay. There won't be any others, Eve. I won't allow it." He turned her head and gazed down into her eyes. "I won't share you with anyone."

His mouth descended, his tongue plunging deep inside the cavern of her mouth. He held her, arms at her sides with her body immobilized. His hands shook as he finally released his tight hold her.

He brought her hand to his mouth and lapped the blood away.

Eve was unbearably aroused and repulsed by the act.

"I want you right now," he growled. "On the grass. I want to throw you down on the ground and sink so deep inside of you that you'll never be free of me." He grabbed her roughly. "Does that excite you?"

"Yes!" Eve quivered. She slammed into him, throwing his center of gravity off. Sweeping her legs beneath him, she took him down. He lay sprawled on his back, looking up at Eve with a hungry expression.

She came down on him, hips astride his, and feral hunger in her eyes. She tilted his head to the side and kissed his neck.

He groaned. The neck was an erogenous zone for vampires.

Eve bit down hard.

Lazarus howled with pleasure. "Drink me, love. Drink me all up!"

Eve realized that what she actually wanted was Lazarus' bite, not vice versa. She wanted to be tasted, ached for it. She wanted him on every possible level. She wanted Lazarus to bite her and sire her.

With a cry, she got off him. Blood dripped from her crimson mouth. She wiped the blood on her hand, staring at it with rapt attention. "I want ... I want..."

"I know what you want, and I want it, too," Lazarus said. "All you have to do is say it."

Eve shut her eyes and took in a deep, calming breath. "I can't have what I want. I can't become like you, Lazarus. Not ever."

"Yes, you can," he said urgently. "I can give you everything you've ever wanted and more. All you need to do is say 'yes,' and I'll take care of the rest."

For a moment, she actually considered. It would be so easy to give in. It would feel so good to belong to someone again. "I think I want to go now." She just couldn't. The price was so very high.

"We both know you want to stay."

"Yes, but I can't." Eve closed her eyes.

"What you mean is, you won't. Just give in. Why do you have to make everything so hard?"

"I have to. I can't just give in to this. It's wrong!"

"You could if you trusted me," Lazarus accused.

The desires she had were unnatural. He had a bad effect on her. "What have you done to me?" Eve cried.

"Made you stronger."

"And a lot less human!"

Lazarus grabbed her and pulled her close to him. "You still feel human to me." He stroked her hair, kissed her cheeks, and attempted to lick his blood from her lips.

Eve shoved him away and wiped his blood off with the back of her hand. "I hate to disappoint you, but I'm not going to become some glorified mosquito. I kill vampires. I don't have sex with them in the dirt. This relationship is over," she turned and walked away from him without a backward glance.

"Fine! Run away, Eve," Lazarus taunted. "It's what you're good at!" He slumped back down on the ground. "But you'll come back to me eventually. This isn't over. We're *connected* Eve!"

* * * *

Eve was furious with Lazarus.

What had he done to her? She was rolling around in the grass, wanting to be bitten by him. It was disgusting. This whole sordid affair was over. Her conscience demanded no less. He always made her feel like she was in the wrong. She was only holding on to her principals, her ideals. How dare he shame her for it!

Even her evening shower didn't help. Eve cleansed away every drop of his blood from her body. It still didn't help. He was on her mind. Lazarus was in her body, somehow. Perhaps they *were* connected.

She was far too angry to sleep, so she stayed in bed, mulling over their relationship--if that's what it could be called. It was better to end it before she got hurt more than she already was. She'd begun to suspect that one of them wouldn't get out of the relationship alive.

"The blood drinker doesn't deserve you."

Other than his voice, the intruder made no noise. There wasn't even the slightest whisper of his feet on the floor, or a movement of his body. Yet, she could sense him. Bayne.

"At least vampires wait to be invited." Eve sat up in bed. She resisted the urge to gather the covers around her. She wasn't some Victorian virgin in a gothic novel.

Then, there was light.

Bayne had lit an oil lamp he carried. The shadows suited him. He was tall and handsome, and his dark hair and eyes were accentuated by the night. He looked like some beautiful fallen angel.

"I had the suspicion that I would be welcome." He stroked the coverlet.

"I think you are sadly mistaken." Eve's hands were bunched up at her sides. "You should leave now." She was a great big liar, too. Bayne called to her. Whenever he was near, her decadent side wet its lips in anticipation. *Lazarus had done this to her. He'd opened up the floodgates, and now she was wet. Eww.*

"Or what? You'll cut into me with that tiny little knife?" Bayne chuckled. "We both know I am more powerful than you, my dear, at least for now." He sat down on the edge of her bed. His hand stroked the covers.

Eve had the wild urge to let him stroke her the same way. She closed her eyes. "Get off my bed."

He ignored her directive. "Very soon, you'll invite me to your bed with open arms and open legs."

Eve was afraid it was true. Was she some kind of supernatural slut? First Lazarus and then Bayne. "Nope, not a chance." She hoped he wouldn't make a liar out of her.

"Kiss me."

"The last time you kissed me, I woke up screaming."

Bayne made a noise, a ravenous sound low in his throat that made her belly clench. "Mmm, I do want to make you scream, but not in terror." Bayne moved up on the bed, until he was half leaning over her body. "Kiss me."

Despite herself, Eve swayed forward. "No," she murmured against his mouth, before she touched her lips to his. Magic. As soon as the kiss began, she tried to shove him away, but only succeeded in putting inches between them. "No, this is wrong! Enough of the innuendo and the cryptic talk. Just tell me what's going on."

Bayne backed off slightly and picked up the blue rose that lay on her nightstand. "How did you like my gift?"

Eve crossed her arms over her chest. Her weapons were at the end of the bed. There was no way she'd get to them in time. "Roses aren't really my thing."

"Still, it seems to suit you." Bayne reached out, holding the rose to her nose. "It has a curious scent, don't you think? Perhaps you should smell it."

"There's an aroma in here, and it's not the smell of roses. I smell bullsh--"

"Easy, my dear."

Eve snatched the rose from his grasp, ripping petals from it. "Enough! I'm tired out of the games. What's the deal?"

"All will be revealed soon."

She scrambled out of bed and stood facing him from the other side. Petals fell around her. "Are you some kind of fairy assassin? Are you here to make me insane or kill me or something worse?"

"Don't be ridiculous! I wouldn't dream of harming you," Bayne said, watching her with unblinking eyes.

"Then what do you want from me?"

“I want your hand in marriage.”

He couldn't have shocked her more if he said he wanted to sing show tunes in Times Square. “What? Honestly, what's wrong with me? Do I give off a vibe to supernatural men? There's no way in hell I'm going to marry you.”

The rose glowed, the petals bursting free and floating around her form at a dizzying pace. Eve realized that it was forming a field around her, a transportation spell--and there wasn't a damn thing she could do about it.

“What did you do?” she shouted. The wind was picking up, forming a little cyclone around her.

Bayne smiled. “Nothing, my dear. I'm merely playing the besotted suitor and taking you home where you belong.”

Chapter Four

Eve found herself standing in an honest-to-God fairy land. Well, a fairy land gone to hell. The landscape was barren, and the sky was a thick black blanket overhead. No stars sparkled in the heavens. The trees were all dead, their leafless branches reaching out towards her like old, gnarled hands. There was no grass or dirt, just black sand beneath her feet. Tethered to a rotting tree, two black horses waited. Their red eyes were focused on her. Eve had seen them once in her fairy research--they were called Night Mares. In the distance stood a castle built of a dark polished material, like onyx.

Eve turned around in a slow circle to see her surroundings a little better. "I've never seen anything like it."

"Impressive, isn't it?" Bayne said proudly.

For a moment, she'd forgotten that he was there. "That's not the word I would use. This isn't real. It can't be."

"Who are you to say what's real and what is not?" Bayne was dressed from head to toe in black. Both his breeches and his black poet's shirt would look at home in the closet of a Goth kid. Only he wasn't a teenager bent on showing individuality, he had far more nefarious goals in mind. "Some say that dreams can be far better than reality."

"Those people need to get better lives. What do you think you're doing, anyway? You *do* know this is kidnapping, right?"

"I am not concerned about mortal rules," Bayne said calmly.

"You are pushing me a little too far, you know. I'm already searching for a way to kill you."

"You won't find it. I'm a Fae and so are you. We can't be killed."

"I'm not a fairy," Eve denied.

"Of course you are, Eve. Haven't you wondered why you've survived so long? You go out every night and face blood drinkers who are far more powerful. How have you managed to not die?"

"Because I'm a good fighter," Eve said defensively. It *was* odd. She was a human, and vampires had powers and speed that were far beyond her own.

"No one is *that* good, at least no one mortal. You are changeling."

"That's impossible!" Even as she said it, Eve could feel a connection with this place. The magic in the air called to her.

"That's it, feel it! You were deposited in the mortal realm by your parents for safekeeping, and now it is time to collect you."

Then her parents weren't her parents? She wasn't even human? "No, this is a mistake!" Eve fought the childish urge to plug her ears. His words were making sense. She was starting to believe it.

"There is no mistake. You and I will live together forever," Bayne said seductively. "We will rule this realm."

“Geez, you come on strong. How about having a cup of coffee or taking in a movie before we live together for eternity? And, you know what? I don’t believe in fairies.”

Bayne raised an eyebrow.

“Dammit, it didn’t work.” She shrugged. “Worth a shot, I guess.”

Bayne continued to advance on her. “I’m only taking back what was stolen from me--my bride.”

Eve raised one eyebrow. “Hmm, I don’t remember saying ‘I do.’”

“You didn’t,” Bayne said calmly.

“Then what the hell are you talking about?”

“Your parents made a contract with my parents. We were betrothed when I was a young man of twenty and you were only a babe.”

It made no sense. “I read about you. You’re married to the woman you were betrothed to.”

Bayne smirked. “So, you’ve been doing a little research on me. Yes, I was married, but not to the woman I was betrothed to. *You* are the woman I promised to marry.”

“That’s impossible. I’m not a fairy.” Eve was shivering. It was so cold here, like a chilly desert. They were in an empty space, a living nightmare that didn’t really exist. Eve wasn’t sure how, but she sensed it. “I don’t even have any magic.”

“Yes, you have Fae heritage. You *are* a changeling, but you’ve been living in the mortal realm. Your magic has been leeches away by living there so long, but we will restore your power to you.”

“If I’m a fairy, why did my parents adopt me out to humans? Don’t say any of that safekeeping crap.”

Bayne looked away. “That is not your concern.” He turned to her once more, his face set in pleasant lines. “Living in the mortal realm has sapped your magic from you. Living with me in this place will make you powerful once more.”

“I don’t want to have any magic, thanks. I’m chock full of enough power and I want to leave! Right now!” Eve shouted.

“We both know that you find me attractive,” Bayne insinuated. He moved toward her sinuously, his hands reaching for her.

It was true, but she wasn’t going to help him make his case. “Well, the felonies are rapidly adding up, aren’t they?” Eve said, backing away. She remembered what happened when he’d gotten his hands on her before. She didn’t want a repeat performance. “First breaking and entering, then kidnapping, and now sexual assault.”

“Be quiet,” Bayne ordered.

Eve fell silent.

“Excellent.” He waved his hand, and she walked to him. Eve was fighting inside, but her body was under his control. “I like my women to be obedient.”

* * * *

Lazarus slammed the front door to his home. For good measure he opened the door again and slammed it. But it still didn’t release the violence that coursed through him. Eve rejected him at every turn. When would she finally realize that she was meant

to be at his side?

"I guess you just saw Eve."

Lazarus turned to see his most trusted minion, Warren, smoking a cigarette in the foyer. Long, tendrils of smoke curled around his face in the half light.

"Do not even speak her name, minion. She is mine and you'd do well to remember that," Lazarus said, crossing to the staircase. He didn't have time for jealous minions. There had been whispers in the ranks that he was grooming Eve to be his second in command. Some even speculated that Eve would become his mate. They were all curious as to why he hadn't killed her or turned her.

"When we told you about her, we assumed you'd fuck her, maybe kill her and be on your way, sire. We never knew that the girl was so--"

He never got a chance to finish his sentence.

Lazarus turned and ran down the stairs. He grabbed Warren by the throat and pinned him against the wall. "I am master here. Don't you ever forget your place, minion. You are here for my convenience, to do my bidding!"

"Yes, sire," Warren quickly agreed, barely getting the words out.

Lazarus released his hold, and Warren sank to the floor, clutching his throat. "If you question my authority again, I will have you staked on the front lawn so you can greet daylight as an example to others. Remember your place, minion!"

As Lazarus ascended the stairs, he caught a glimpse of Warren rubbing his sore throat. Hatred burned in his eyes.

* * * *

It was like being in an evil version of Cinderella.

Bayne's castle was just as terrifying inside as it was outside. While everything had a cold beauty to it, from the polished marble floors to the icy crystal chandeliers, there was an aura of menace surrounding it. Eve's mind struggled against Bayne, but her will now belonged to him. He pulled her strings as if she were no more than a pretty puppet.

"Eve, you may change in my bedroom." He escorted her down the vast hallway to his bedchamber and opened the door to a fantasy, or a nightmare--depending on your viewpoint. A large fireplace dominated the room. The bed was wrought iron and king-sized and swathed in black satin. There were a couple of armoires against the wall and a thick trunk at the end of the bed. Over all it was a beautiful if dramatic room.

Bayne smiled. "Get dressed. We should leave soon." He closed the door behind himself.

Eve turned with a question in her eyes.

"You may speak, but I will hear no defiance from you."

"Where are we going?"

"Why, to a little ball in my honor." He took a garment bag from his servant who hovered in the hallway. "Put these on. We haven't much time." Bayne placed it in her hands and patted her on the head.

Eve obediently put the garment bag down on the trunk and began to disrobe.

"Good girl," he said indulgently and shut the door behind him, leaving her to dress.

It felt odd to be disrobing in his bedroom, but she had no way to stop herself. In fact, something odd was happening. Eve was beginning to feel welcome here. She was beginning to grow accustomed to her surroundings. Was it magic? Perhaps a part of her recognized the place of her birth. Whatever the reason, the fairy realm was gaining a dangerous hold on her.

Eve's hand settled on the black counterpane. She found herself wondering what it would be like to sleep in that big bed. The bedding smelled like Bayne--sandalwood and a hint of sage. Eve sighed. It smelled good. His scent rolled over, whispering to her to set aside her reservations and let him make the decisions.

Eve struggled against the feeling, but it was useless. She pulled on her new clothing in a slow, methodical manner.

Twenty minutes later, she was ready. Eve had even fixed her hair. She knew it must have been a hidden directive Bayne had given her. Her hair was piled on top of her head and lay in neat curls around her face. She had all of her undergarments on and was in her gown but couldn't manage to get it zipped. She slipped her silver slippers on and walked to the door.

Bayne was in the hallway, leaning against the door. His mouth fell open as he saw Eve. The firelight, the dress, and her dreamy expression added an air of sophistication. He couldn't take his eyes from her. She was a vision. "You look lovely, my dear."

Eve didn't respond.

"What do you say when someone pays you a compliment?"

"Oh, thank you. I need your help." Eve presented him with her back. "I can't get it zipped." Eve cringed inwardly. She'd rather punch him in the face than ask him to dress her. On the upside, at least she hadn't asked him to *undress* her.

"Allow me." Bayne placed his hand at the base of her spine. Eve trembled a little at his touch. He grasped the zipper and drew it up her back. "I must confess it is disappointing to see all that creamy skin slowly disappear from sight. I wonder what you look like beneath that dress, but suppose I shall find out soon enough." When he was finished, he pressed a kiss to the top of her head. "All done."

"Thank you." She turned to face him and shook her head. "Wait, no. I don't want to say that. I-I--"

"Don't fight, my dear," he said in a soothing tone. "You want to obey me. Simply give in, follow my compulsions, and no harm shall come to you."

Eve's inner struggle ceased as he overwhelmed her mind once more. "I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me."

"That's a good girl." He opened his jacket and withdrew a black satin pouch. "For you." He handed it to her. Inside, were two elbow-length black gloves.

Eve held them limply in her hands. It was hard to form thoughts of her own. She wasn't sure what she should do with it.

"What do you say when someone gives you a gift?" Bayne asked patiently.

The answer came to her, as if by magic. "Show gratitude. Thank you, Bayne."

"You're welcome. Put them on then."

She pulled them on her arms. Eve knew she shouldn't be here, doing these things, and yet she couldn't seem to stop.

"We need masks, too. You can't very well have a costume ball without those." He pulled two simple black masks from the trunk at the end of the bed. They were on a silver handle that could be placed against the face. They only covered the eyes and nose. His was slightly larger than hers.

"Don't you already know everyone at the party?"

"That's part of the charm of a masked ball, Eve. They get to pretend to be someone else." He sighed. "Besides, I'm not quite ready to reveal myself just yet. The elfin priestess is coming here tonight to renew our vows--or so she thinks. You and I will be wed. Isn't that wonderful?"

"No," she managed to say.

"Give in!" Bayne said. "Quit trying to break my thrall. You're exhausting energy needlessly. Tell me what I want to hear."

"Yes, it's wonderful," she dutifully repeated.

Bayne took a shawl from the discarded bag and wrapped it around her shoulders. "I know you are nervous, Eve. You are about to meet your own kind. You belong here, in this realm. It can be disconcerting. The first time is always like that." He rested his hands on her shoulders and took a step closer.

"The first time?" Eve was acutely aware of the bed against the back of her knees.

"It's terrifying and exciting at the same time," Bayne murmured. "Like owning you. Your little human counterpart fell to my will on the first night, but you won't, will you? You will challenge me for years."

"Yes, sir." Her face was upturned. His breath was warm on her cheek.

"Trust me. I'll guide you, teach you," he murmured. His lips hovered over hers. "Follow my lead."

"I'm ready."

"Then kiss me, my dear. Give me a taste of what is *mine*."

Eve bridged the distance between them by placing her lips against his. Eve was in the middle of a maelstrom. He tasted of power and gloom, tasted of things that made her heart beat faster and her breath catch. She wanted more. Eve wanted to drown herself in him--the very darkest depths of soul. Eve only hoped that she could hold his attention.

When he lifted his mouth from hers, they silently gazed at each other. Neither one of them could put words to what had happened.

Bayne took a deep breath, and when he spoke, his voice was hoarse. "Beware. You've entered the serpent's den, Eve." She noted that the scenery around them had changed. They were in a ballroom, surrounded by an array of well-dressed Fae.

"How?"

"A spell." Bayne's smile didn't reach his bottomless black eyes. "Useful when transporting people."

Eve shuddered involuntarily.

* * * *

Lazarus couldn't sense Eve.

As soon as he realized that fact, he sat up in bed. Lazarus had drowned his sorrows in a bottle of red wine mixed with blood. It had done little to ease his pain, but it had called forth a host of other insecurities.

However, now wasn't the time to contemplate all of his flaws. Lazarus had a blood connection to her. Their lives were entwined. There was only one way she could escape him. He knew she was no longer on this plane of existence. What the hell had happened? Surely, Warren hadn't tried to attack him by going after her? That would have been suicide. Eve might be human, but she was a cunning killer.

He cast a doubtful look at the clock on the wall. Thankfully, it was only 3 a.m.. He had a couple of hours before daylight--more than enough time to check on her. She couldn't have gotten far. Perhaps she'd tried some spell to break his hold on her. Or perhaps she'd sought some comfort from a very old friend.

He felt his blood start to boil. Nicholas.

* * * *

Nicholas rolled over in bed. He'd been having the most amazing dream about the Baldwin brothers, all except Daniel. But his absolute favorite was Alec. They had taken him home with them and he was kissing Billy on the mouth when he was woken up by the sound of someone furiously pounding on the door.

Nicholas put the pillow over his head, but he could still hear it. It was pulling him out of the best sex dream he'd had in years. He blearily looked over at the alarm clock. It was far too early for guests. The pounding still continued.

"Fine!" Nicholas got up. He didn't bother with a robe. Whoever it was could deal with the full monty. Well, the monty was covered in silk boxers, but it was still there.

He threw open the door. "Who are you and what the hell do you want?"

On the stairs stood a handsome blond man in his thirties, but his body was in good shape. He wore jeans and a sweater--and a thunderous expression. Very chic. "Well, hello there. I don't remember calling Deliver a Hunk. What can I do for you?" Nicholas said, flashing a smile.

The other man narrowed his eyes. "Where's Eve? Is she here with you?" he asked deliberately. "Is she in your bed?"

What? "Eve? No, she's not here."

"I know what the two of you do together," the man accused.

"Right, then you know none of those things would occur in my bedroom. Hold on! Are you the guy? You are! You must be Lazarus. Oh my," Nicholas said, eyeing the other man. "Girlfriend has been holding out on me. She didn't tell me you were this yummy."

Lazarus seemed to be mildly pleased by the comment, but his expression was serious. "She's missing, Nicholas. I can't sense her. Did she talk about doing a spell with you? Did she do a spell to sever her connection with me?"

"No, last I heard she was all moony over you and really depressed about it."

"It's that damned fairy, then," Lazarus growled. "He took her."

"Come in," Nicholas offered. He stepped away from the door.

"Thank you." Lazarus walked in and angrily paced the foyer like a caged tiger. "We need a plan."

"Are you talking about the fairy who's been stalking her?"

"Yes, Bayne. He's fixated on her."

"Yeah, Eve told me he kissed her, and there was a lot of sexual innuendo," Nicholas said. One look at Lazarus's thunderous expression and he knew that she hadn't shared that much. "Oops, I assumed that she told you that."

"I see," Lazarus growled. "He wants her for his own. Well, he can't have her."

"Yeah," Nicholas agreed, watching the vampire carefully. Maybe inviting him in had been a bad idea. He privately knew that Eve would be really pissed about his Neanderthal-like behavior. "Okay, she's yours."

"Eve and I are connected through blood. I marked her!"

Nicholas had heard enough. "No wonder she's running from you. You're all *mine* and *marking* and possession terms. Eve is a modern girl. She doesn't want to be anyone's property."

Lazarus bared his fangs. "Eve is my concern, not yours. Remember that, boy."

"Woah, calm down!" Nicholas said, raising his hands. "We both want to get Eve back."

"Fine, but we'll continue the conversation later. Right now, we need to focus on the matter at hand. I can't sense her. She's gone from this plane of existence or cloaked from me. I'm betting it's Bayne. He's been stalking her for days now."

"What do we do?"

"I think we need some help from the books."

* * * *

Eve was dancing. Her head still felt muzzy inside. She felt like she was spinning, the way she did when she was a little girl and she'd stand in the dark and whirl around. She'd stare up at the sky until she lost her balance and fell. She was in Bayne's arms and the world was whirling past her yet again. Eve knew she wouldn't land safely on the ground this time.

Bayne looked down at her hungrily. "Tonight, we will consummate our union in every way. We will perform the marriage rights, and then I will take your powers and your body."

Eve stared at him blankly. She could form no thoughts or words. She was oblivious to everything but the movements of her body.

"I promise you, you will find pleasure in my bed. I will make you my queen. Forever. You will never leave my side." Bayne kissed her once more, drugging her with his mouth.

When they left the dance floor, Bayne pulled her down the hallway and into one of the private rooms. His hands roamed over her freely, like he was inspecting something he planned to purchase. "Are you eager to become my queen?"

The answer appeared in her mind. "Yes, Bayne."

"Good girl." He pulled a small velvet box from his pocket. "Because you've been so obedient, I'm going to give you a present." He opened the box and pulled out a moonstone choker. "It's a necklace with a very special gem." He fastened it tightly around her throat.

Eve's first reaction was that it looked more like a slave collar than a necklace, but the thought left her mind almost immediately. "It's so beautiful."

"And practical, too. You can trap a being's essence in the hidden chamber within

the necklace forever.”

“Forever,” Eve repeated.

“I think you should use it on your blood drinker. We don’t want him interfering in our plans. What do you think?”

“Yes, I think I will.” It sounded like such a good idea when he said it.

“Good girl.” Bayne kissed her forehead. “We shall make him pay for taking what is mine. All you need to do is trick him into kissing the stone.”

“Thank you, Bayne.” She reached up to brush a kiss against his lips.

“No, thank you, *a thaisce*, my treasure.”

* * * *

Lazarus and Nicholas spent the next two hours in Eve’s bookstore researching. She’d given Nicholas a key, and he knew where she kept all of her supernatural books. They found nothing about how to access the fairy realms.

“Apparently, the only non-Fae to enter the realms are stolen by a fairy,” Nicholas said disgustedly. “There isn’t a way to enter without a fairy that I can see.”

Lazarus threw a book against the wall. “There has to be a way. I need her back!”

Nicholas looked at the vampire. He practically vibrated with anger and was completely undone by the thought of Eve in trouble. “You really love her, don’t you?”

Lazarus jammed his hand through his hair. “What? Of course not. I’m a vampire, we don’t generally fall in love. I just ... I just need her back.” He eyed the other man. “And what about you? Are you in love with her?”

Nicholas shook his head. “No, I adore Eve and I love her, but I’ll never be in love with her *that* way.”

Lazarus shook his head. “All I’ve bloody heard about since I met her is you, and you say that you’re not in love with her?”

Nicholas grinned. “Well, I love the lady, but I don’t, you know, *love* the lady.”

“I see,” Lazarus said with a nod. “But you two are close.”

“Yes, we are, but we’re just friends. Besides, she’s talked about you an awful lot. Although it’s nice to hear that I’m important to her, too,” Nicholas said thoughtfully. “We just need to find a way to get her back and everything will work out.”

“Wait a minute. What about old magic? Magic that predates even the written word.” His smile was crafty. “What we need is a fairy ring.”

Nicholas made a face. “Do you really think that jewelry is going to help in a situation like this?”

“No, not jewelry.” Lazarus raced to the computer behind Eve’s desk and booted it up quickly. “What’s her password?”

“How would I know?” Nicholas griped. “I don’t know all about Eve.”

Nicholas raised an eyebrow.

“It’s a movie. Look it up. Fine, I know her password. It’s IKICKASS. No spaces, all capitals.”

“Of course it is.” Nicholas typed in the password and began surfing the net. He pulled up a picture of a fairy circle, which was a perfectly rounded circle of mushrooms. “This is what I was talking about. These things spring up wherever fairies meet. They like to get together and dance at night.”

“Cool. Like a little fairy rave or something. What’s with the mushrooms? Are they magic mushrooms?”

“In a way. Fairies draw their magic from the earth, so naturally the earth responds to a group of them together practicing magic together. So, fairy rings of mushrooms are a natural occurrence that’s proof of a supernatural encounter.”

Lazarus cursed.

“What?”

“Dear God, I hadn’t even considered it. Eve accidentally stepped through a fairy circle that night. It was how Bayne discovered her. I’m not certain why, but the fairy has some sort of obsession with her. Fairy circles are portals to the fairy realms, and I know just where we can find one.”

* * * *

Eve washed her hands in the bathroom. The floors were marble and the sinks were made of pure white porcelain. Even the mirrors were gilded. Everything was so beautiful here. So serene. She felt so deliciously numb. Nothing really mattered but pleasing Bayne. It was a simple existence.

Suddenly, the mirror in front of her shimmered, as though another face was emerging. “Hello?” Eve asked fearfully.

“He’s mine! He’ll always be mine.” In the mirror, Eve’s doppelganger was reflected. She looked very angry.

“You ... I know you. Somehow,” Eve said slowly. “Who are you again?”

Mirror Eve was enraged. “Don’t even pretend not to know what I’m talking about! Bayne is mine.”

“But Bayne said he was going to marry me,” Eve informed her reflection quietly.

Mirror Eve reached through the mirror and grasped Eve’s shoulders, pulling her in on top of her. They both landed on the cold floor. Eve looked around the room with awe. It was a room made of mirrors. The floor, ceilings, and even the walls reflected their images. They were in the mirror, a part of it anyway.

“What is this place?” Eve asked. Her head was starting to clear.

“It is my cage. Bayne keeps me here when he doesn’t have time for me.”

Eve felt like she was waking from a deep sleep. Her mind was becoming sharper. “Where am I? Am I in a fairy realm?”

“Yes and I’m getting sick of--” Mirror Eve broke off to stare at her counterpart. “He bespelled you, didn’t he? That’s why you’re acting so strange. Well, his magic can’t reach here,” Mirror Eve said irritably. “The room reflects all magical powers. Anti magic was seeded into it. No spells can enter or leave from this place.”

Eve was rapidly gaining her mind back. “How do I get out of here?”

“You don’t. Bayne will release us when he is ready. Or, actually, he’ll release me and keep you prisoner after he consumes your powers.”

“Nope, I don’t think that’s how it’s going to end. I have a feeling I’m going to kick the crap out of him and kill him.” Eve busied herself by feeling the cool walls that surrounded her. There had to be a catch in the wall or some secret release.

Mirror Eve was hugging herself, clearly worried. “Bayne only wants you for your magic, you know. He owns this realm and he needs you to build his strength so he can

conquer all of them. You mean nothing to him.”

“That makes two of us, only I’m smart enough to know it.” Eve thought her doppelganger was in denial. “He wants to use both of us, and you’re a fool for letting him do this to you. He keeps you in a cage!”

“But I love him!” Mirror Eve wailed. “He has to love me! You know he does. He loves me!”

“Whatever. How long have you been here?” Eve continued to feel the walls. It was easier not to look at her counterpart. Talking to yourself was downright creepy.

“Since he found out about you. You stepped into a fairy ring and he was alerted to your presence. He’s been searching for you for years. Lazarus knew your parents had switched us after the betrothal was first made when we married.”

“Bayne knew because you had no powers?”

“I can only use the residual magic that exists in the fairy realm.”

Eve looked at her counterpart sadly. Eve could see her own fate reflected in her identical green eyes. “Eve, why didn’t he divorce you or kill you when he found out?”

“Because he fell in love with me!” Mirror Eve shouted. “Why would he want you, when he has me? I’m much better than you.”

Eve had grown used to fighting with demons, male demons to be exact. They were inclined to very direct in their problems. They usually solved them with straight up violence. She wasn’t used to fighting with another woman. She’d forgotten how emotionally damaging they could be.

“Why would he want you? He has me. I’m taller, my skin is softer. I’m thinner and I also have bigger breasts.”

“And a bigger mouth, too. Did you get a discount for that after you’ve had the magical boob job?” Eve paused to take in a calming breath. “I’m sorry about that crack. I didn’t mean to offend you.”

“Bayne didn’t kill me because he loves me and wants me to be with him forever.”

Eve knew that it was probably appearances that kept Bayne from harming her. Bayne didn’t want to appear weak. He could be attacked if people knew he wasn’t as powerful as they believed. To keep up the illusion, he had to stay married to the imposter.

“He did murder your parents though--my parents, I mean. On my wedding night, he killed them both for lying to him.”

“Oh, no,” Eve breathed. She’d never met them, but she mourned their loss, too. Eve silently thanked them for sending her to her human parents. Ironically, both sets were dead--unless it wasn’t a coincidence. “He’s been searching for me?” Eve asked carefully.

“Yes, he doesn’t enter your realm often. It saps his strength. So he hired mercenaries to track you down several years ago. Blood drinkers, I believe.”

Eve felt her whole body go numb. “B-blood drinkers? Vampires, right?”

“Blood drinkers. Night walkers. Vampires. They have many names, but that is who I mean.”

“Oh, God,” Eve said. “It’s my fault my parents are dead!” She rocked back and forth on her heels. “He sent them to find me, and they tortured my parents for

information. Only, they probably had no idea what I was.”

Eve dissolved into tears. She cried like she hadn’t cried since she’d found her parents. *She* was responsible for their deaths. Eve fell to her knees and really sobbed.

All the while, the other Eve watched her with compassion in her eyes. She, too, had lost her parents. They were bonded by their mutual grief as well as their appearance.

Eventually, Eve stood on unsteady legs. She mopped her eyes with her sleeve. When she could speak again, Eve asked another burning question. “Why didn’t they just come for me afterwards?”

“The vampires told Bayne that the magical trail had gone cold. They caught no trace of fairy magic in that shop. Bayne was furious. They took the black magic he offered in payment and didn’t get him any results. He assumed that your fairy parents had covered their trail well.”

“Bayne didn’t know how close he’d come.”

“No, finding and keeping you has been all he’d wanted.”

“How did he find me?”

Mirror Eve shook her head. “I don’t know. You must have done something to attract his attention. You’ll have to tell me your secret.”

Eve had to help Mirror Eve escape from this hell. Eve pitied her. If her fairy parents hadn’t switched them, this would have been her fate. Eve swiped at her eyes again. Tears had to wait. She had a little fairy ass to kick. “I need to get out of here. Now.”

“You can’t magic your way out of here, you know. There are no special catches. All you can do is wait until he releases us.”

Eve touched the smooth mirror. “If I go back out there, will I still be under his spell?”

“No, the spell has been broken by the anti-magic. You have your free will back.”

“Excellent. If I can’t magic my way out of here, maybe force will work.” Eve went to the very back of the room and ran as fast as she could. She brought her leg up and kicked at the mirror, leaving a large crack.

“No, he’ll be very angry! We should stay here,” Mirror Eve warned, pressing a hand to her mouth. Ignoring her, Eve picked herself up off the floor and then ran at the mirror once more, this time the crack gave way--shattering the mirror.

Eve felt herself being blown up into the air and then shoved through space. The next thing she knew she found herself lying on the floor amidst slivers of broken mirror.

Mirror Eve lay beside her. She had a small cut on her face. “Bayne will be so upset,” she moaned.

“Good. That makes two of us.”

Mirror Eve scrambled to her hands and knees and frantically tried to gather up bits of the mirror.

“Stop it, you’re going to cut yourself!”

When she didn’t stop, Eve knew she had to take action. “I’m sorry to have to do this,” Eve said, before she brought her foot down on the back of her double’s neck, knocking the other woman unconscious. “I can’t have you spoiling my little surprise.”

* * * *

Lazarus and Nicholas surveyed the roomful of dancing fairies with bewildered expressions. Fortunately, the Fae seemed more interested in partying than calling them out for being party crashers.

They didn't see Eve among the twirling dancers. "Where is she?" Nicholas asked.

"Where is *he*?" Lazarus corrected. "I just need to get my hands on him. I can't kill him, but I'd like to pummel him for a few hours." Then, he spotted Eve across the room.

She was in Bayne's arms and didn't appear to be a captive. In fact, she seemed to be enjoying herself. The fairy prince was whispering in her ear and fondling her body. All the while, Eve watched him with a coy smile. He hugged her, pressing Eve along the line of his body, and she looked up at him with captivated eyes. They turned slightly, and she put her head on his shoulder. Eve locked eyes with Lazarus as he came into view.

"It's her!" Nicholas whispered. "Let's go get her."

"Wait," Lazarus warned. He watched Eve carefully. She winked at him before she made an angry face at the man touching her so intimately.

"I know she's flirting with him, but we did come here to rescue her," Nicholas said. "I don't want to go against this guy by myself, but I'm not leaving here without Eve."

Lazarus chuckled. "If there's one thing I know about Eve, she likes to rescue herself. We won't intervene just yet. I think she has a plan for him. I almost feel sorry for the bastard. Almost."

* * * *

Earth. Air. Fire. Water.

Bayne had pulled Eve into the ritual room. Eve could tell from the residual magic in the air. It was a place of power. In the center of the room was a fireplace and large pool of whirling water. There were no windows in the room, and the wind whipped through the sacred space. Under their feet, was rich dark soil--unlike the black sand outside.

The Elfin Priestess appeared from the shadows. She certainly didn't look like a little Keebler elf. Her eyes were red, and her hands sported claw-like talons on each finger. Her skin was darkest black, obsidian almost. "Are you ready to begin, my liege?"

Eve fought the urge to plug her ears. The priestess's voice was harsh and discordant, like nails on a blackboard.

"More than ready," Bayne answered. He pulled Eve closer to him and pressed her against his body. "Have me repeat the vows. Renew our contract, renew our powers."

"Very well, sire. You must hold her while you say the ancient words, and then you must consummate this reunion." She opened a large, dog-eared book and began to intone a verse in Gaelic.

Eve knew she had to accept her powers. She couldn't fight Bayne without them. Part of her still hoped that he was wrong and that she wasn't a fairy. If she wasn't, she was in big trouble. If she really was a fairy, Bayne was in for a world of hurt.

Bayne had all of the work to do. The priestess asked him to repeat many things, but Eve didn't understand Gaelic. When it was finished, he looked down at her

triumphantly. "*Tá tú go h-álainn,. Gráim thú. Go síoraí.*" Bayne smirked. "I just told you that you are beautiful and that I will love you forever."

Eve knew it was lie. The only thing Bayne loved was himself, although she supposed he got the beautiful part right.

He turned to the priestess. "Leave us, we need to be alone."

The priestess vanished in a puff of smoke.

"Do you feel it?" Bayne asked. "You're vibrating with power." Bayne pulled her to him and kissed her harshly, like he was trying to devour her with his mouth.

Eve groaned as his magic poured from his mouth. There was an answering call from her body, too. Magic to magic.

The power inside her was tremendous. Every cell felt alive. Her body hummed with energy. She felt as though she'd been sleeping these past years. And maybe she had--Bayne had told her that living in the mortal world sapped her strength. Here, she felt powerful.

It poured from her body into his mouth, as well. The magic met and mingled. She'd never felt anything like it.

"I'm not under your control anymore," Eve said, pushing back from Bayne.

"No, you have been restored," Bayne said carefully. Eve was wild, and magic could be unpredictable. He needed to bring her to heel as soon as possible.

"I restored myself before this actually. With the help of the other Eve. You remember her, don't you? Your wife? The one you keep locked up in the mirror."

"You've seen her?" Bayne asked. He hadn't expected his passive little Eve to betray him.

"Oh yeah, I did, but I'm going to see that you're punished for that and so much more. I just wanted to get my magic back, so I could use it to destroy you." Eve had never felt so juiced before. She was breathing heavily. Every instinct in her demanded that she suck the life from him.

"Are you sure that is what you want?" Bayne asked seductively. His magic reached for hers, making her moan. He reinforced it with his body, pulling her close. "Feel that? Think of how good it could be between us. I know you want me."

Eve did want him, but it wasn't about passion or even love. It was about dominance. She wanted to screw him over for screwing up her life. He'd killed her parents, for pity's sake. Both sets! He deserved pain. "You're right. I do want you. I want to screw you." She wanted to hurt him like he'd hurt her.

"Then come to me. You are everything I dreamed. My true match."

It was a contest of wills. Their magic crackled between them. Eve had never fought like this before. There was no violence, only controlled civility. It was the fight of her life.

"I want to control you," Bayne whispered, as if he were wooing her with sweet words. He nibbled on her earlobe. "Would you like that, Eve? Would you like to be in my power?"

"I forgot. You like your ladies to be obedient, don't you?" Eve kissed him again, only this time, she nipped his tongue, causing blood to well up. "I like to be in control though."

"You need to be shown your place," Bayne said, bucking his hips against her.

Eve groaned. "Shut up." She undid his breeches and his cock sprang forth, a thick tower of flesh. She stroked him with her hand. There was no tenderness in her touch. She just wanted to come out on top. She felt like an animal.

"That's it! Yes!" Bayne growled, all pretense of being civilized and courteous had fled. He pushed her back against a table, candles and glass vials falling to the floor in a crash. Bayne reached beneath her skirt and burrowed between her legs. "I need inside you!"

Eve moaned and spread herself for him. "Your fingers! Put your fingers inside of me." The magic arced between them.

Bayne probed her with his fingers, but it was gentle. No, he slid them in and out roughly, a prelude to putting himself inside her. "Is that what you like? Is that what you need?"

"Yes!" Eve squirmed. She inserted her hand between her legs and played with her clitoris.

"No!" Bayne knocked her hand away. "I didn't say you could play."

Eve's eyes were slits. "I don't remember asking permission. Fuck me the right way or get off of me and I'll find someone who will."

"You're mine, Eve. You have been mine since we were betrothed," Bayne breathed against her mouth, before taking her lips in a frenzied kiss. He rubbed his thumb over her clitoris until she exploded beneath him. "That's right! Give it to me!"

When her body's needs were satisfied, Eve came back to herself. She shoved at his chest. "Get off!"

"But we haven't--"

"Thank God!" Eve pushed her skirt down and slipped out from beneath him.

"I see," Bayne said with an obscene chuckle. "You're embarrassed that you acted like a common whore. You couldn't help it, Eve. Women crave me," Bayne said in what she supposed was a cajoling tone.

That clinched it. She wasn't the slightest bit attracted to him anymore. It was the magic that she missed, not the man. "Oh, yeah, you're a real prize."

He seized her. "We both know you want it."

Bayne's cock still strained towards her. "I don't think I want *that*."

Bayne put his hand on the top of her head, and tried to push her head down.

"You're mine. You always have been. There's no point in fighting it. Come on, just kiss it. Please, just kiss--"

"How about you kiss this instead?" Eve ripped the necklace from her throat pressed the moonstone to his mouth. In a blur of white light, Bayne was sucked inside. When it was over, she turned the necklace over, revealing the milky white stone. With a fierce expression on her face, she whispered, "You're mine now."

* * * *

Eve left the room with the choker around her throat. She felt oddly numb. It was over but she didn't feel any better. Vengeance had changed nothing. Her parents were still dead, both sets. She still considered James and Susan Flynn to be her real parents. Biology didn't matter as much as her memories did.

Lazarus was in the hall. His eyes looked weary. It was clear that he knew what had happened in the altar room.

"Oh, Lazarus, I'm so sorry." Eve hung her head. "I got my powers, but it was too much. It made me crazy. It was like I was on fire or something. I-I--"

"I know," Lazarus whispered. "I can smell him on you." He sighed. "Did he hurt you? Are you all right?"

After all of that, he was concerned about her. "Yes, I'm fine. Lazarus, I wanted to hurt him. It wasn't about love or even lust. It was about pain and revenge. I feel nothing for him," she said, desperate to make him understand. The thought of losing him was more painful that she could imagine.

"I know that," he said quietly. "Give us a few days, pet. I'll be fine. What matters now is that you're safe. I saw a blast of light. What happened?"

Eve touched the choker with a feral grin. "He's in here, for all eternity apparently. I trapped him in the moonstone. Lazarus, he killed my parents. I am a fairy and--"

"Shh," Lazarus soothed, taking her in his arms. He kissed the top of her head. "You can tell me everything once we're home. Let's get Nicholas and get out of this place.

"Nicholas came?"

"Apparently, you have two men that love you to distraction," Lazarus said with a small smile. "I can't fault him for that."

"Love me?"

"Yes, I love you, you silly girl," Lazarus admitted.

She had no idea what to say to that. "Oh, wow. That's really ... Lazarus, I'm sorry." She looked up at him with big eyes. "I don't know what to say."

"I know, pet. Don't say anything for now. It's all right. Everything will work itself out in time. For now, let's go home."

Eve smiled. "Before we do, I have a little errand to run. I have something that doesn't belong to me."

* * * *

Eve and Lazarus stood at the threshold to her apartment. She wrapped her arms around him and touched his cheek. "Thank you for being so understanding." Eve was pleased by the way he'd come to her aid and the way he had understood what happened with Bayne. Lazarus had placed himself in jeopardy to save her.

The significance of the affectionate gesture wasn't lost on Lazarus. This was the first time she'd touched him tenderly. He was pleased that there was some genuine emotion in her eyes. She felt something for him. Before this breakthrough, they seemed to have two modes: violence and sex. When they weren't pummeling each other, they were having sex. Eve was becoming important to him and she also valued him.

Lazarus couldn't ever remember having tender feelings for a woman, not since he'd become a vampire.

A ghost of a smile settled on his lips. "Yes, well, who else would I argue with? You aren't a short term relationship it would seem. So, I intend to have you around for a very long time."

The statement was a little too cryptic for Eve's taste, just like the expression on

his face. Eve had never seen him look quite so pensive. He was up to something. Lazarus had once threatened to make her a vampire when they first met. Surely, he wouldn't think of doing that now?

Eve shook her head to clear it. She was obviously still affected by the fairy magic. She kissed his mouth gently. It was a thank-you kiss and a promise of more sentimental things. "My knight in tarnished armor."

He kissed her fingers. "Do you think you've put it behind you?"

She knew what he was referring to. "No, the vampires who murdered them are still out there. Bayne hired the vampires to torture them, not to kill them. Lazarus, they had fun doing it. They ripped my parents apart. I have to find them and kill them for my own peace of mind."

"I understand, and I will help you locate them in any way that I can."

"Thank you," Eve kissed him again and touched the moonstone. She wore the choker most days.

"Why didn't you just kill him?" Lazarus asked curiously.

"Because this will hurt more. He'd rather not exist than be trapped by himself."

"How long will you make him pay for his crime?"

"Maybe I'll have my great-great-great-grandchildren release him." She narrowed her eyes. "Or maybe I'll put him under one of the floorboards in my apartment and forget about him."

His eyes widened. "That's surprisingly vengeful, pet. Are you sure you shouldn't have kept your fairy powers?"

"What's the point? I couldn't use them in the mortal world. Besides, I think Mirror Eve needed some firepower. Hopefully, she'll grow a backbone, too."

"If she's anything like you, pet, she'll become the scourge of the fairy world."

Eve laughed. She walked up two stairs. "Goodnight, Lazarus." She was acutely aware that she hadn't told him she loved him.

Lazarus touched the invisible barrier that separated them. "Can I come in, Eve?"

She knew he wanted entrance to much more than her home. He wanted into her heart, as well. Eve knew Nicholas was right. She had to let someone love her sometime very soon, or she would grow cold inside. Just like Bayne.

Eve smiled. "Yes, you can come in."

Lazarus stepped through the barrier and into a place in Eve's heart.

The End.