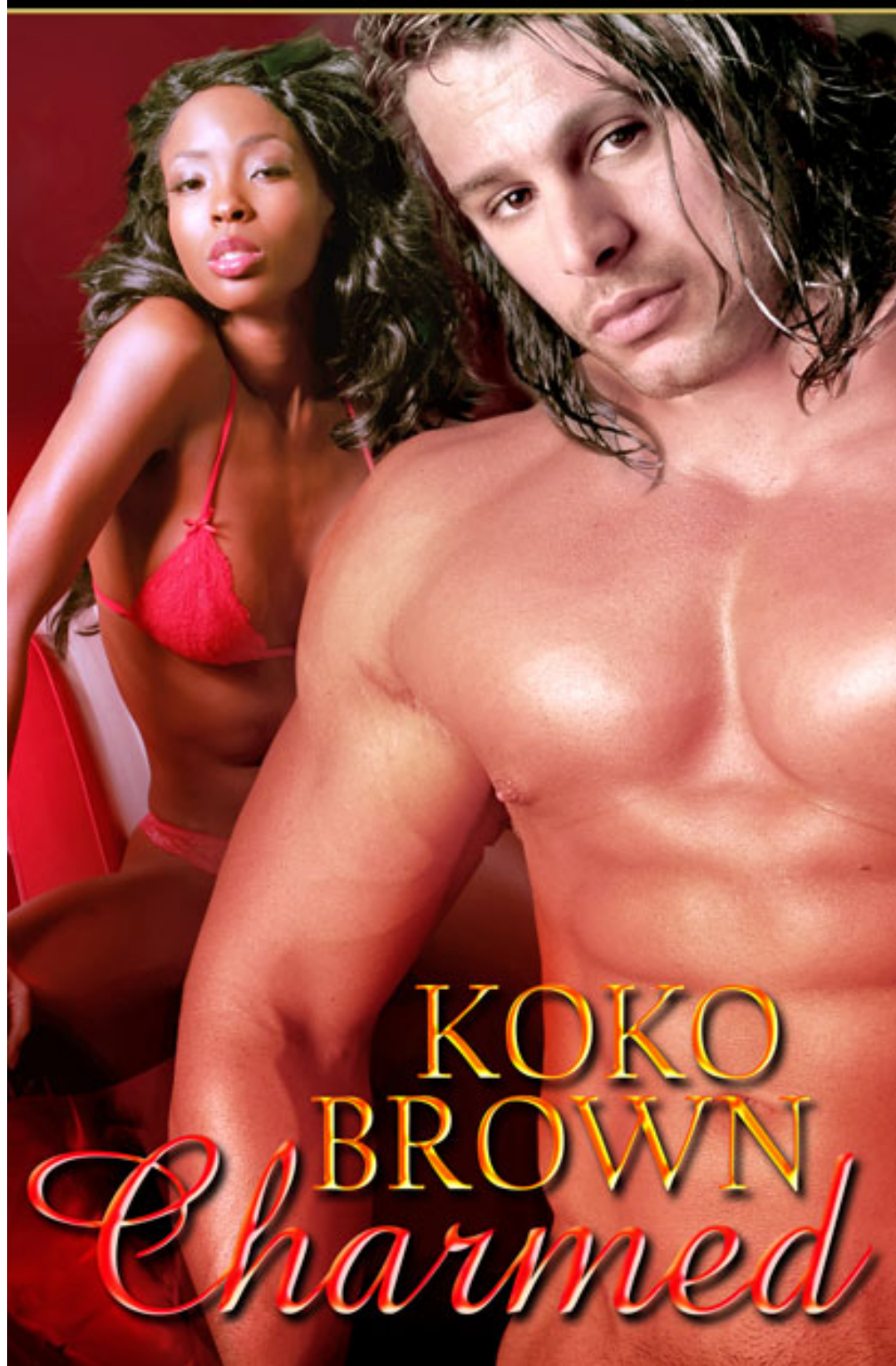


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



KOKO
BROWN
Charmed

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Charmed

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CHARMED

Koko Brown

Dedication

This book is dedicated first and utmost to my late mother who always listened to all of my harebrained schemes and never doubted me nor told me I couldn't do it. Without her love and support, I would have never accomplished a fourth of the goals I set for myself. And last, but surely not least, to my muse, the infamous Troy Alexander. Your colorful true-life adventures have definitely helped to ward off the dreaded writer's block!

Chapter One

"Mm... That feels delicious," Chloe purred, opening her legs wider. Someone was performing some fantastic tricks with his tongue. So much so that her toes curled and her hands clenched in his silky hair. He must have liked her reaction because his tongue swept unmercifully across her pussy lips then plunged deeply into her heated channel.

"Oh jumping Jehoshaphat!" Chloe yelled. "I'm almost there, please don't stop!" And he didn't. Instead he added a finger to his arsenal. He stroked her clit as his tongue plunged in and out of her pussy.

"Oh yes, yes, that's it! Give it to me, daddy!" Millions of stars, not just from the predawn light, blinded Chloe's vision as the beginnings of her orgasm ripped through her. Unabashedly she screamed her release then yelled when she felt a sharp prick on the inside of her thigh.

What the fuck! Did he just bite me?

Her dreams were definitely getting kinkier and kinkier! Oh well, whatever he'd done, she wanted him to do it again because her orgasm had just kicked up ten notches as he sucked on her inner thigh.

While she struggled to regain her senses, she distinctly heard the telltale crinkle of foil. As her body continued to pulse from her orgasm, she felt her lover slide his way up her body and position himself between her quivering thighs.

"Do you want more?" he asked, whispering huskily in her ear. As if trying to coax the right answer out of her, he moved his hand, which had been stroking her pussy, and exchanged it with the head of his cock. Cock indeed! It felt more like a battering ram with its thick head and wide shaft.

"I don't think you're gonna fit," Chloe panted when he slowly inserted the head of his cock inside her.

"I fit quite well four times last night," he chuckled, working his way into her tight passage.

"Four times?" They'd had sex four times already! Where had she been when all this went down? But before Chloe could become more indignant on the matter, she almost choked when he plunged deep inside her, filling her. He was so thick and deep within her she just knew he was touching her womb, or was unbelievably close.

"Ah!" Chloe gasped, shuttering her eyes at the exquisite pain-pleasure he was inflicting on her. As his thrusts became more demanding, she eagerly met him thrust for thrust by lifting her hips from the bed.

"I love it when you throw your pussy back at me like that!" her lover groaned. "You would be the death of any mortal man," he grunted, rising up on the palms of his hands. Now he could dig deeper into her. Sliding one of his arms under her thigh, he lifted her leg up and wide and thrust even deeper into her now quivering flesh.

Chloe opened her eyes and looked into the face of her dream lover and the breath caught in her throat. She knew she had a great imagination but she'd really gone overboard with this one.

Not only was he white with a delicious British accent but he was drop-dead gorgeous to boot!

Never in her thirty-four years had she dreamed up a lover outside her own race. Most of her dreams featured deep chocolate-brown hunks with pretty skin and even prettier white teeth.

But she had to admit she hadn't done badly with this one. He had impossibly wide shoulders, which tapered down to washboard abs with to-die-for v-cuts. His jet-black hair curled softly to the nape of his neck. A strong jawline, aquiline nose and sparkling green eyes the color of fresh spring leaves completed the picture.

He was manly perfection personified.

It was amazing what a few days of vacation could do for the mind and body! Two weeks ago, she'd closed on the last house in a hundred-unit subdivision she'd been

brokering for the past seven months. In need of a long-overdue vacation, Chloe had decided to fly to Vegas a week ago for some relaxation and fun.

Well, whatever it was, she just hoped her dream didn't end anytime soon because not only was he one of the best-looking men she'd ever dreamed up but he was working it.

"Do you like what you see?" he asked. If Chloe weren't so besotted by the rotation of his hips against her pelvis, she would have thought he sounded insecure. When did dreams start acquiring insecurities?

"Ungh-hungh," she gasped, nodding her head.

Oh my lamb! He was really working his cock now. It took Chloe several attempts to form a coherent sentence. "B-b-but I especially like what you are doing to me." Wanting him even deeper, she shifted her position lower onto the mattress then wrapped her legs around his hips.

"Oh...yes...love...hold me tight. Just like that. Your pussy is so hot and wet," he hissed. Grabbing hold of the headboard, he quickened his pace so that his balls were now slapping against her ass.

"Oh...oh...oh," she panted. "Please don't wake up, Chloe girl, this dream can't end now!"

"Mrs. Smythe, I assure you it won't," her lover growled, nipping at her puckered nipples. "As long as you want me, this will never end."

Mrs. Smythe? Oh no, he didn't! Dream or not, he wasn't going to call her another woman's name. Pushing on his shoulders, Chloe tried to sit up. But his hard body wouldn't budge and although he wasn't driving into her at such a voracious pace as before, he didn't stop.

"What's wrong?" he asked, trying to kiss her lips.

"You just called me another woman's name," Chloe huffed, trying to wiggle away from him, but his body kept her trapped under him even when he began to shake with laughter.

"Oh, you are a delight! I knew you were the one to spend the rest of my life with," he drawled, his clipped British accent bringing goose bumps to her skin. Or was it the fact that his long strokes had slowed to an exquisitely slow pace?

Chloe closed her eyes in ecstasy. For some reason, she suddenly didn't mind if he called her Priscilla, Queen of the jungle, as long as he didn't stop. This man had the wickedest hip fluctuations.

"I...know...exactly...what...your...name...is," he punctuated every word with a kiss to her lips and a thrust of his hips. "It's Mrs. Chloe Smythe. You're my wife."

"Yeah, right, and your name is Count Vladimir Dracul and I'm the queen of the damned," Chloe chuckled, egging him on.

Whatever turned him on was fine with her as long as she was able to come...and she was almost there *again* as she felt the heat slowly beginning to build in her belly.

"Well, no, my name is Tristan Smythe. Count Vladimir was a lonely bastard who didn't deserve the notoriety he received and, yes, you are a queen of sorts and I don't think my people are damned."

Chloe's eyes shot open. Why did he have to ruin her dream and her impending orgasm with this foolishness?

"Whoa, whoa, partner," Chloe huffed. Taking him by surprise, she bucked her hips and successfully pushed him off her. She then rolled out of bed, pulling the sheet with her.

"Okay, now it's time for this dream to end." Chloe closed her eyes then pinched her arm. When she opened her eyes again, her gorgeous lover was still lying stretched out on the bed. He was looking at her intently and with what looked a bit like worry.

"Why do you always keep referring to this as a dream? This is definitely real and we *were* married last night." He validated his claim by lifting his left hand and wiggling his ring finger at her, a gold band winked back at her.

Without even having to look down, Chloe instinctively knew the weight on her left hand wasn't her favorite aquamarine-and-diamond ring she wore on a daily basis. Unable to resist, she looked down at her hand.

"Damn!" Chloe couldn't believe the size of the yellow diamond, the size of a lima bean, sitting on her ring finger. Grabbing hold of the back of the nearest chair, she was suddenly seized with a bout of nausea.

"Oh God, what have I done?" she groaned, beginning to falter backward.

"The ancients say that temporary memory loss usually occurs during the transition," Tristan informed her matter-of-factly. He removed the condom then rose gracefully from the bed with blissful disregard to his own nudity.

Although he reached to steady her, Chloe snatched her arm away from him. That sent her stumbling toward the wall of windows that looked out onto the Las Vegas strip.

Unmindful of the thirty-floor drop below, Chloe fought down the urge to hurl as the events of the past week flashed before her eyes.

She remembered how she and her best friend Shirley had flown out to Las Vegas to celebrate her selling out Metro Park West the week before and the subsequent six-figure commission that came with the final closing.

She also remembered checking into the luxurious Kensington. Covering over five city blocks, the hotel featured miniature-size versions of well-known British landmarks.

One of the hotel's four restaurants was housed in a half-acre park with live trees reminiscent of Hyde Park. The Big Ben was home to a traditional English pub. Replicas of the London Eye and Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum provided guests with in-house entertainment. And the lobby was surrounded by the River Thames.

“Oh God, what have I done?” Chloe whispered as she remembered that fateful night a week ago.

She and Shirley had only been in the hotel for a few hours when she’d met Tristan Smythe, the sole proprietor of The Kensington. She couldn’t believe her luck when she’d met the handsome owner of the newest and most popular hotel on the strip at the five-dollar roulette table at the casino.

When she sat down across from him, they’d exchanged polite smiles but she couldn’t help feeling that he was watching her. And she was correct because he’d eventually moved several seats over to sit next to her and began flirting with her outrageously. Even going so far as to asking her out on a date, which she repeatedly refused, despite of his charms.

However, Chloe wasn’t entirely immune to his handsomeness, British accent and dry wit for her concentration had faltered on the gambling table. And she ended up losing five hundred of her hard-earned dollars.

Calling it a night before she lost any more money, she had been floored when he’d gathered his winnings as well and invited both her and Shirley back to his suite for a late-night supper. Unbeknownst to them, his suite consisted of the entire floor of his hotel.

From that day forward, he’d wined and dined her with his private chef. Upgraded their room to the Queen’s suite, treated them to Las Vegas shows and flown her to Lake Tahoe in his private helicopter.

This week had been so much of a whirlwind that she hadn’t known if she was coming or going. Two nights ago as they were having dinner in his penthouse, she hadn’t hesitated when he’d asked her to marry him. Before she knew it, the marriage license was procured. And she was standing in front of a minister in the hotel’s grand ballroom, pledging to love and obey him in sickness and in health “until death do us part”.

Turning to him, Chloe knew deep down she couldn't have done any better if she'd been in her right mind. Yet this man was still a stranger and a fruitcake to boot with his silly talk of Count Vladimir and the ancients. She might be a plus-size girl but she wasn't *that* desperate.

"We're celebrating our honeymoon, aren't we?" she asked. He nodded his head, yet he didn't move toward her when she finally collapsed into the chair she was holding on to.

"Well, there is only one thing that we can do," she announced, smiling at him brightly. Obviously he must have felt her smile was genuine because he returned it with one of his own.

Chloe's heart skipped a beat at the effect it created on his already gorgeous features. Maybe she might have to rethink this marriage thing. It wouldn't be so bad to wake up every morning to a beautiful man like him. And be put to bed by his delicious cock buried deep inside her every night.

Girl, get a grip! What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, as they say, and this farce of a marriage will definitely stay here.

"And what's that, love? Are you about to suggest we get back in bed and try for a fifth round?" The smile that curved his lips offered such sinful promises she was hard-pressed not to tackle him where he stood and ride his cock to hell and back.

However, Chloe bolstered herself against his charms. She tightened the sheet around her and shook her head.

"No, that's not going to happen *again*," she stated firmly but lost a little of her resolve when she noticed the slight narrowing of his eyes.

"What I was going to say is that the only thing we can do at this moment is to get a divorce..." Chloe faltered a little in her brave speech because his face had become hard as stone. And he'd started to clench and unclench his fists. Undeterred, she continued. "As you've already stated, we've consummated our marriage several times. I'm pretty sure there are dozens of places right here in Las Vegas that can draw up the papers."

"I am not giving you a divorce, Chloe. You're talking nonsense. For you crave me as much as I crave you. The transition has caused you to forget what you felt for me before. Soon I will initiate the next phase and you will finally be one of us."

The man was definitely insane! Here she had given him the easy way out and he'd refused. The idiot could have any woman he wanted and he wanted her—the pretty-faced fat girl.

All her life, Chloe had been told she had such a pretty face—if she'd only lose some of that weight. Little did anyone know that because of well-meaning compliments like that, it took her almost twenty years to come to love her plus-size figure and work with what she was born with.

Although she was a size fourteen, sometimes a sixteen depending on the time of the month, she was a *very* solid fourteen. What people referred to as a brick house. She was nicely proportioned with slim ankles, firm thighs toned from hundreds of squats and a well-rounded derriere. She also had ample hips, a flat stomach with a mild case of love handles and a pert 36D bust.

But even though she thought of herself as attractive, she knew she wasn't attractive enough to pull and keep the attention of the man who was now her husband.

"What do you mean one of us?" Chloe asked, not understanding all of his mumbo jumbo. If he needed a wife to become a U.S. citizen, he could have paid for a more willing victim.

"I'm a vampire, Chloe," Tristan sighed as if they had been through all of this before. "I am the leader of one of the oldest and most powerful covens made up of more than two hundred thousand or so beings like myself."

Palming his chin in his hand, he waited for her reaction. With nothing forthcoming he spun on his heels and disappeared into the bathroom, slamming the door soundly behind him.

Oh. My. Lamb. I've married a nutcase! Chloe felt even sicker. She knew there had to be something wrong with him because no one that gorgeous would want to be stuck with the "fat girl", and here was her proof.

Warily, Chloe approached the bathroom. The faint sound of running water could be heard on the other side. She cleared her throat and squared her shoulders then knocked on the solid-wood frame. Before she could ask him where her clothes were, he yanked her inside.

"I knew you would come to your senses, love," he murmured while showering kisses along her shoulders and neck. "If you would have left me, I think I would have died. Ha! Imagine the irony of that," he chuckled.

As if she were a lightweight, Tristan easily lifted her up onto the counter. Obviously he was just about to shave for he'd prepared a bowl of lather, the water was running and his razor was lying on top of a crisp white towel.

"You have to be the sexiest and most desirable woman I've seen in centuries," he breathed, his nose buried deep in the curls lying on her shoulders. With one deft movement, he quickly snatched her sheet out of its careless knot and wedged himself firmly between her thighs. Chloe opened her mouth to protest but she was silenced by the insistent press of his warm lips and his roaming fingers, which ran riotously through the curls covering her pussy.

Why does he have to have such soft warm lips and such naughty fingers? Chloe groaned in defeat. She would leave just after she got some more nooky.

She arched her neck as he placed kisses down her throat to the valley between her breasts. As if she were a tasty morsel, he began to draw patterns around her right nipple with his tongue, stopping every now and then to nip playfully at it. Tired of his play, he finally popped it into his mouth and began to suck on it.

"Ah, Mrs. Smythe, this is where you were meant to be," he groaned while switching from her right nipple to her left. "With me sucking on your delicious mounds and me wedged between your creamy brown thighs."

In one swift movement, Tristan laid Chloe on her back on the granite countertop. He tugged the sheet from under her hips and tossed it aside. As he placed his right hand on her stomach, his eyes darkened to a shade of green that appeared almost black.

“Look at how arousing my skin looks next to yours,” he whispered.

Unable to resist, Chloe looked down at her torso and silently agreed with his observation. Although it was rather erotic to see his paler skin next to her own, it wasn't half as erotic as watching him grip his cock in his hands.

Lord save me. He was huge—a good ten inches and incredibly thick. Fear crept into the pit of her belly as she wondered how he'd been able to stuff all of that in her some time ago. But her fear quickly turned to desire as he slid the tip of his cock across her slit, causing her clit to jump.

“Ssss... You are so hot,” he hissed. “Tell me you want me,” he growled, while pressing the head of his cock just inside her tight opening.

Oh Lord, he was teasing her! Didn't he know she wanted him? She was running her hands all over his chest like she couldn't get enough of him and she was making little mewling sounds like a hungry kitten. She wasn't going to give him the satisfaction by begging as well. However, he had other plans because he withdrew the tip of his cock and palmed it in his hands once again.

“Nooo,” Chloe moaned.

“Tell me!” he ordered with an insistent slap on the side of her thigh.

Chloe looked at him and was taken aback at how feral he looked. His skin stretched tautly on his body, his nostrils flared and his pupils glowed like black diamonds. She looked down at him pumping his delicious cock in his hand. Unbelievably, it appeared to grow even larger!

“I want you, Tristan—” she groaned. He stepped back between her legs and the rest of her words died in her throat as his cock pressed hotly into her eager sex. He pressed so deeply into her, his pelvis was flush to her own. As his hips retreated, she grabbed for him, causing him to chuckle.

"You are a greedy one! I love it," Tristan bit out, driving back into her.

This time he would take the pace slow. He wanted her to have no doubts of who was making love to her. It had taken all of his willpower restraining himself from shaking some sense into her when she'd asked him for a divorce. Hell would freeze over before he let this beautiful, vivacious creature out of his life—especially since he'd been waiting for someone to complete him for several hundred years.

Tristan had waited centuries to find his soul mate and he'd known instantly that she was the one. In fact, when he first laid eyes on her seven short days ago, the bloodlust had fallen on him like a ton of bricks. It was good for both of them, especially Chloe, that she'd fallen under his spell. He shuddered at what he would have become had she refused his pursuit—his bloodlust for her was that strong.

"Tristan, what are you doing to me?" Chloe panted as she grabbed at his forearms.

"What does it look like, love? I'm trying to fuck the daylights out of you," he puffed. And he practically was doing just that, Chloe thought to herself as his hips pummeled into her with lightning speed. Reaching down between her legs, she heightened her pleasure several levels by using two of her fingers to strum her clit.

"Oh...Tristan...Tristan," Chloe chanted. "I'm going to come!"

"Yes, baby, that's what I want you to do. I want you to cream all over my cock. *Your* cock," Tristan encouraged as she clenched around him. As she screamed her release, her sex gripped his cock almost to the point of pain. It was his undoing as he felt his own orgasm wash over him.

"Oh shit...shit," he groaned, grinding his hips into her pussy. After the last of his seed had emptied into her, he collapsed on top of her.

"I guess I better leave you alone and let you finish your shaving," Chloe announced, pushing gently at his shoulders to get his attention.

"I'll let you off *only* if you agree to take a bath with me afterward," he purred, placing a kiss on her rounded belly.

Gosh, this man was insatiable, Chloe thought. Yet, although she was tempted, she knew if she didn't leave now, she would never leave. He would just keep on seducing her and as attracted as she was to him, she would let him. It was now or never.

"That sounds good. Run the water, will you? By the way, where is my luggage?" Chloe asked innocently. To ease his suspicions, she wrapped her arms around his neck and began to plant kisses on his hair-roughened chin.

"Why do you want your luggage?" he asked.

Chloe's breath caught in her throat at his question. She looked away to hide the guilt in her eyes. "Well...it *was* going to be a secret but I have my favorite bath oil in my suitcase and I want to pour it in the bathwater."

Chloe's mind went blank and she held her breath as he contemplated her words. The seconds seemed to tick by like hours. However, to her relief, he gripped her waist and helped her off the counter. Chloe snatched up the sheet, or what was left of it, off the floor and quickly wrapped it around her.

"Your luggage is in the dressing room, which is on the other side of the bedroom. You can unpack while the water is running."

Nodding her head, Chloe made a move to leave the bathroom but something made her turn back to him. This would be the last time she would see him like this, the next time would be across the room in a court of law.

Feeling a twinge of guilt, she reached up on tiptoes, wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him for the last time. Chloe closed her eyes and committed him to memory. She memorized the softness of his lips, the way his hair curled around her fingers and the hard feel of his chest against her breasts.

Sighing, she finally ended the kiss then stepped back. As she left the bathroom, she made sure she closed the door behind her.

Picking up the tail of the sheet, Chloe raced around the bed to the double doors leading to the dressing room. Upon entering, she was shell-shocked by the sheer size of the room, which was slightly larger than many people's garages. And amazingly enough every single wall was taken up with rows and rows of expensive suits and shirts, which were most likely handmade and of every color imaginable.

Chloe walked over to the nearest rack and fingered the tailored pants, which were separated by style and color. Her husband was a man after her own heart—he was a true clotheshorse! She would never have to be ashamed of her hundred pairs of shoes living with him.

Despite discovering something they had in common, she didn't waste any time in locating her luggage at the back of the dressing room.

As she unzipped her rollaway bag, she noticed that a wall had already been cleared to hang her belongings. Flipping open the top, she pulled out a pair of jeans and a cashmere sweater. As she pulled on her pants, she speed-dialed Shirley on her cell phone.

Chapter Two

"Come on, come on, wake up!" Chloe prayed.

"Calling to gloat?" Shirley yawned into the phone.

Chloe could feel the anger building in her throat threatening to choke her. Was everyone in on this farce of a marriage except her? Taking several seconds to calm her nerves, she tried in vain not to shriek in the phone.

"You know I got married?"

"Of course, I was there. You all needed a witness," Shirley sighed. Chloe just knew she was rolling her eyes on the other end. "You know, girlfriend, for it to be so last minute, it was actually quite beautiful. He'd even flown in several dozens of your favorite Black Beauty roses."

"Well, the honeymoon's over," Chloe announced, zipping up her jeans.

"Why? But I thought you were head over heels in love, well, maybe not love, but at least lust with him."

"Was I?" Chloe asked. "The strangest thing is that I don't remember anything! I mean, I remember bits and pieces. Don't get me wrong. He would be a perfect catch but, girl, he's completely nuts."

"No! Girl, spill it." Chloe knew that her friend was wide-awake now. Gossip could wake her out of a coma.

"Shirley, Mr. Drop-dead-gorgeous thinks he's a vampire." Chloe waited to hear the laughter on the other end. And, like clockwork, it spilled from her best friend of fourteen years like beans from a jar.

"No! Wait, wait, let's use some common sense. Maybe he was just pulling your chain." Good ole Shirley. She was always looking for the silver lining. But in this situation, there were no positives, her husband was truly mental.

"He was not pulling my chain! He even implied that I was becoming one as well. Therefore explaining my not being able to remember my nuptials."

"Oh, this is classic! He's trying to get you to become his Elvira, Mistress of the Dark. Like in that movie."

Although Chloe was the more levelheaded of the two, it never took Shirley too long to fall on the same page as she, thus providing the solid foundation of their long friendship.

Chloe picked up her suitcase and prepared to make her way out of this mess she'd made of her life. Praying her "husband" was still in the bathroom and oblivious to her motives, she poked her head out of the dressing room to make sure her escape would be clear.

Jumping Jehoshaphat! Her husband was richer than King Midas himself. As she crossed the bedroom, she finally noticed her surroundings. What walls were not made up of glass windows were covered in a dark teak as was the floor.

In the middle of the room sat a platform bed, which could easily accommodate ten. And judging from the seven-by-eight mirror hanging from the ceiling above, it probably had. On the opposite wall, directly across from the bed, a leather sofa and armchairs flanked a fireplace and several shelves of books.

Lord have mercy! Why did her husband have to be nuttier than her Grandma Violet's fruitcake? Under different circumstances, she would have loved this lifestyle. But staying with him was out of the question. She had her own life back in Atlanta and she wasn't ready to give it up for some psycho, no matter how sexy and rich he was.

"Hello, are you still there?" Shirley yelled into the phone, regaining her attention.

“Sh, you’re going to get me caught,” Chloe hissed. “Shirley, get your butt out of bed right now and meet me in the lobby in five minutes! We’re going to catch the earliest flight out of Las Vegas.”

Chloe scurried across the bedroom as fast as she could without making any noise. She looked toward the bathroom to see if she’d disturbed him but the door remained closed.

Easing out of the room, she didn’t bother to close the door behind her. Once she was in the hall, she took off like a champion track star. She flew past several doors that were most likely guestrooms or offices before she made it to the living room, which was half the size of a soccer field.

Like the bedroom, two walls were covered with the dark teak wood. And one looked out onto the strip below. However, one wall contained a set of double doors, which she correctly guessed led out to the hallway containing only a sideboard topped with fresh flowers and the penthouse elevator.

“Come on, come on,” Chloe muttered. She pressed the down button for what seemed like the hundredth time. But what seemed like hours was only a matter of seconds as the elevator dinged open. Obviously the service for this elevator was much quicker since it was only used by Tristan and his personal guests.

Stepping off the elevator, Chloe hustled across the miniature London Bridge, which connected the hotel’s guest towers to the front lobby.

As she passed the front desk, she caught the eye of the day manager. For some reason he seemed very familiar to her. Then it hit her—he’d been the one in charge of relaying messages back and forth between her and Tristan throughout the week.

At first he simply nodded his head at her in acknowledgment but then he noticed her suitcase trailing behind her. His eyes quickly scanned the lobby looking for his employer.

Undeterred, Chloe continued her trip across the hotel lobby. She swung through the hotel's revolving doors and resurfaced into the sunshine outside. Stumbling slightly, she was temporarily blinded by the dawning sun.

"What in the hell," she muttered to herself. She was blind as a bat. All she could see were fuzzy images and strange blobs. She quickly dug in her purse and pulled out a pair of dark shades. After a few moments, her eyes eventually acclimated themselves to the change in light.

Not willing to waste any more time, she stepped onto the curb and hailed one of the taxis lined up in front of the hotel. While the driver put her bag in the trunk, her phone rang.

"Where do you think you're going?" a masculine voice asked on the other end. "If you come back upstairs, I will forget all of this foolishness," Tristan drawled.

"Foolishness? Well, isn't that the pot calling the kettle black? I'm not the one who thinks he's Count Dracula. Halloween was over months ago, buddy."

Chloe could hear him sigh on the other end. Although she wanted to hang the phone up on him, she didn't.

"I know all of this sounds strange to you, love. But there is a whole other world out there that exists alongside the so-called normal world you have safely resided in your entire life. Your very reaction is why many of us stay hidden and deal only with our own kind."

"Well, why didn't you remain hidden and marry one of your own?" Chloe couldn't believe she'd asked such a silly question. As if she was beginning to believe he really was a vampire.

Certain that Tristan was still upstairs, Chloe decided to reenter the hotel. Shirley would probably be waiting for her in the lobby and the sooner she collected her best friend, the sooner she could put this whole mess behind her.

"I guess I was being a bit selfish, *love*. Female vampires are such a jaded lot. It comes from walking this earth for hundreds of years. You on the other hand are a

breath of fresh air. Like a moth to a flame, your innocence beckoned me to come closer. Once I tasted life again, I couldn't let it go. I couldn't let *you* go."

"Are you ready to go?"

Chloe looked at her best friend and took pity on her. Poor Shirley. She was so winded she looked like she ran downstairs, instead of taking the elevator. Chloe mouthed to Shirley that she was on the phone with Tristan. She then pointed to the taxi waiting at the curb outside.

"Tristan," Chloe sighed. No matter how romantic his words sounded, he was still talking like a madman. "I think you need real help. You're a very successful man but you have some real issues with reality. And if you keep living in this fantasy world of vampires, werewolves and fairies, you're going to get yourself committed."

"I am not crazy!" Tristan insisted. "Vampires exist just like you exist, Chloe. Listen to me. You *cannot* leave. You're in too delicate a state to walk out those doors. Plus, you need me just like I need you."

How did he know she wasn't already halfway to the airport? Chloe looked around the lobby and her eyes widened like saucers as she watched Tristan crossing the hotel's lobby.

Spinning around, she attempted to make a beeline for the revolving doors. However, her escape was impeded by a hard chest encased in a tailored dress shirt. Chloe struggled for air as she looked up into her angry husband's face.

How in the hell did he do that?

Taking advantage of her surprise, Tristan grabbed her wrist and held it firmly in his grasp.

"Hello, love. Why don't we go back upstairs?"

Chloe shook her head and tried to pry her wrist from his firm grasp. But he wouldn't budge.

"Let's not fight, love," Tristan purred, looking into her eyes.

Chloe suddenly ceased her struggling and nodded her head in agreement. She then allowed Tristan to pull her along behind him back through the lobby.

"I won! I won!" an elderly woman with a purple halo of hair and an orange polyester suit drew their attention. She was jumping up and down, clapping her hands at one of the nickel slot machines nearby. The sign above her machine flashed widely.

"Oh my stars! I just won fifty thousand doll—" The woman stopped in mid-sentence, grabbed her chest and collapsed to the floor, banging her head on the stool.

"Bloody hell!" Tristan cursed. Several hotel staff ran past him to help the woman who looked like a sack of potatoes slumped over on the floor.

Feeling as if she'd just awakened, Chloe shook her head to clear the fog. She looked down at Tristan's hand on her wrist and suddenly remembered her situation. Since he was distracted, she easily snatched her hand out of his grasp then stumbled toward the exit door.

She looked behind her to see if he was following her and to her dismay he was close on her heels. When she reached the revolving doors, she felt him pull at the sleeve of her sweater before her elbow felt like it was on fire.

Chloe fell back against the inner wall of the door, clutching her elbow. She looked down and gasped at the hole singed into the material. Lifting her gaze, she noticed that sunlight reached a couple of feet into the entrance of the lobby. She also noted that Tristan stood well out of reach of the sun's warm rays, clutching his hand.

Ice-cold fear gripped her as she swept through to the outside. Exiting on the other end, she stumbled toward the waiting cab.

"Are you okay?" Shirley asked, jumping out of the car. She took a hold of Chloe's arm and helped her into the backseat. Chloe leaned her head back against the hot leather seat. Her head was spinning out of control.

"Oh God, oh God, let it not be true," Chloe moaned, shaking her head. But she knew in her heart he was telling the truth. Now everything came flooding back as she remembered how he'd told her his secret before their marriage and how she'd accepted

everything so readily. All she'd cared about at the time was how she wanted to be with him for eternity.

"Let what not be true?" Shirley tucked a wayward curl behind her ear in a motherly fashion and waited for her to answer. She was always doing things like that although she was the younger of the two.

"That I think I'm just as crazy as my husband," Chloe whispered.

* * * * *

"Why are you so glum?"

Tristan stopped in mid-stride. He hadn't seen his brother sitting on the couch when he entered his suite. Fair in complexion while Tristan was dark, his younger brother Simon was always underfoot, putting his nose in his affairs and calling him on the carpet for any and every indiscretion. So much so that Tristan felt like the younger sibling at times.

However, today he didn't mind his company. In fact, at this moment, he really needed to spill his guts to someone, anyone who'd listen.

Tristan stepped down into the sunken living room and took a seat next to Simon on the sofa. Sighing, he slumped down dejectedly in the leather material, a look of utter frustration clouding his handsome features.

"My wife."

"Your *wife*? My God, man, when did you get married?" Tristan was so absorbed in his own troubles that he missed the fact that his brother's words seemed tight and forced. "I would've sworn vampires would mate with trolls before you stumbled down that path."

"I was of the same opinion but I was happily married two days ago while you were away in Tahoe with that leggy redhead. And now upon your return, I'm unhappily separated as well." Tristan sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. "And you would never guess why. All because she doesn't want me."

"What do you mean she doesn't want you? Now I'll go and sleep with a troll myself if that were really true. I've never met a woman, human or vampire, able to resist you," Simon jeered.

Ignoring his brother's barb, Tristan rebuffed, "Well, you better get ready for it because she doesn't want me. However, I will admit she loves making love to me, but outside of the bedroom she doesn't want anything to do with me."

Tristan's voice was so pathetic Simon almost felt sorry for him – almost.

Simon wasn't sure he'd ever see this day, but it had finally come! The day he would finally see his successful older brother not have everything handed to him on a silver platter. It was about time the tables had turned!

Although he wanted to grin from ear to ear, Simon successfully schooled his features into a bland mask before finally addressing him. "My word, man, you sound like a little boy who's just lost his favorite blankie!" he scoffed. "Why, this is definitely a first! For I have never seen my overconfident older brother not get what he wanted. I love my sister-in-law already!"

"This is serious, Simon." Tristan sighed in exasperation. "I'm in love with a woman who doesn't love me."

This is serious, especially if he's talking love, Simon thought. "So enlighten me. How did you get yourself into this mess?"

"I charmed her into falling in love with me. And I didn't release the spell until our honeymoon night when she was going through the transition. I didn't have a chance to complete the cycle because she went ballistic on me and left." Tristan looked at his brother warily for he was sure of his reaction.

"You what!" Simon roared, coming off the couch. "You know as well as any vampire worth his salt that we only use our powers to feed. Bloody hell, Tristan! You're over six hundred years old, not some fledgling that can't control his urges. Not to mention the fact that you're the head of the Warwick coven, one of the strongest in the world. You're supposed to set an example. Not act like some rogue vampire going

around breaking our moral codes. If this gets out, the council might question your authority." And if he had anything to do with it, Simon thought, he would make sure they knew.

"No one is going to question my authority," Tristan snarled. "I have ruled for over four hundred years and I have no plans of surrendering my authority any time soon."

Simon began to pace the floor in front of him. His movements appeared angry and agitated. "I can't believe *you* of all people would stoop so low as to trick a woman into being with you. I mean, you have women falling over themselves seeking your favor. And you chose someone who doesn't want you?"

Slumping into his seat, Tristan reflected on his brother's words. For several hundred years, he'd been the self-confirmed bachelor. He'd romanced hundreds of women and broken their hearts without any regrets. But then Chloe had come along and he'd had eyes for no other woman. Not even Yasmine had had that effect on him.

"I can't explain it, Simon, but she's the one." Tristan laid his head back wearily on the back of the sofa as Simon continued to pace back and forth. "I, of all people, never believed in love at first sight but it happened to me because I fell madly in love with her the moment I saw her. Can you believe it? After all these years, my jaded soul has finally found someone who makes me feel alive."

"For goodness' sake, man," Simon sneered. "You didn't just get hit by Cupid's arrow, he clobbered you over the head."

Tristan turned his head and looked out the window at the Las Vegas skyline. But he didn't see any of it. Instead he saw Chloe's beautiful face.

"Aye, clobbered me he did. Have you ever met anyone who you couldn't wait to see at the end of a hard day? Someone who makes you laugh no matter how angry you are? Someone who finally makes you feel complete?"

Simon's mind ran over the countless number of women he'd been with and even shared with Tristan but he had to admit that not one of them stood out in his mind.

"I hadn't either until I met her. And by all that is holy, I wasn't going to let her get away. Even if that meant I had to use my powers to do it."

"So what are you going to do?" Simon asked. "You know you can't charm her again. It's not right."

"No, no, I promised myself that I would never do that again. I want her to want me as much as I want her. I'm going to have to simply work really hard to win her back." Tristan sighed.

Simon's face was unreadable as he stood looking down at him.

"Well, I wish you luck, brother, because winning her back may be harder than you think, especially when she was never really yours in the first place."

Chapter Three

Two months later

“Ew. Now that’s just wrong. I don’t know how you can eat your steak like that. I have half a mind to call People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.”

Chloe looked up into Shirley’s disgusted face and gave her a lame smile. She didn’t know how she could eat her steak so raw it could almost jump up from her plate and run from the room either. But that was the only way she liked her food nowadays.

But that wasn’t the only thing that had changed about her life ever since she’d returned from Las Vegas. She’d essentially become a freak of nature. Her eyes had become so sensitive to daylight that not even the darkest sunglasses could prevent her from being blinded by the sun’s rays. And her poor skin, dark as it was, practically burned from the slightest exposure to daylight. She was also strong as an ox. Her personal trainer Derek used to tease her about being a cream puff because she whined through all of her sets and was unable to do one complete set of chin-ups at the gym.

Now she was his star client. She breezed through her entire workout. And she could complete fifty one-arm chin-ups without breaking into a sweat. Despite these drastic changes in her life, she’d tried to carry on as normal as possible these past two months. She still ran both of her real estate offices with efficiency, although she practically ran them from home now. She’d delegated the daytime showings to her assistant Dina. And if she needed to see a client or participate in a closing, she simply scheduled them at sunset or in the early evenings.

“Are you sure I’m safe being here?” Shirley asked. She looked toward the windows, which were now covered with blackout curtains, and shivered.

“You’re safe around me, silly. I don’t have any fangs yet.”

Chloe chuckled when Shirley looked at her sharply.

"That is not funn—" Shirley stopped in mid-sentence. Her brows knitted together in concern. "Girl, what's wrong with you? You look like you've seen a ghost." Shirley looked over her shoulder warily. "Please don't tell me you can see dead people too?"

Chloe shook her head at Shirley, yet she didn't say anything. She was too intent on the happenings going on in the apartment next door.

The Rominovs were at it again.

Before her trip to Las Vegas, they seemed like a nice couple, very much in love for you never saw one without the other. However, Chloe now knew the reason for such an attachment. Mr. Rominov was abusive and controlling. The beatings were so bad at times she had to resort to sleeping in her bathroom. The ceramic tiles helped to blanket the noise. The crash of breaking glass made Chloe jump, causing her to knock over her wineglass. Instinctively she grabbed for the glass and set it upright, while Shirley stopped the flow of wine with her napkin, preventing it from running off the table onto the floor.

"Girl, you're scaring the shit out of me!"

"I-I'm sorry..." But Chloe jumped again as she heard the distinct sound of flesh meeting flesh. Coming out of her chair, she grabbed her plate and threw it in the sink. Breaking it into several pieces. Gripping the edge of the kitchen counter, she gritted her teeth in frustration. "I can't stand it when he beats her."

"Who?" Shirley asked, coming out of her seat as well.

"The man next door," Chloe groaned as she ran her hand through her hair in frustration. "He does it almost every night. I can hear them plain as day as if they were standing in front of me."

"You can hear through walls?" Shirley asked, her eyes widening like a deer in the headlights.

Chloe sighed, nodding her head. "I can hear through walls, floors, even glass. I can hear the guy below us, he's watching wrestling. And Mrs. Parks, across the hall, is

talking to her niece on the phone. She needs a ride to the doctor's office tomorrow. She has to go in for her weekly chemo session."

"Now that's one skill I wish I had. Then I could spy on my coworkers to see if they were talking about me behind my back."

"No, you don't because you can't turn it off," Chloe whispered. She wrapped her arms around her body. She felt like the world was literally closing in around her. "And you can't block it out when someone is getting the living daylights beat out of them."

"How about we call the police?"

"It won't do any good. I have done that a couple of times. The police simply took him down to the station but she refused to press charges. I've talked with her and offered her my protection, but she refused. She even went so far as to tell me to keep my nose out of her business. That my calls to the police had caused her beatings to become even worse." Chloe turned her head as emotions welled up inside her.

Shirley closed the short distance between them and put an arm around her shoulders.

"Girl, you've done all you can do. It's up to her if she wants to really change the situation."

"How can she if she's scared to death?" Chloe cried, stepping away from her.

"Are you scared for her or for yourself?"

Chloe looked at her best friend a long moment then she sighed wearily. There was no hiding from Shirley. She knew her almost better than she knew herself. "Both, I guess. I don't know myself anymore, Shirley. How would you feel if you could no longer feel the sun on your skin or the food you eat practically makes your skin crawl? Then to make matters worse the person who did this to me doesn't give a damn!"

"You still haven't heard from him?"

Chloe shook her head. Ever since they'd left Vegas, she'd heard nothing from Tristan. The man had practically tried to physically prevent her from leaving his hotel

that day but as soon as she was gone, the bastard had forgotten her. He'd sent no apology letters or flowers to make up for what he'd done to her.

"No, but I should be hearing from him soon. Mr. Dobson finished drawing up the papers two days ago. I have a meeting with him tomorrow to sign them. Once that's done, he will forward them to Tristan's corporate offices by the end of the week."

"Well, at least you beat him to the punch. Soon you'll be a free woman again."

Although Chloe smiled at her friend, inside she was anything but happy. In a sense she would be free once the divorce was finalized. But deep down, Chloe knew she would never be completely free of Tristan because every time she experienced a discomfort or a new facet of this thing she'd become, she thought of him. And then there were the other times... When she thought about the last time they'd been together. And how his cock had brought her to immeasurable heights no other man had been able to.

* * * * *

Tristan looked down at the papers lying on his desk. His barrister, Mr. Finneus Winthrop, had just hand-delivered them an hour ago. What was the bloody world coming to? he thought. Vampires didn't divorce. It was only one mate for them until death.

But here he was listening to his solicitor, one of the very few humans who knew he was a six-hundred-year-old vampire, drone on and on about the particulars of the divorce settlement.

"It seems pretty simple actually, Tristan. The petitioner, your estranged wife, wants to be granted a divorce as soon as possible. Due to the lack of children and the brevity of your marital state, she has not asked for child support or alimony.

"She has also requested that no common property be splintered. In particular, she names a twenty-five-unit apartment building, amongst other various properties, which

she wants to remain in her possession. In a nutshell, you're a very lucky man. She wants nothing from you."

She wanted nothing from him? Tristan snorted.

She wasn't even going to exact revenge for what he'd done to her by taking half of his empire. That's what any woman in her right mind would have done. But she'd done something that cut him to the quick even more, she wanted no part of him—not his assets, nor him.

Tristan sat incredulous as the reality of the situation sank in. He couldn't believe how the one woman he'd chosen as his mate, out of the hundreds he'd known over the centuries, didn't want anything to do with him. Tristan grudgingly admitted to himself that he had no one to blame but himself. Despite all of his misgivings and basic morals, he'd charmed her, used his magic to bend her to his will, knowing full well that she had no chance once his hypnotic spell was cast. But he did it anyway because he wanted her so damn badly.

He'd been such a vain fool! For he simply assumed that, once they were married, his looks and his sexual prowess would be enough to overcome all of her objections. But they didn't. And it was his own bloody vanity that kept him from going after her.

"Tristan, you need to sign here and here." Tristan looked at the fountain pen Mr. Winthrop held out to him. He took it from his grasp then placed the tip on the dotted line. He sat there impassively as the ink began to pool into a tiny puddle on the page.

"You are ruining the document," Mr. Winthrop exclaimed, snatching the pen from him. "What's gotten into you?"

Tristan looked at Mr. Winthrop as if he was looking through him. "My wife, Finneus. She's gotten to me. Do me a favor and hold off any phone calls from her attorney. I'm going to take a trip to Atlanta to visit the little minx. Hopefully, when I return, I will not need your services for this particular matter again. Good day."

Mr. Winthrop nodded his balding head acquiescently. He gathered up his leather briefcase and let himself out of Tristan's office.

Once he was alone, Tristan looked down at the divorce papers now stained with black ink. He studied the flowing letters of his wife's distinctive signature for several moments. Then the unexpected occurred.

"What in the hell!" Tristan exclaimed, looking down at the enormous bulge pressing insistently against the cloth of his tailored trousers. "All I have to do is look at her bloody signature and I'm as hard as a pubescent youth."

Like many times over the past two months, Tristan found his thoughts drifting to his wife and each and every time he became hard as a rock. Knowing that no one would dare enter his office without his permission, he unzipped his pants.

With thoughts of his voluptuous wife floating through his head, Tristan carefully pulled out the heavy flesh that was now weeping for release. Gingerly, he reached out his thumb and swiped the tear off the engorged head then smeared it down the thick shaft. Satisfied that he was properly lubricated, he gripped his cock.

Wishing it was Chloe's full, sensual lips wrapped around his cock, Tristan began to pump his hand up and down over himself slowly. To increase his pleasure, he dipped his free hand inside his trousers and palmed his balls.

He leaned his head back against the soft leather of his high-back desk chair and lazily closed his eyes. While his hand continued to pump up and down, he felt the pressure slowly build in the pit of his stomach. Although bringing himself to a climax was by far not as pleasurable as his wife's sweet pussy, it was still a means to an end.

Tristan's hand slid up and down his shaft in quick order and the pressure he applied on his cock increased until he felt the veins in his neck bulge and his breathing become more difficult. When his seed began to puddle in his ball sac, he stood up and began to run his hand up and down his cock with lightning speed. As his cum erupted, conveniently ruining the divorce papers still lying on his desk, he vowed that the next time it would be inside his wife's warm pussy.

Feeling better than he had in days, Tristan reached inside his coat pocket and pulled out a monogrammed handkerchief and cleaned himself off. After stuffing the soiled

linen in his back pocket, he snatched up the divorce papers and dumped them in the trash on the way out of his office.

“Judy, I need you to call Colin and tell him to ready the plane as soon as possible. I need to take care of some business on the East Coast. I also need you to clear my schedule for the rest of the week. And, oh, call Barney and have him pack me a week’s worth of clothes and leave a message with my wayward younger brother to tell him to call me on my cell phone.”

Tristan headed toward the elevator but he paused in the middle of his private offices and then turned back to Judy, who was in the process of carrying out his orders.

“Judy, make that two weeks. Knowing my wife, I don’t think she’s going to make this easy for me. If you need me, I’ll be in my car. Wish me luck!”

Judy silently wished him luck as she watched his tall, muscular frame climb into the elevator. But she wished the poor bird who’d married him even more luck. For Tristan Smythe was a man on a mission. And when he wanted something, he would stop at nothing to get it.

* * * * *

Chloe nervously pulled on the hem of her black blazer. She’d chosen the conservative suit with its matching pencil skirt as a nod to her prospective clients, who were gentlemen from the U.K. looking for broker representation in acquiring several parcels of land in downtown Atlanta.

Normally, she wasn’t nervous at buyer presentations because she’d performed them hundreds of times over the years. However, she’d focused most of her firm’s energy on the residential market and had never brokered a commercial transaction, despite her earnest efforts at courting potential clients.

Not only was this a commercial transaction but it was a multimillion-dollar purchase involving the most important economic development in Atlanta. Therefore, if she scored this client, the sky was the limit for Walker Realty.

Chloe stepped off the elevator and walked the short distance to her office. When she entered, Monique and Dina greeted her in the lobby. She'd asked both of them to stay on late to greet their guests, who were due to arrive at seven.

"Hello, ladies." Chloe took the buyer folder that Dina held out to her.

"Monique, is the laptop and projector already set up and ready to go?" At Monique's affirmative nod, she smiled and headed toward the conference room. Her staff, although small, ran like a well-oiled machine. "When the clients get here, seat them first in the lobby then I'll come out and greet them."

"They're already here," Dina stated, falling in step beside her.

Chloe halted in mid-stride.

"They arrived about five minutes ahead of you. Since you hadn't arrived yet, we decided to go ahead and seat them in the conference room. We told them you were en route from a meeting in the Alpharetta office."

"I know the British are the originators of etiquette but an hour early is rather extreme," Chloe muttered. "Oh well, if we get through this we can call it an early night."

Chloe looked down at the folder and quickly scanned the buyers' profiles. Her clients were the CEO and Vice President of Warwick House, LTD, located out of London. They were heavily involved in the commercial development market. Although this was not their first project in the U.S., this was their first venture in the southeast.

Chloe paused outside the double doors to her conference room. Although her downtown office was rather small with only a reception area, two private offices and a cubicle area for her sales associates, she'd chosen the location primarily for its conference room, which had a spectacular view of Atlanta's skyline.

Drying her hands on her skirt, Chloe squared her shoulders then winked at Dina. "Let's get this show on the road."

She shouldered her way into the conference room. One man, a blond, was seated at the cherry-wood conference table, while his partner stood by the windows with his back turned toward the room. The man seated at the table jumped up upon her entering the room.

"Good evening, gentlemen. I see you both are anxious to commence your business in our beautiful area." Chloe offered her hand to the man at the conference table who shook it firmly. As he returned her handshake, Chloe got a good look at him. And she had to prevent her jaw from dropping to the floor.

And here she was thinking her husband was the handsomest man in the world! This guy could definitely give Tristan a run for his money with his crystal blue eyes and closely cropped blond hair. "My name is Chloe Walker and this is my assistant Dina Robinson."

"It's a pleasure to meet you...*Miss Walker*." The man paused as if uncomfortable. Then without missing a beat, he continued, "I'm Simon Smythe, Vice President of Warwick House, LTD."

A shiver ran down Chloe's spine when he brought her hand to his lips, not because Simon Smythe was a fine specimen of a man, but because he'd addressed her with a crisp British accent and because he shared the same surname as her estranged husband.

Alarm bells went off in her head. Yet Chloe had no time to entertain her suspicions for the sound of a masculine growl like that of a wolf drew everyone's attention in the room to the man standing by the conference room windows.

"Ah, excuse his rudeness, ladies. Sometimes he can be a real beast. Please allow me to introduce my *older* brother and CEO of Warwick House, LTD. Tristan Smythe."

Chloe looked at the man who'd come to stand in front of her and she realized that Simon Smythe, although drop-dead gorgeous, really didn't hold a candle to his older brother.

Chapter Four

Tristan's tall frame was molded into a blue pinstripe suit accented with a gray shirt that was obviously tailored for it fit him like a second skin. And although he was just as handsome as the day she'd left him, he now bordered on being beautiful for his hair had grown, softening his features.

What game is he playing? Chloe thought as she waited for his first move. Well, whatever game he was playing she was ready. She was the queen of hustle. She hadn't built a multimillion-dollar-producing real estate firm without it.

Plastering on a superficial smile, she held out her hand to him. But despite her brave front, she was unprepared for the lightning bolt that shot up her arm when he took her hand in his.

"Miss...Walker...isn't it? It's a pleasure to meet you." Tristan held her hand for only a brief second before dropping it to take Dina's.

Although she tried to fight it, Chloe couldn't suppress the jealousy that ran up from the tips of her toes to the roots of her hair as Tristan proceeded to engage Dina in small talk. He even went so far as to compliment the younger woman on her choice of dress and how the color brought out the green in her eyes.

In order to prevent herself from doing anything drastic, like snatching Dina bald-headed, Chloe crossed her arms over her chest. Finally growing fed up with their small talk and needing to stem the urge to vomit, she cleared her throat to gain everyone's attention. "If you all would have a seat, we can get started," she announced cheerily. Almost too cheerily even to her own ears.

Chloe waited for them to take a seat at the conference table. Her eyes almost crossed in anger as she watched Tristan pull out a chair for Dina, before taking his own.

"So, gentlemen, you are looking to buy in the metro Atlanta area, specifically in downtown?" However, she didn't receive an immediate reply from Tristan because he was continuing his conversation with Dina.

Turning away from their antics, Chloe looked to Simon for an answer. And just in time to catch the angry look that he shot at his brother, before he turned a pleasant smile in her direction.

"Well, *I've* wanted us to invest in the Atlanta area for quite some time. I tried on several occasions in the past to convince Tristan about the economic benefits of your fair city. But the only areas he had an interest in here in the southeast were in Florida, specifically the Miami area. That's why I was so surprised that he wanted to meet with you about our purchasing several parcels in downtown Atlanta."

"So it was your *brother's* idea to finally invest in Atlanta?" Chloe asked, her brown eyes lighting up triumphantly as she looked over at Tristan, whose full attention was on her now. She silently gloated as his eyes roamed slowly over her face and settled briefly on her lips.

When he finally lifted his eyes to meet hers, for a brief second she thought she saw something akin to regret on his face. However, whatever it was, it was quickly masked by a look of bland detachment.

"Miss Walker, what my brother says is true. In a momentary lapse of judgment, I disregarded his attempts at persuading me into investing in Atlanta. But now that I have discovered that there are, shall we say..." Tristan paused to look at Dina, "very desirable aspects about your lovely city. Therefore I am very interested in purchasing several parcels and developing them. You don't have to waste your time or ours by going through the rigmarole of a presentation. I want you to handle the transaction for us. I don't need further convincing that you are the perfect candidate for the job."

"Are you sure?" Simon asked, a look of utter confusion marring his handsome looks.

"I'm very sure," Tristan drawled, not bothering to look in his brother's direction. "I'm confident that Miss Walker can certainly handle everything thrown her way." His mind obviously made up, he turned his attention back to Dina.

Chloe pursed her lips in consternation as she flipped open the leather portfolio containing the buyer's agreement.

"Well, I guess it's a done deal," she announced tightly. As she shuffled through the paperwork, she couldn't resist listening to tidbits of Tristan and Dina's conversation. He was telling the younger woman about a get-together hosted tomorrow evening by some friends to celebrate his and Simon's arrival into town.

The papers slipped from her hands when she heard him ask Dina to accompany him.

Enough is enough! Chloe thought.

He could flirt in front of her all he wanted but he sure as hell wasn't going to ask out another woman. Estranged husband or not. Before Dina could accept his invitation, Chloe interrupted her.

"I'm sorry but I think that's going to be impossible," she announced, drawing everyone's attention. However, she didn't waver as she locked eyes with Tristan.

"I thought you just said a minute ago it was a done deal?" he asked.

"It is, however, I was referring to your invitation to the party tomorrow evening."

Chloe heard Dina clear her throat. Although she tried to hide the smile behind her hand, Chloe still saw it and wanted to jump up and smack it off the younger woman's face.

"Chloe...I mean, Miss Walker. I think Mr. Smythe was only inviting *me*."

Chloe sat up straighter in her chair, her gaze swinging to her assistant, who now shifted uncomfortably in her seat. "Dina, I know perfectly well who Mr. Smythe invited but I think it is rather inappropriate for my *employee* to be dating my *husband*."

"What!" Dina exclaimed. "When and where did you get married?"

"We were married a few months ago during my vacation in Las Vegas."

Dina looked between Chloe and Tristan who appeared to be having a stare-down. Then she finally spoke. "Miss Walker, will you need me any more this evening?"

Chloe broke her gaze from Tristan's long enough to answer. "No, that will be all tonight, Dina. I'll see you tomorrow evening."

Dina rose from her chair, stalked around the table and slammed the conference door behind her.

"Well, I guess that's my cue as well," Simon announced, rising from his seat. "It was a pleasure to meet you, sister-in-law. Welcome to the family, you poor dear."

Chloe waited for Simon to leave the conference room before she finally lit into Tristan. "Why haven't you signed the divorce papers?"

"I haven't signed them because I wanted to come here and patch things over with you."

"Well, you sure don't act like you want to 'patch things up'," Chloe hissed. "Just a minute ago you were trying to ask one of my employees out on a date!"

"Chloe, I only did that because you were pretending to act like you didn't know who the hell I was. I did it out of anger. By the way...are you okay?"

Chloe was so flustered by his gentle tone and abrupt change in subject that she sputtered for several moments. How dare he catch her off-guard with his fake attempt at concern? He wasn't going to sweet-talk her out of what was long overdue.

"I'm not faking my concern for you, Chloe, and if you think this is sweet-talk and it's working, I will deem to use it all the time when I am around you."

Chloe's mouth dropped open, making her look like a fish out of the water. "Y-y-you know how to read minds," she stated more than questioned.

"Of course I know how to read your thoughts, love. I'm a vampire. I have powers you couldn't begin to fathom."

"What kind of powers?" Chloe asked. She couldn't help but be curious about other powers she wasn't yet aware of.

"Well, I know that you don't hate me as much as you're pretending," Tristan drawled. He rose out of his seat and slowly walked the length of the conference room until he towered over her.

Chloe had to crane her neck back to meet his gaze. "H-h-how do you know that?"

"I can smell the desire you have for me. It's leaking out of every pore of your body, filling this room with your very essence." Tristan closed his eyes and inhaled deeply as if smelling a bouquet of fragrant flowers.

Although he hadn't touched her, Chloe could feel the heat gathering in the pit of her stomach and her panties becoming damp. Hating her response to him, she snatched up the papers scattered in front of her. If she didn't get out of this room quick, she would be flat on her back on top of her conference table.

"Would you like to learn more about your powers, Chloe, and how to control them?"

"Mr. Smythe, I don't want to learn anything from you," Chloe snapped. She stood up from her seat and began gathering her things. "I've been carrying on with my life perfectly well without you, considering you've made me into a monster."

Tristan grabbed hold of both of her arms and pulled her to him.

"You are not a monster!" he snarled, his teeth clenched in anger. "I know vampires have been painted as these horrific creatures that go around killing young maidens but you're not a monster, love, and neither am I."

Chloe snorted. "The last time I checked an encyclopedia, vampires were described as bloodsucking creatures that leave their victims to die."

Tristan let her go so suddenly she fell back against the conference table. "Enough! Those are nothing but silly myths and legends told to pollute the human mind. Despite

what you might think, I have never killed anyone in my entire life, not even when I feed. We are not monsters, Chloe."

"Why should I believe you?" Chloe asked. "You duped me into marrying you. You tried to physically prevent me from leaving you. And now you've wasted my time with this phony business venture of yours."

She stepped around him. As she headed for the door, a triumphant smile came to her lips. She hadn't felt this good in months. She'd finally been able to get some of the anger she felt toward him off her chest. She reached for the handle and turned it, yet it didn't budge.

"At least let me prove to you that I'm...that *we're* not monsters," he stated close to her ear, his warm breath tickling her skin.

"How do you plan on doing that?" Chloe asked, her breathing becoming erratic.

"Could a monster make you feel how I make you feel? I assure you, *Mrs. Smythe*, what I want to do to you is anything but nightmarish."

Chloe gasped when he pressed his body up against her back, trapping her against the door. Closing her eyes, she prayed for strength. Although she was still able to stand on her own two feet, she knew that if he laid those devilish hands on her, her legs would turn to water.

"P-p-please stop," Chloe whispered as his hands slid around her body. Holding her breath in suspense, she waited. And to her utter dismay his hands settled on her breasts.

"If I can remember correctly, your breasts are your weak spot," he stated matter-of-factly, his hands kneading and squeezing her twin globes. Like clockwork, her traitorous nipples came to attention. Chloe gritted her teeth in frustration.

"Ah, I guess they still are," he chuckled close to her ear. His thumbs were running along the telltale peaks. "I must be losing my touch because by now you should be mewling like a hungry kitten, begging me for my cock. Would you like that, love? My cock deep inside you."

"If...if I said no, would you force yourself on me?" Chloe hoped her jab would make him angry and give her the needed respite to tamp down her raging desire. However, her bravado plummeted when he chuckled softly.

"Of course not, I'm not a monster, Chloe. But I'm pretty sure that I can be very convincing." Tristan suddenly dropped to his knees behind her. Before she knew what he was up to, he reached down and grabbed the hem of her skirt. He hitched it up and over her hips so that it rested around her waist. He then dipped his nose inside the juncture between her thighs.

"Mm, you smell so sweet. Do you mind if I have a taste?" However, she was unable to give him an answer because he yanked aside her panties and stuck his tongue between the lips of her pussy. In one swift movement, his tongue licked the entire surface of her hot core. "Delicious...absolutely delicious," he breathed, his voice sounding husky and deep. "I think I could spend the rest of eternity eating your delectable pussy."

Chloe grabbed at the door handle for support as he dove back in.

Nothing went untouched as his tongue attacked her secret place and laid it open for his pleasure. One minute he was sucking on her clit and flicking it playfully then the next minute he was running his tongue up and down her pussy lips until they became swollen. And then her final undoing, he darted his tongue inside her hot channel and speared her with his impossibly long tongue.

Feeling more alive at this moment than she had in months, Chloe wanted the release that only he could give her. So she opened her legs wider and tilted her butt up and out, giving him better access.

Her hips rocked against his mouth as his tongue fucked her. In and out his tongue plunged, until she found it nearly impossible to hold herself up. Thankfully Tristan was gripping the fronts of her thighs or she would have plummeted to the ground.

"Do you still think I'm a monster?" he asked, his warm breath tickling the backs of her thighs.

Chloe pressed her forehead against the door. How could she think clearly at a time like this?

"Tell me!" he demanded, spearing her pussy with his tongue. "Do you still think I'm a monster?"

"No, Tristan!" Chloe moaned. She looked down at her hands, which gripped the door handle tightly. She noted the whiteness around her knuckles. "I don't think you're a monster."

Somewhere in the back of her befuddled mind, she heard his satisfied grunt. But then all normal brain function ceased to exist when he dove into her with such intensity that her hips bashed against the door. An unexplainable pressure built up within her body and her head swam. "Oh God, Tristan," she panted. "I'm going to come. I'm going to come."

"Do it, love. I want you to cream all over my face." His words acting as a catalyst pushed Chloe over the final precipice. She clawed frantically at the door as wave after wave of the most intense pleasure pulsed through her body. Flinging back her head, she unashamedly filled the quiet conference room with her screams.

Chloe stumbled away from the door. She needed to distance herself from not only him but the spectacle she'd just made of herself. Tristan only needed to lay his hands on her and she was spreading her legs for him.

Angry more at herself than at him, she yanked down her skirt and straightened her blazer over her breasts. When she turned around to look at him, she noticed that although he didn't look worse for wear, his mouth still glistened from her juices.

"Aren't you at least going to wipe off the evidence?"

Chloe's heart tripped over in excitement as a seductive smile spread across his features, producing an impish dimple in both of his cheeks. He was hands-down the most handsome man she'd ever met.

"No, I plan on wearing you home as a souvenir. To remind me of the sweet time we've had here tonight."

Chloe couldn't help the smile that came to her lips as well.

"You know you look utterly ridiculous in your thousand-dollar designer suit and my cum smeared all over your face." She walked over to him and took the silk handkerchief out of his breast pocket then proceeded to dab at his face. "You're so incorrigible. What am I going to do with you?"

"I can think of a thousand things you can do with me, to me and on top of me." Tristan wiggled his eyebrows at her. "But seriously, how about accompanying me to the party tomorrow evening? It will be what you would call a learning experience."

"You mean the one you invited Dina to earlier?" Chloe bit out.

She shoved his silk handkerchief back in his pocket. When she stepped back from him, he grabbed her arm.

"Come on, love, let's let bygones be bygones. Don't we all do foolish things that we regret? I know I've done plenty in the past year alone."

Chloe's spine stiffened in anger. If he was going to tell her that he regretted marrying her after all she'd been through these past few weeks, she was going to sock him one. When she tried pulling her arm from his grip, he tightened his hold and pulled her close.

"It's not what you think, love. I never regretted meeting you. My biggest regret is not coming after you sooner. I hate to admit it but I allowed my foolish pride to come between us too many times. And I'm here to rectify that. But I can't do that if you're not willing to give us a chance."

Although he was the cause of her world being turned upside down, she couldn't deny the insatiable attraction between them. Chloe looked into his green eyes, which reminded her of angry thunderclouds, but the emotions she read in them were anything else but anger. More like an openness and a touch of weariness that only a soul who

had walked this earth hundreds of years could convey. Would she be like that someday?

Would she have to spend eternity walking this earth with no one to share her life with? The possibility of that filled Chloe with dread. It was bad enough living the past twenty years being the one on the outside looking in. Always seeing the skinny chick being rescued by the knight in shining armor.

Her knight might not ride a white stallion or even be human, but at least he desired her and made her feel wanted. So why not take that leap of faith and test the waters? Especially since she now had what she'd been yearning for years staring her right in the face and, stupid stubborn fool that she was, she was fighting her perhaps one and only chance at happiness.

"Okay," Chloe sighed, finally tired of fighting not only him but herself as well. "I'll accompany you, but only under one condition. Absolutely no funny business."

"Even if it's mind-blowing out-of-this-world sex?" At Chloe's sharp look, Tristan threw up his hands in mock surrender. "Okay, okay. I'll promise to behave. I'll pick you up at nine. The dress is after five, we British love to do things proper."

Tristan opened the door to leave then, as if thinking better about it, he turned back to her and yanked her into his arms. He bent down and planted a toe-curling kiss on her lips. He didn't release her until she began to beat on his chest. "Sorry about that, love, I forgot you still needed oxygen to breathe. You know, I could rectify that."

When Chloe lifted her hand threateningly, he made a quick exit for the door.

"Sweet dreams!" he called over his shoulder. "Don't let the bedbugs bite."

Chapter Five

Chloe slid the last bobby pin into place, neatly securing her hair into a loose updo. Satisfied, she hurried into the bedroom. With a quick glance at the clock, she snatched up the dove gray cocktail dress she'd laid out earlier.

Giving a quick prayer to the please-let-it-still-fit fairy, she stepped into the dress and shimmied it up her body. Made of ballet-slipper satin, the strapless gown had been custom-fitted for her fifteenth class reunion last year so that it hugged all of her curves.

Chloe breathed a sigh of relief as the zipper closed without protest.

Smoothing the satin over her hips, she then bent down and picked up the leather stilettos and matching clutch bag she'd chosen to wear that evening.

As she entered the living room, the intercom buzzed in the kitchen.

She hurried over to answer it.

"Are you ready, pigeon?" Tristan's silky voice asked on the other end.

"I'll be right down," she yelled.

She checked herself over one more time in the hall mirror, before grabbing her things and leaving.

When she stepped off the elevator, she was glad that Tristan's back was to her for it gave her the opportunity to secretly admire him. Now clad in a black suit offset by a crisp white shirt, he cut a debonair picture. The suit's jacket nipped snugly in at the waist, emphasizing his broad shoulders and narrow waist. When he turned around, her eyes were drawn to the open collar of his shirt. His olive complexion provided a beautiful contrast to the whiteness of his shirt.

"Bloody hell, woman! That dress is simply fabulous. Did I actually promise I would be on my best behavior this evening?"

Chloe chuckled at the look of utter anguish on his face. She also noticed that his eyes hadn't strayed from her bosom since the moment he turned around. Deciding to play up her charms, Chloe over-pronounced the sway of her hips as she walked across the lobby. Her efforts didn't go unnoticed.

"Yes, sir. You did promise," she announced cheerily. She stopped just to his right, her arm grazing his. She reached out her hand and fingered one of the buttons on his shirt—secretly smiling to herself as she noted the rapid rise and fall of his chest.

"And, Mr. Smythe, I'm going to hold you to it. Shall we go?" Chloe didn't wait for him to answer. She stepped away from him, allowing her hand to trail down his hard chest.

"I am a bloody fool," Tristan mumbled, yanking the door open for her.

* * * * *

"Are you nervous?" Tristan asked, taking her hand in his as he walked them to the front door of a Tudor-style mansion nestled in the heart of Buckhead.

Although Tristan's simple gesture was quite innocent, Chloe couldn't help the warm tingling sensation that now pooled in the pit of her stomach and the increased staccato of her heart. But before she could reflect any further on her raging emotions, the mansion's double doors suddenly swung open, spilling light onto the front stoop.

"Tristan! Oh, it's good to see you, my man." A middle-aged man of medium height and slightly balding pate pulled them into the front foyer. He was dressed in a black tuxedo with a shawl collar. His ruddy face, warm and welcoming, was a total contradiction to the Count Dracula look-alike Chloe had been half expecting. In fact he chortled and chuckled so much he reminded her of a doting uncle, the kind that sneaked you sweets before dinner.

"We thought you might have become lost. Your brother Simon arrived almost an hour—" But before he could continue, his attention was suddenly drawn to Chloe. He

looked her up and down then his gaze rudely settled on her bustline and a mischievous grin split his features.

“Who is this lovely bird you’ve brought with you, Tristan?” the man purred, not hiding his apparent lust. “You know I’m always well stocked but as usual your taste in familiars is impeccable. Will you be sharing later?”

Initially, Chloe was flattered by the man’s compliment. But then she realized his compliment was not rooted in lust but in hunger. Tristan also sensed their host’s carnal thoughts and stepped forward.

“Raleigh, I think you must be mistaken. This is my *wife*, Chloe, and, no, I will not be sharing her anytime soon. Chloe, this lecherous lout is Sir Raleigh Lawson, an old family friend.”

“Your wife? Tristan, why, you sly fox.” Raleigh chuckled softly as he eyed Chloe once again as if reevaluating his earlier assumption. “Thank goodness, I’m not in London, the heads must be rolling as we speak. How did you ever escape Yasmine’s clutches, dear boy?”

Tristan glanced uncomfortably at Chloe before addressing Raleigh.

“Yasmine doesn’t know that I’m married yet. Matter of fact, she doesn’t need to know because that’s been dead over a century ago.”

“True, true. But does time really matter to vampires when it comes to affairs of the heart?” Raleigh then turned from them and addressed those milling in the foyer and standing on the stairs.

“Come along, everyone,” he announced. “Let’s rejoin to the upstairs where our entertainment awaits in the conservatory.”

Raleigh steered them toward the staircase, which wound dramatically up to the second level.

While Raleigh and Tristan caught up with the goings-on across the pond, Chloe noted her surroundings. She counted about fifteen to twenty other elegantly clad people

in attendance. Again she was surprised at how non-threatening they all appeared. If one were to meet them on the street, one would never know they were bloodsucking vampires.

Once they reached the second floor, Tristan took a hold of her hand and pulled her off to the side.

"I need to warn you about tonight's entertainment."

Chloe stiffened. "Why? I'm not about to enter a bloodbath, am I?"

Tristan chuckled, wrapping his arms around her waist. "You've been watching too many horror movies."

Chloe sighed into him. Tristan could have been warning her about not spending too much during the annual Black Friday sale for all she cared, because he'd lost her the minute he put his hands on her body. Like a thirsty plant needing water, her body came alive at his touch.

"Are you charming her again?" Chloe turned her head and looked at Tristan's younger brother Simon who was leaning up against the entrance to the conservatory. She'd forgotten that the party was held to welcome him as well. Unfazed by being caught sharing a moment with her husband, Chloe continued to lean into Tristan. Therefore she couldn't help but notice how his body stiffened.

"Mind your business, *brother*," Tristan warned. Chloe looked back and forth between the two and noticed some unspoken challenge was passing between them.

For several drawn-out seconds, they just stood staring at each other then Simon shrugged his shoulders, letting whatever happened between them pass. He turned on his heel and entered the conservatory.

Seeming satisfied with the outcome, Tristan turned to look down at her, a smile playing on his full lips. He stepped back with his arm extended in true gentlemanly fashion. "Come, let's enjoy our host's hospitality."

Slightly disturbed by what had just happened, Chloe hesitated briefly before taking his arm.

* * * * *

The conservatory was a large room resembling a ballroom with parquet floors, ornate mirrors and an impressive dome glass ceiling. At the far corner of the room, a quartet of women was seated on the floor, playing Chinese string instruments. While they were clad in traditional Chinese robes of red and white, their serene faces were painted ghostly white with tiny red bow mouths.

At the center of the room, Raleigh had erected a raised dais. Directly above it hung several theater lights. Slightly dimmed, they cast a rosy glow onto the low stage and provided an intimate atmosphere to the seating area below, which was simply a sea of multicolored pillows made of the finest Chinese silk.

Many of Raleigh's guests had already found their places on the pillows scattered around the dais, while others were finding their seats. As the guest of honor, Tristan was seated next to Raleigh and his companion, a beautiful Asian woman named Ming.

The excited whisperings of the other guests heightened Chloe's anxiety. As if sensing it, Raleigh leaned over to whisper in her ear, "I hope you like what we have in store. Tonight's entertainment is all Ming's doing. It's an ancient Chinese folktale about our kind. She's been preparing this for Tristan's arrival for several weeks."

Chloe looked at Raleigh sharply. "Weeks? You knew Tristan was coming to Atlanta weeks ago?"

"Of course! He called last month and said that he had urgent business to take care of. But things kept him away until recently. In our last conversation, he even mentioned something about setting down roots here. Could you imagine that? Another Brit in Atlanta. Elton John has definitely started a trend, with us expats crossing the pond and settling into new digs in America's South."

Chloe's eyes swung to Tristan who was chatting with an older gentleman to his right. She didn't know why she was happy that he'd been considering a permanent stay in Atlanta but she was.

While Chloe sat contemplating a future with her husband, a burst of streamers shot through the air, raining over them like dried multicolored leaves. Then the stage lighting extinguished, leaving the room in complete darkness. As they sat quietly in the dark, Chloe could hear the quiet rustling of bodies against the silk pillows, a few clandestine whispers and feminine giggles.

Inspired by the unknown goings-on around them, Tristan reached for her hand. He curled his fingers around her own and stroked the top of her hand with his thumb. Chloe shifted a little on her pillow in an attempt to blanket the heat that suddenly leapt between her thighs.

What was wrong with her? She'd been the one to warn him about behaving himself. And here she was trying to remember the exact shade of his nipples and fantasizing about him throwing her onto his lap and allowing her to ride his cock to hell and back.

Chloe's dirty thoughts were pushed to the back of her mind as a woman and man appeared on the dais, now bathed in a single spotlight. Both were dressed in traditional Chinese attire and wore makeup, which made them appear older in age. The man lounged on the floor beside the woman as she serenaded him with a wood string instrument that sat in her lap. Despite their pronounced years, they appeared to be a couple in the first stages of young love.

Their lovers' tryst was eventually broken by the appearance of a young woman carrying a basket of cherry blossoms. She skirted the edge of the stage, jealously watching the pair, until she caught the eye of the old man, who sprang from his seat to attend her.

With the old woman looking on, they flirted outrageously with exaggerated hugs and kisses. Finally the old woman became indignant and decided to intervene. She got up and tried pulling him away but he simply shrugged her off. Heartbroken, she flung

herself to the ground at his feet but he simply stepped over her and left with his new lover. The woman's wretched sobs reverberated off the walls of the room.

"Asshole," Chloe muttered as the lights dimmed on the stage. "Just like a man to turn you in for a new model."

"I would never trade you in, love," Tristan whispered close to her ear. "No matter how old and wrinkled you get."

"Even if I grow to be a wrinkly old woman of eighty-eight?"

"Well, maybe not that old..."

Catching the humor in his voice, Chloe elbowed him in the ribs. Tristan played along and grabbed his side in pain.

Their play was interrupted by the beginning of the second act, which began with the old woman lying alone in the bed. The lights above flashed rapidly as she tossed and turned, the sheets wrapping around her body. The string quartet was now replaced by the loud bang of a drum and the chaotic clang of a cowbell.

Chloe looked over her shoulder and her mouth fell open as an athletically built man ran into the room. He possessed a beautiful body accentuated by a loincloth that left nothing to the imagination. But his face was repulsive. It was covered by a grotesque mask with glowing red eyes. Long white hair streamed behind him as he circled the dais like a madman. Occasionally he would stop and flick his unusually long tongue at a female guest.

Eventually his attention was drawn to the old woman tossing and turning in the bed.

Slowly he climbed on top of the dais—the drum accentuating his steps.

Crawling onto the bed next to his prey, he reached out a gnarled hand and began to stroke her long silver hair. Then growing bolder, his hands strayed over her body.

Thinking the intruder in her bed was her old lover returned, the woman drew the monster into her arms. However, when he kissed her, she immediately realized her

mistake and fought to get out of the bed, yet the creature easily pulled her back to him. Bending down next to her, he whispered in her ear. After several moments, the woman ceased her struggling.

To Chloe's surprise, the woman sat up in the bed and removed her robe, revealing her nudity underneath. Without hesitation, her companion swooped down and placed one of the woman's apricot-colored nipples in his mouth. He sucked greedily on it while his twisted fingers played with its mate.

Releasing her breast, the creature rose up on all fours and straddled the woman backward, giving their audience an unhindered view of her naked body.

Although Chloe would have never thought herself a voyeur, she found herself turned on and unable to avert her gaze as the monster took his time licking his tongue down the woman's pale body.

When he stopped to play in her bellybutton, Chloe leaned over to Tristan. "He's not going to do what I think he's going to do, is he?" But he didn't get a chance to answer because the monster suddenly snatched the woman's legs apart.

"Oh my," Chloe breathed as a chorus of approval shot up through the audience at the unobstructed view of the woman's shaved pink pussy. Like the others around her, Chloe grew still and waited.

The monster slowly lowered himself over the woman. His long tongue flicked out and swiped at her clit as if wanting to gain a little taste of the woman's hidden delights. Obviously liking what he tasted, he licked again, then again, until the woman began to squirm like she was on fire.

Hell, if she wasn't. Chloe surely was as she watched the monster swirl his tongue around the woman's tiny bud. An unconscious moan even escaped her lips when the monster took the swollen nub in his mouth and began to suck on it like a baby with a bottle.

After leaving no areas of the woman's pussy untouched and thoroughly lapping up her juices, the creature sat back on his haunches.

He looked directly into the audience and began to run his hands all over his toned flesh. Chloe felt the breath catch in her throat when his hands slipped down to the waistband of his loincloth. She, like many others in the audience, wanted him to remove the garment. Sensing this, the monster toyed with them by playfully skimming his hands over the thin cloth several times.

Then, as if by accident, the loincloth fell away and his fat cock sprang free and bobbed heavily in the air, its bulbous head glistening with pre-cum. The monster then took his member in his hands and began to stroke it. Up and down his hand slid until more droplets pooled at its tip.

"Take me!" a woman yelled on the other side of the dais. "Take me please, I'm all yours!" Several people clapped at the woman's passionate response. Yet the monster ignored her.

Instead he turned back to the old woman in the bed. He grabbed a hold of her leg and pulled her sideways so that she lay on her side facing them. Lying behind her, he placed her leg over his hip.

He then grabbed a hold of his cock and positioned it between her legs. With one swift thrust he was inside her. And a collection of gasps filtered around the room. Even Chloe had to bite her lip to stifle the gasp that almost burst from her throat.

With each powerful thrust, the woman's breasts flopped and her legs opened wider to give the monster an unobstructed entry into her greedy passage. Chloe sat in disbelief when the woman's moans turned into soft cries of pleasure as the demon increased his speed. Atlanta might be the home of dozens of all-nude strip clubs sharing the corners with one-thousand-member churches but this even shocked her.

"She's about to come," Tristan stated, his voice low and deep.

Chloe stiffened. "How do you know that?" she huffed, trying to remove his arm from around her waist. "Did you fuck her too?"

Tristan looked at her sharply. Although she struggled against him, he easily held his arm wrapped around her waist, even pulling her tighter against his side. Chloe

looked at him and saw the familiar signs of desire in his face. His eyes were dark and heavy-lidded with arousal. His nostrils were flared. And a seductive smile curled his lips.

“No, I’ve never seen her before. That’s what *you* look like whenever we make love. When you’re on the brink of creaming all over my cock. Isn’t it beautiful?”

Tristan so unnerved her at that moment that Chloe knew she’d just creamed in her own panties. Biting her lip, she turned her attention back to the dais, just in time to see the woman orgasm. Her screams filled the room as the monster continued to hammer into her.

While the woman’s screams subsided into muted moans, her partner rolled her limp body onto her stomach. He grasped her by the waist and pulled her up onto all fours, her weight resting on her elbows.

Taking his cock in his hands, he ran it along her slit, which was still wet from both of their juices. Without any warning, he slapped one of her butt cheeks. He continued to spank her until her ass wore his handprints like a tattoo.

Chloe was so aroused by the monster’s aggressive foreplay on stage that she didn’t protest when Tristan’s hand slid down her back and slipped snugly up under her buttocks. Therefore she wasn’t sure if her moan was because of Tristan’s roaming hand or because the monster sunk his fat cock back into the woman’s cunt.

“He’s fucking her in your favorite position,” Tristan whispered. His hand was driving her crazy. Every time the monster thrust into the woman’s quivering pussy, he drove his hand between her thighs and thrust his fingers against her clit.

Chloe shut her eyes and grabbed at Tristan’s thigh as he began to work her pussy.

“You like it from the back, don’t you?” Chloe nodded her head. “I thought so. I also remember that you used to practically purr when I spanked you.”

Her eyes flew open and a soft cry escaped her lips when he swatted her ass none-too-gently to hammer home his point.

Looking around apprehensively, she hoped Sir Raleigh had not heard her voice her pleasure. However, her attempt at maintaining an ounce of decency went unnoticed for many of Raleigh's guests were preoccupied with other pursuits. As Chloe looked about the room, she began to blush as she noted that bodies were now straining against one another in an effort to get closer, while others were already in a state of undress, their elegant attire lying discarded where they'd thrown them.

Even though the show around her and on stage was riveting, nothing compared to Tristan shoving his hand up under her and wedging it between her butt cheeks. Although she writhed in desire as the monster's taut buttocks squeezed and contracted as he pumped in and out of the woman's pussy, her passion rose by several degrees when Tristan's hand mimicked the monster's movements on stage.

Chloe knew she was close to coming and as she stood over the precipice of her own orgasm, she struggled to hold back a moan.

However, Tristan came to her rescue by covering her mouth with his.

The play was forgotten as they became lost in their passion for one another. Oblivious of those around them, they fell back into the pillows as their tongues mated. Unable to get enough of him, Chloe eagerly wrapped her arms around his neck and drew him closer. Although her hands roamed unhampered over his broad shoulders and chest, Chloe wanted more. She wished they were alone so she could strip away the clothes that separated them. Groaning in frustration, she collapsed back on the pillows.

Sensing her dilemma, Tristan winked at her. "Not to worry, love, we have plenty of time for this later, I promise." He then took a hold of her hand and pulled her to a sitting position.

Chloe gasped at the stark change in the old woman's appearance.

The creature had gifted her with youth and beauty. Unfortunately the transformation was not entirely complete for she still walked like an old woman and her hair was still gray.

As the play progressed, the old woman seduced two other lovers of whom she robbed their youth and innocence. Each time she had sex, she grew younger and younger.

By the fourth and final act, she sat proudly playing her string instrument. Her back was perfectly erect, her hair was as black as a crow's wing and her skin was smooth and white as the finest porcelain.

While she sat and played, the old man stepped onto the dais. His appearance had changed as well. He was a pitiful soul in tattered clothing. Apparently the younger woman had robbed him of everything.

"Serves his ass right," Chloe muttered under her breath.

The woman looked up at the old man and stopped playing. Although she looked forty years younger, the old man still recognized her. Ashamed at what she had done to herself, she jumped up and attempted to run off the stage. However, the man followed her and stopped her, pulling her in his arms.

He brought her back to the front of the dais and handed her the string instrument. Once they were seated, she began to play for him. While she played, he reached out a hand and touched her face. Shaking his head, he began to weep for he realized that he was the cause for her transformation.

Taking pity on him, the woman set aside her instrument and drew him into her arms and comforted him. Although the man had been the reason for her change and the creature she'd become, the woman's love for him allowed her to forgive him.

When Tristan gently lifted her hand and kissed it, Chloe couldn't help feeling that forgiveness might be just what was needed.

Chapter Six

The lights slowly dimmed on the players on stage. While the lights rose on the seating area, Raleigh stood up and graciously accepted his guests' applause.

"Ming and I hope you enjoyed tonight's play. She spent several long weeks 'perfecting' your entertainment. Now is the hour that I've been waiting for especially. It is time for us to quench our baser needs. Let us feast!"

The conservatory doors suddenly flew open and a group of young people, in their early twenties, filed into the room. Chloe looked around uneasily as Raleigh and his other guests shifted from their human form to vampire. No longer able to fight an urge to flee, Chloe struggled up from her seat. However, Tristan grabbed a hold of her waist and pulled her down on his lap.

Chloe looked back at Tristan. His eyes glowed with an unnatural light and his face had begun to transform as well. His brows were distended and his cheekbones were more pronounced, almost hollow. But, despite the drastic changes in his normally handsome features, his voice was gentle as he whispered in her ear. "Do not run, beloved. You have nothing to fear. No harm will come to you or anyone else here tonight. Those are simply familiars. They're especially chosen to serve us. Of course they can choose not to but many willingly do."

One by one, the familiars joined Raleigh's guests. Eventually one of them knelt in front of her and Tristan. The young man bowed his head obediently. Like the other familiars, he was exquisite in both form and features. With straight blond hair so pale it appeared white and clear creamy skin not yet ruined by the sun, he looked almost angelic in appearance.

Chloe stared at his bowed head and wondered why someone so young and beautiful would want to live his life being someone else's food.

“Why don’t you ask him, sweet? The answer may surprise you.”

Chloe bristled at the fact that Tristan had just read her thoughts but she couldn’t resist his suggestion. She reached out her hand and touched the young man on the shoulder. His head came up and he smiled. “Yes, mistress.”

“Why do you serve them? Why do you allow yourself to be fed upon?”

The young man’s brow knitted in confusion. Obviously it was a strange question and one that had never been asked because he looked nervously at Tristan, who in turn nodded his head in encouragement.

“It’s simple. They are so much more evolved than we humans. They are cultured where we are barbarians. They cherish while we destroy. They have a respect for life while we selfishly take it. I have been a familiar for five years and I have never seen harm come to anyone. I am treated with kindness and respect. And hopefully one day, I will be given my reward – eternal life.”

The young man reached up and unbuttoned the top of his white Oxford shirt. He peeled back the collar, exposing two tiny pricks on his throat. His skin was so pale it looked almost transparent. His jugular vein stood out like a road map against his fair skin. Chloe’s attention was drawn to this lifeline, not because it was unusually thick and pronounced but because she could hear the thundering sound of the familiar’s blood flowing through the vein.

Unable to help herself, Chloe leaned over and placed her nose against the young man’s throat. Running her nostrils along the blue vein, she inhaled deeply. His blood smelled sweet and coppery. And for the first time in her new existence, Chloe had an intense yearning for human blood. Disturbed by the revelation, she pulled back from the familiar.

“Do you want to taste him?” Tristan asked, his voice sounding unusually rough and hoarse to her ears.

“N-no,” Chloe whispered. Although she yearned to.

Thankfully, Tristan didn't push her on the subject. "It's okay, sweet, you still need time to come to terms with this new life you have been given. All you need to do tonight is watch and learn."

Tristan lifted his hand and beckoned the familiar to him. Without hesitation, the young man moved higher on the pillows until he was nestled against Tristan's chest, facing Chloe. The young man slipped his shirt from his body, revealing a muscular chest and well-defined abs.

A low growl emanated from deep within Tristan's chest, drawing Chloe's attention. She watched him lower his head to the young man's throat. As Tristan opened his mouth, his canines lengthened. Even though she was somewhat fearful for the young man's life, Chloe's heart accelerated in excitement when Tristan's lips connected with the familiar's skin.

Tristan opened his mouth wider and his canines pierced the young man's skin, causing him to jerk and open his mouth in a startled gasp.

Half expecting the young man to scream his head off, like she'd seen countless times in the movies, Chloe was surprised when the familiar only sighed as if in the throes of ecstasy. He even reached up, threaded his hand in Tristan's hair and drew him closer to him.

Chloe couldn't help but think how erotic it was to watch them together. If it was possible, Tristan seemed even more powerful and sexy as he sucked the lifeblood from the young man's body while he writhed on Tristan's lap.

It wasn't before too long that Chloe herself became aroused and she felt the need to participate. She reached her hand out and ran it along Tristan's thigh. The muscles bunched and flexed under her caresses.

When her fingers found his crotch, she hesitated. But then she heard the deep rumble of Tristan's growl and she smiled to herself.

The naughty boy was encouraging her.

Needing no further encouragement, Chloe cupped Tristan's heavy weight in her hand. While he continued to feast on the familiar, she gently squeezed and caressed him until she felt him grow and become hard. Wanting to feel his hard flesh in her hand, Chloe went one step further and unzipped Tristan's pants. She reached inside and wrapped her hands around him, his heat almost searing her skin.

However, before she could get a good grasp on him, Tristan suddenly broke free of the familiar, his mouth splattered with blood. He grabbed the back of Chloe's head and yanked her to him, covering her mouth with his own.

His kiss was fierce almost savage in its taking. But Chloe didn't mind, for her head was spinning out of control as she greedily drank from his lips. She couldn't believe the bittersweet taste of the familiar's blood. It was better than the most expensive wine. Although she wasn't quite ready to take that final step and drink human blood, she closed her eyes in ecstasy as she settled on feasting on Tristan's bloodstained lips.

"Enough... I'm tired of being teased, I want to fuck!" Tristan growled, tearing his lips from Chloe's. "I know I promised to behave but I simply can't resist touching you, kissing you, wanting to bury myself deep inside you. You drive me absolutely mad, woman. Please say you want the same."

Despite his deception, Chloe wanted him as well. She needed him to be inside her as much as he needed to be inside her, probably more so. For no man had ever caused the raging heat that was now coursing through her body.

Her mind made up, Chloe reached up, sank her fingers into the inky black curls covering his neck and pulled him down for a kiss. When their lips met, the familiar's blood was only a faint memory as their tongues mated.

Taking a cue from the naked bodies writhing around them, Chloe grabbed a hold of Tristan's jacket lapels and used them to push the garment up and over his broad shoulders without breaking their passionate kiss.

Once Tristan's arms were free, Chloe felt his hands on the back of her dress.

"Bloody hell!" he roared. "What kind of contraption is this?"

She giggled at his frustration. Although she was in the throes of passion as well, she had been able to not only divest him of his suit jacket but his dress shirt as well.

"It's called a zipper, hothead. I'm pretty sure you've been on this earth long enough to know how it works."

"I bloody well know how it works!" Tristan growled. Without warning, he grabbed the top of her bodice and yanked the dress apart, shredding it into two equal pieces.

"Tristan!" Chloe huffed. "This is my favorite dress!"

"I'll buy you a dozen more," he grunted.

Although she opened her mouth to protest further, he conveniently stopped her tirade by covering her mouth with his own.

Clever man, her husband.

Unwilling to fight any further, Chloe wrapped her arms around his neck and followed his lead. Sliding her tongue across his lips, she tenderly outlined their perfect fullness. Impatient and wanting to taste him, she pushed past his lips until their tongues met.

Chloe smiled to herself when she heard Tristan moan against her lips, the sound both pleasing and arousing at the same time. Despite the fact that her head was reeling, she still remembered they were in a room filled with several dozen people. Regrettably, she broke away from Tristan's passionate kisses and her eyes settled on the familiar still sitting obediently at the foot of the pillows.

Although her first inclination was to send the young man packing, Chloe hesitated. For when she looked down at his bowed head, all she could think about was how erotic it had been to watch him with Tristan.

"Are you ready to have a taste?" Tristan whispered close to her ear.

Chloe looked away from the young man and looked into her husband's green eyes and she didn't see an ounce of jealousy, only understanding.

"Yes," she replied, her mouth beginning to water as she thought about all the delicious possibilities if they added the familiar to their love play.

A sensual smile curled Tristan's lips just before he planted a quick kiss on her lips. He then leaned over and took the familiar's hand in his and pulled him closer.

Chloe didn't immediately reach out and touch the young man. Instead she simply sat there and drank in his beauty. Despite her yearning, she held back because she was still unsure of Tristan's response.

However, when Tristan began to stroke the small of her back reassuringly, Chloe felt some of her confidence return. Therefore, without further hesitation, she leaned forward and took the young man's face in her hands then brought him nearer until he was only inches from her.

Chloe ran her thumb along the familiar's bottom lip, admiring the softness. Licking her lips in anticipation, she looked over the young man's shoulder and her eyes locked with Tristan's.

"I can't have all the fun, love," Tristan chuckled.

Knowing that Tristan was okay with what she was doing, Chloe turned her attention back to the familiar. Closing her eyes, she lowered her head and pressed her lips against the familiar's. For several moments, Chloe's lips remained still, non-moving, but then the young man opened his mouth under hers.

The familiar's lips were softer and more pliable than Tristan's. And the fact that she kissed him in front of Tristan only made it more erotic.

Chloe's eyes fluttered closed and a thrill of excitement coursed through her veins as she removed the remainder of her clothing. With a gentle nudge on her shoulder, Chloe fell back on the silk pillows with nothing on but her leather stilettos and an ankle bracelet. Once her head hit the pillows, Tristan immediately grabbed both of her ankles and opened her legs wide.

"What are you going to do?" Chloe panted.

"It's time for you to have some real fun." Although he didn't look at her when he addressed her, Chloe knew he'd been affected by her and the familiar's play for his voice was raspy with desire and his hands shook.

Chloe looked down and sucked in her breath when he placed his head between her parted thighs. Tristan turned his head to the side and began to kiss the inside of her thigh, slowly inching his way upward. The familiar bent his head as well, capturing her lips in another kiss.

Chloe's head was practically reeling at the assault of emotions catapulting throughout her body, yet she managed to match the familiar in exuberance as Tristan's tongue made a slow move up her inner thigh until it ran up against the juncture of where her thigh joined her buttocks.

Chloe buried her hands in the familiar's pale blond hair as Tristan used his tongue to part the springy hairs covering her clit. Once she was sufficiently opened to him, Tristan swiped his tongue over her sex. He then parted his lips and drew the now-extended flesh of her clit into his mouth, alternating between sucking and tonguing the tiny bud.

"Tristan...Tristan," Chloe panted, tearing her mouth away from the familiar's ardent kisses. She blindly grabbed for the silk pillows beneath her as she felt the world of reality rapidly slipping away from her. The silk bunched between her fingers and her hips began to buck involuntarily, almost unseating both of her lovers. Despite her wild abandonment, both of them held on firm, the familiar latching onto one of her nipples while Tristan shifted even lower, his tongue sinking into her pussy, spearing her.

"Oh God...oh God! What are you doing to me?" Chloe cried out. Yet neither of them answered her, for it was a moot point as the familiar swirled his tongue around her areola then took the dark nipple in his mouth and began to suckle it, causing Chloe to gasp and writhe in pleasure.

Not wanting the familiar to stop, Chloe dug her hands in his hair and held his head in place. She shut her eyes tightly as thousands of emotions assaulted her senses. She'd

never been loved like this her entire life. And she wasn't so sure she would be able to do it again, the sensations were just too intense. Tristan was enough of a lover for her, but add that times two, and she seriously thought her head was going to explode.

"I'm going to come," Chloe moaned, a white-hot heat bubbling in the pit of her belly. As it grew hotter, it became harder for her to breathe normally, signaling her impending orgasm. Yet her lovers didn't give her any respite. Tristan's tongue plunged in and out of her pussy and the familiar playfully nipped at her nipples.

When she finally came, her orgasm ripped through her violently, causing her to break out in a cold sweat and shake uncontrollably. Yet she had no time to savor it for Tristan grabbed a hold of her wrists and pulled her into a sitting position.

"I want you to do what you wished for earlier," he growled into her ear. "I want you to ride my cock 'to hell and back'." Tristan spun her around to where she was facing away from him. As he settled himself amongst the pillows, his strong, able hands stroked her hips. With the ease of a man with the strength of twenty men, Tristan lifted her up like a rag doll and slid her down on his erect member.

Chloe quickly realized that she'd forgotten how big his cock was for the pain of having him fully seated inside her far outweighed the pleasure. Therefore it took her several drawn-out moments to accustom herself to his wide girth.

However, Tristan was impatient. His hands gripped her hips tighter and he began to guide her hips back and forth over his lap.

Chloe squeezed her eyes shut and allowed him to set the rhythm. Back and forth...back and forth...back and forth, her hips swayed slowly. It didn't take long for her earlier discomfort to disappear and her body conformed easily to the delicious cock seated deeply within her womb.

Wanting more, Chloe set her mind on establishing her own pace. Leaning back slightly, she tightened her thighs around Tristan's hips and began to rock her hips back and forth. As she quickened her pace, she reached down and found the tiny nubbin

hiding just inside her swollen pussy lips. In an effort to heighten her pleasure, she began to rub her open palm over her clit until it became hard and distended.

Gritting her teeth, Chloe soon found it hard to keep up both the maddening pace of her swaying hips and the hand pressed to her pussy. However, her dilemma was quickly solved when the familiar slowly crawled up Tristan's legs and settled his face between her parted thighs. Chloe watched in fascination as the young man moved her hand away and replaced it with his tongue, strumming it in time with Chloe's hip movements.

"Ah fuck!" Chloe cried as she dove over the edge, for the familiar's unrelenting tongue and the enormous cock pulsating deep in her pussy were just too much for her overexerted senses.

* * * * *

Simon curled his lip in disgust. His brother, as luck would have it, had obviously reconciled with his wife, considering their carrying on like animals in heat.

Swallowing the bitter bile threatening to choke him, Simon wondered for the thousandth time why things always came so easily to his older sibling. Women, money, even the love and respect of their people.

Unlike Tristan, he had to fight tooth and nail to obtain only a fraction of the success that seemed to always befall his ever-present thorn in the side. But just when he thought he'd be able to come out on top, his achievements always paled in comparison.

Even when he'd led the Warwick coven to victory in the deciding battle of an attempted coup by the Radamakin fraction in the late 1700s. His expertise on the battlefield was still overshadowed by his brother, who'd left the control of the army to him so that he could personally hunt down Lord Radamakin himself for trying to usurp Tristan's absolute rule of the Warwick coven.

Simon had thought he would finally receive the respect and admiration he deserved for a hard-fought battle against ten thousand treasonous vampires but Tristan

had still upstaged him, for many of their people saw Tristan's actions as noble, while Simon was seen as just following orders.

Although that had been over three hundred years ago, Simon still had not forgiven Tristan, for it was the first and last time he'd been given the opportunity to finally break free from his older brother's overbearing shadow.

Until now.

Just when he thought he would have to spend the rest of his life living in the shadows of his virtuous brother, he'd finally been given a reprieve in the form of his sister-in-law, the one woman who hadn't been so easily taken in by his brother's charm. In fact she was so immune that his brother had to resort to charming her, which was not only an abuse of his powers but a direct breach of their moral code.

Tristan had unknowingly given him the means by which to lift the heavy shadow he'd been carrying around all his life. And hopefully if everything went as planned, he would be the new leader of the Warwick coven.

* * * * *

"Wake up, sleepyhead. It's time for us to leave. It'll be dawn soon. And I don't want to spend my night of rest on a pile of slippery pillows."

Chloe stretched her arms over her head and smiled lazily up at her handsome husband.

"Well, I wouldn't be so sleepy if you hadn't been fucking me for the past two hours," Chloe purred.

"And I wouldn't have been so insatiable if I didn't have such an alluring partner."

"Oh, so it's my fault now that you wanted to go on and on and on..." Chloe replied, rolling her eyes heavenward. She yelped when Tristan leaned down and bit her on the shoulder playfully.

"I think there can be worse things to complain about but wanting to spend my time stuffing my cock into my wife's pussy isn't one of them," Tristan drawled. He then sat

back on his haunches and hauled her up beside him. "Now hurry up and get dressed. I want to get back to your apartment and fuck you properly." He handed her a long caftan that had miraculously appeared next to her torn dress.

Needing no further inducement, Chloe was dressed in one minute flat. Although she'd just chastised her ardent husband for his rampant lustiness, her sexual appetite was just as insatiable, despite the fact that she would be sore for the next few days.

Once they were both dressed, Tristan practically dragged Chloe out of the conservatory. Instead of descending the stairs as expected, he crossed the second-floor landing and entered what appeared to be the home's guest wing. He stopped just inside the archway, pressed her up against the wall and began placing heated kisses in the crook of her neck. Sliding his hands down her body, he settled them on the rise of her buttocks.

"I swear," Tristan groaned, "I can't think straight when you're near me. Love, would you think me rude if we didn't make it back to your apartment? We could hole ourselves up in one of Raleigh's guestrooms for the day instead."

Chloe gasped when his large hands slid lower and cupped her ample flesh. His fingers splayed open and he pulled her up roughly against his hard cock. As expected, she melted like ice cream on hot asphalt when he touched her. She was so hot for him that he could have asked her to fuck up on the roof and she would have done it, no questions asked.

"You put on a great show back there, *brother*," Simon jeered.

"Clear off, Simon!" Tristan growled. "One more word and I swear you'll regret it..." His hands suddenly dropped from her body and he positioned himself between her and Simon. Although he didn't say any more, his hands clenched and unclenched at his sides.

Chloe's interest was already aroused by the underlying tension that had passed between them earlier in the evening. But it was Tristan's menacing undertones and defensive manner that moved her to confront her brother-in-law.

In an effort to stop this nonsense before things became physical, which they seemed close to becoming considering the rigidity of Tristan's shoulders, Chloe stepped away from the wall and placed herself between the two brothers.

"Spit it out *now*, Simon. I'm getting tired of your little riddles."

Tristan slid his arm around her waist and pulled her up against his hard body. He leaned his head down and spoke close to her ear, his warm breath fanning the baby hairs at her temple. "He isn't trying to say anything, love. This is just a little sibling rivalry," he purred, his thumb gently stroking her belly.

Jeez, he was really pouring on the charm now, Chloe thought as she tried to clear her head. Despite the seriousness of the moment, she couldn't help but be affected by her husband's closeness. If her stilettos weren't so pointy, her toes would be curling.

"Sibling rivalry?" Simon snorted. "Don't put me into this, brother. This was all *your* own doing. And what you did to her was despicable! So much so that I'm almost ashamed to even claim you as family."

Despite the effect her husband was having on her rising libido, Chloe felt the hackles on her back raise. Pulling herself free, she stepped away from Tristan. If he was playing her false, she was gone for good. Mind-blowing sex or no.

"Say what you have to say, Simon, and be done with it. What's this big secret you're hiding?" Chloe asked, coming to stand in front of him. If he had half a mind to flee, he couldn't now for she practically blocked him in.

Chloe looked into Simon's handsome face and she noted the hard press of his lips, the slight tic of a muscle in his lean cheek and the almost pained expression in his clear blue eyes. Obviously her close scrutiny disconcerted him because he averted his gaze.

Although she appeared cool and calm on the outside, Chloe wanted to reach out and grab on to Simon's jacket lapels and shake it out of him. What was he waiting for, for Pete's sake? This wasn't some silly soap opera where you kept the audience on edge until tomorrow's episode. This was her life he was messing with and her possible future

happiness with Tristan. If he didn't spill the beans soon, she might have to revert to violence as well and beat this well-guarded secret out of him.

However, just when she felt the urge to kick off her heels and remove the diamond studs in her ears, Simon pushed himself away from the wall he was leaning against. He silently adjusted the silk tie knotted at his throat. When he finally looked at her, Chloe was surprised at the change in his expression.

Whatever she'd read earlier was now cleanly wiped away and replaced with a mask of boredom. His eyes appeared cold and distant. Suddenly remembering the mixed company she was in, Chloe took a cautious step backward.

Simon cleared his throat as if readying himself for a speech or in his case a dramatic monologue. If she wasn't mistaken, he now seemed to relish his newfound role in this sudden game of intrigue.

"Chloe," he began but then paused.

Oh, this is just too much, Chloe thought. But before she could throttle him, he continued. "I'm sorry but I think you should know that my brother has not treated you with all fairness or honesty. When you were in Vegas, my brother told me that he charmed you."

Chloe wasn't sure she'd heard her brother-in-law correctly, which wasn't surprising considering the blood pounding loudly in her ears, but she was pretty sure he'd just said that Tristan had charmed her during their short courtship in Vegas.

"Did you just say that Tristan charmed me?" Chloe asked, making sure she'd heard correctly.

Simon nodded his head with such seriousness that Chloe threw back her head and laughed. For goodness' sake! He was acting as if he'd just told her Tristan was a polygamist or had slept with the family dog. Not that her husband had literally charmed the pants off her on more than one occasion and would probably do so again, before the night was over.

"Is that all?" Chloe sighed as she snapped open her clutch and pulled out a tissue. She then proceeded to wipe at the tears threatening to ruin her mascara.

"I don't think you understand what I'm telling you. When a vampire charms a human, they have the power to control their thoughts and actions. He tricked you into marrying him and I believe he is doing the same in order to reconcile with you."

Chloe's head came up slowly and she stopped repairing her makeup. "Are you trying to tell me that Tristan placed some kind of *spell* on me to make me want him? Possibly even fall in love with him?"

When Simon nodded his head, Chloe felt her body temperature rise. "So what I'm feeling right now might not be real?"

Simon nodded his head once again. And this time she actually saw red.

Chloe shoved the soiled tissue back into her clutch, snapping it shut loudly. She then spun around and faced her husband, who was uncharacteristically quiet. She placed her hands on her hips and waited for him to refute his brother's claims but, instead of coming clean, he slipped his hands in his pockets and looked at some invisible spot over her head.

Not willing to let this be easy for him, Chloe stalked over to him and grabbed a hold of the lapels on his jacket. Yet he still didn't look at her.

"Look at me!" Chloe hissed. "Did you do what he's just accused you of, Tristan?"

Tristan sighed heavily as if a great burden were riding his shoulders. When he looked down at her, his green eyes appeared glassy with tears.

"Chloe, love, I can explain," he pleaded as he reached up and covered her hands with his own but she shook them free as if they burned her.

"Don't. Touch. Me!" she yelled, backing away from him, her eyes beginning to pool with unshed tears.

"I see everything clearly now," she announced, averting her gaze away from him. "Oh my God...I've been such a fool. Not once but twice! For here I was thinking that I'd

finally found someone who I had strong feelings for and who returned them as well, but now it seems all I've been is some silly pawn. Well, it must have been a pretty strong spell because I think I would have practically followed you to the ends of the earth..."

Tristan opened his mouth to speak but Chloe held up her hand to stop him. "Save it, Tristan, there's nothing you can say at this point to rectify the situation."

Thankfully, Chloe still had her pride for when she spoke she chanced a glance at him and the look of utter devastation on his face was almost her undoing. Because despite the fact he no longer controlled her mind, she knew deep down inside he still held a piece of her heart.

Needing a moment to gather her bearings, Chloe slowed her breathing. In...out...in...out. Somewhat satisfied, she lifted her head regally, sniffing back the tears that threatened her makeup.

"Simon, could you take me home, please? It seems like I have suddenly become unescorted."

"Of course. It would be...my pleasure," Simon replied from close behind her.

"Good, I'm done here."

Chapter Seven

"I've really made a mess of it, haven't I?"

Tristan waited for Raleigh's answer. They were in the older man's drawing room playing a game of billiards. Because of Tristan's troubled thoughts, Raleigh was beating the pants off him.

"I guess if what Simon said was true. Yes, you have. Good God, man! What were you thinking? You of all people should have known better. You could have upset the whole natural order between vampires and humans."

Tristan sighed. Raleigh was right, just like Simon had been right earlier. But could any of them understand wanting someone so badly that you would do anything to have them? Probably not. He was obviously the most selfish bastard on the face of the earth at this moment.

"I know I was being selfish. But the thing is only half of his allegations were true. I will admit that I used my charms on her to get her to marry me but I didn't use them to manipulate her feelings for me. We both know that our powers can only influence one's actions and thoughts, not what is in the heart."

"Did you explain this to her?" Raleigh asked.

"No," Tristan replied dejectedly. "She didn't give me the opportunity to explain myself."

"So now she thinks that all of the things she's felt up to now weren't real but magic? Oh, you are in a mess," Raleigh murmured.

"I could just strangle Simon right now," Tristan spat out.

"Well, it wasn't *his* misguided judgment that got you into this mess. He was just looking after your wife's welfare." He then bent over the billiards table and readied

himself for his next shot. After the eight ball rolled into the right corner pocket, he looked up at Tristan as if he were deep in thought.

“Maybe you should tell this to Simon. He could talk to her and admit his mistake. It could possibly help you to patch things over.”

Tristan nodded his head in agreement. “As soon as the sun sets tomorrow, I’ll go and talk with him.”

Once Tristan awoke from his day’s rest, he hurried back to his and Simon’s hotel room. Tristan grimaced to himself for he’d hardly slept a wink through the day anyway so he should have returned to his hotel instead of crashing in one of Raleigh’s guestrooms. But he didn’t because he knew his anger would have gotten the better of him and he and Simon would have torn each other apart.

Tristan gritted his teeth in anger as he thought about last night’s events. He still couldn’t believe his brother’s betrayal. When Simon had confronted him some time ago, he’d admitted his wrongdoing and even promised he would never use his powers against Chloe again. But instead of holding his confidence, Simon had turned around and stabbed him in his back.

Finally reaching their suite of rooms, Tristan called out his brother’s name. He wanted to talk to him right then and there so they could resolve this and Simon would no longer interfere with his and Chloe’s relationship.

However, when his brother didn’t answer, Tristan walked through his hotel room and molten rage began to fill every fiber of his being as he soon discovered that not only was Simon not there but his bags were gone as well.

“That son of a bitch,” Tristan muttered as he tore out of their suite. “If he’s touched her, I swear I’ll kill him.”

* * * * *

Chloe had been sitting at her home office desk for the past hour staring blankly at the computer screen. Instead of preparing a home market analysis for a potential client, she'd been sitting there for hours replaying last night's events and beating herself up for being such a fool for thinking someone like Tristan Smythe could really be into her.

What was his motive for charming her anyway?

He had more money than King Midas himself, he was supermodel handsome and he was totally unassuming. So what could he gain from abusing his powers? Was he a control freak and only plus-size women in their thirties fit the bill? It just didn't make sense.

Sighing, Chloe massaged her temples to help alleviate the headache she'd been suffering from for the past twenty-four hours. Thinking another cup of chamomile tea might help her head and her spirits, she headed to the kitchen.

While she sliced lemons for her tea, the doorbell rang. "Now who could that be?" Chloe mumbled, placing aside the cutting knife. She walked to the front hallway and paused to look at herself in the hall mirror.

What she saw made her groan. She looked a hot mess! Her hair was still piled on top of her head from last evening's affair. But due to a restless sleep, it was now leaning to the left. Her eyes were no better. They were red-rimmed and puffy from crying. And her silk robe was dreadfully wrinkled and stained from lounging around in it all afternoon.

"Oh well, whoever it is, they can talk about me all they want. I'm not feeling up to being the diva today." Chloe unlocked her front door but kept the security chain attached.

"May I help—" The rest of her sentence died in her throat as she looked up into Tristan's face.

Chloe was surprised he was there but she was even more surprised at his appearance. He looked in worse shape than herself. Dark shadows rimmed his eyes. He

sported a five o'clock shadow. And his hair was disheveled like he'd just rolled out of bed. Obviously he had because he still wore the same black suit from last night's party.

Even in his rumpled suit, he's still gorgeous, Chloe thought, pissed.

"Is my brother here?" Tristan asked quietly. "His bags weren't in our hotel rooms when I returned this evening and I thought maybe he'd come here."

Chloe's brow knitted in confusion. Why would his brother crash at her house? Slowly, the implication of his question dawned on her. Chloe's headache immediately evaporated and was replaced by white-hot anger. He thought she'd slept with his brother! Chloe wished she were trifling enough to do something like that. It would serve his ass right for his deceit.

Without answering his question, she moved to shut her door. But before she could press her full weight against it, he'd broken the security chain and pushed her out of the way like a useless rag doll.

Righting herself, Chloe followed him down the hallway. "I'm calling the police!" she yelled.

"Go ahead, love. What can they do to me? I'm a vampire, remember," Tristan shouted over his shoulder.

With Chloe sputtering angrily at his heels, Tristan stalked through her condo like a man possessed. He went through every single room. Not finding what he was looking for, he retraced his steps back into the living room where he began to pace fretfully in front of the fireplace.

"Are you satisfied?" Chloe shouted. "Are you sure you don't want to check the closets? Under the bed? How about the wastebasket as well?"

"I'm sorry, I don't know what comes over me when it comes to you but I—" Tristan suddenly stilled. He cocked his head to the side as if listening to something.

"What's wrong? I guess now you think I have him hidden in the walls."

"Sh...do you hear that? It sounds like a wounded animal."

Chloe ceased her tirade and listened as well. Was that a woman crying? It was but it wasn't the ordinary tears of the brokenhearted, instead they were tears of anguish and torment. Instantly Chloe knew who it was.

She made a move to steer him to the door. "It's none of your business."

Tristan raised an eyebrow at her. Then he looked past her toward the far wall in the kitchen. "But she sounds tortured!"

Chloe sighed. "Her husband beats her."

"He beats his wife?" he asked, his voice tight and restrained.

She nodded her head. "I-I tried to help her by calling the police but she didn't press charges. She's afraid of him."

"Well, I'll give that bastard something to be afraid of!" Tristan bellowed and he was out of her apartment in a flash. By the time Chloe made it out in the hall, he was already shouldering his way into the Rominovs' apartment.

Chloe quickly followed him. When she entered her neighbors' apartment, the living room was empty. Hearing a noise, she ran down the hallway to the back bedrooms. Upon entering the master bedroom, she saw that Tristan had Mr. Rominov dangling in the air, his hand wrapped around the man's throat.

"Tristan! What the hell are you doing?"

"I'm teaching this bastard to pick on someone his own size!"

"Where's Mrs. Rominov?" Chloe asked, looking around the room.

"She's over there on the floor by the window. She passed out when I came in. The filthy pig was beating the poor woman with a belt."

"Let me go!" Mr. Rominov cried, struggling ineffectually in Tristan's powerful grip. Chloe looked up at the man and was reminded of a bug caught in a spider's web.

"Not until you learn your lesson," Tristan drawled. He tightened his hand on the man's throat, causing Mr. Rominov to gag.

"W-w-who the fuck are you?"

"I'm your worst nightmare come true!" Tristan parted his lips and grinned, giving him a clear view of his elongated canines. Mr. Rominov's round face paled and he began to cry.

Tristan looked at Chloe and rolled his eyes in disgust. He then turned back to Mr. Rominov. "Good God, man! Have a little more pride about yourself. I know that a man who beats a woman is a coward, but you're a crybaby as well?"

"What do you want from me?" Mr. Rominov sputtered, snot spilling out of his nose and onto his upper lip.

"You're going to stop beating your wife."

"You can't come in here and tell me what do within my own home!" the older man retorted, obviously forgetting his precarious position.

Tristan's angry roar filled the room as he dropped Mr. Rominov down to eye level. "I can and you will. Or I will gut you like the beast you are." Tristan opened his mouth and his canines lengthened some more until they extended beyond his bottom lip.

"Okay, okay! I won't touch her again. J-j-just please don't kill me!"

"What do you think, love? Should I spare the wanker?"

Chloe looked at Mr. Rominov's face, now marked with red splotches. Although she'd listened to many of his wife's daily beatings and had wanted to beat the shit out of him herself, she still didn't want his blood on her hands. Although reluctant, Chloe shook her head no.

Tristan opened his hand and Mr. Rominov dropped to the ground like a trash bag.

Chloe looked down at the man groveling on the floor at Tristan's feet. Then suddenly a fecal smell filled her nostrils.

"What's that smell?" she asked, wrinkling her nose.

"The poor bloke has soiled himself."

"That was absolutely classic!" Chloe crowed as they left the Rominovs. "Thank you for what you just did back there, Tristan. You didn't have to step in but you did and I appreciate that."

"No problem, love. That man was a monster," Tristan sneered. "Any man who physically beats a woman is a beast and I couldn't stand by and allow that to continue."

When Chloe stopped at her door, he was close at her heels. She turned around and looked up at him. Tristan opened his mouth to say something then, as if thinking better of it, he shut it. He stepped back from her and shoved his hands in his pockets, reminding her of a little boy.

"Well, I guess this is goodbye."

Chloe knew she should say goodbye as well but something inside her didn't want him to leave. There were too many questions that needed to be answered before she could close this chapter in her life. And in order for her to finally have peace of mind, there was one major obstacle to surmount.

"Why did you do it, Tristan? Why did you use your powers?"

Tristan looked down at his feet for a moment. Then he cleared his throat and looked back at her. He looked uneasy and surprisingly unsure of himself.

"I know this may sound strange to you. In fact it was a complete shock to me as well, especially since I'm not a firm believer in love at first sight. But the moment I first laid eyes on you, I was completely taken. But unfortunately for me, you felt the opposite, which was a new experience for me."

"What do you mean? I had the hots for you when we first met!" Chloe huffed, recalling their first meeting.

"No, you didn't!" Tristan countered. "If I clearly remember, you turned down all my advances. Bloody hell, woman! I had to almost beat you over the head to get you to have dinner with me. And you only agreed when I invited your friend Shirley along."

Chloe opened her mouth to refute his accusation but closed it because he was telling the truth.

"Why is that, Chloe? If you were as attracted to me as you claim, why did you turn down my advances?"

Chloe sighed heavily. It was now time to cleanse her soul. "Have you looked at yourself in the mirror lately, Mr. Smythe? Do you have any idea how attractive you are? You look like a freaking supermodel. And I'm about as close to supermodel material as I am to becoming a cosmonaut."

Tristan rolled his eyes heavenward. "I would have never thought that your low opinion of yourself would be the root of most of our troubles," he sighed.

Chloe's hackles rose. She stepped up to him and poked her finger in his chest. "Well, you don't know how it is to grow up being the chubby girl. Who no one wanted to date because her body wouldn't fit into a pair of size-six jeans. Or the girl who was overlooked at all the school dances because the boys were afraid their arms wouldn't fit around your waist. Or...or...or even worse, they kissed you behind the bleachers but laughed at you when they were with their friends!"

Tristan grabbed both of her hands in his own and pulled her to him. "They were idiots, Chloe! Complete and utter idiots to ignore someone as beautiful as you!"

Chloe snatched her hands from his grasp. "Do you honestly think I'm going to believe that you were so taken by my 'beauty' that you went to such great lengths as to use magic to win me over? Heck, it took me twenty-five years to come to love this body and you're going to tell me that it took you only one glance?"

"Chloe, I have been on this earth for six hundred years. The women of today would be considered ugly in past generations. You on the other hand would have been worshiped. Your luscious curves immortalized in paint. Despite what you may be thinking and what today's society wants you to think, you are a very beautiful and desirable woman. Therefore I'm glad all the others overlooked what I love about you.

For one look at you with another man and I would have ripped his throat out. So deep in the throes of bloodlust I was for you."

"Bloodlust? What's that?"

"It's a condition that vampires experience only once in their lives, thank God! When vampires have found their one true mate and our pursuit has been refused, we become utter fools and in some extreme cases, if the bloodlust goes on for too long, we walk the earth as raging lunatics. Fortunately I only hit the foolish state before I caved in and decided to use my powers to charm you into marrying me.

"Despite what you might be thinking, I can only manipulate your thoughts and actions, love, not your heart. And that can only be done if I'm within close proximity to you. So if you missed me in the least bit these past few weeks, which I pray you did, that was your heart dictating your feelings, not me."

Chloe's heart flip-flopped in her chest as the implications of Tristan's words sunk home. From the moment she'd laid eyes on him over the roulette table at the casino, she'd experienced an instant attraction for the handsome British hotelier, but it wasn't necessarily love at first sight, which was so popular in many romance novels. She was too pragmatic for that silliness.

However, she had to admit that during the brief time they'd spent together something had developed. Something so intense she felt butterflies in the pit of her stomach every time he was near her. And during the few short weeks they were apart, she was absolutely miserable. So if his powers were limited to only controlling a person's mind and actions, then how could she explain her acting like a lovesick teenager?

However, for argument's sake, Chloe decided to call his bluff. "How do I know you're telling the truth? I-I mean, you could be using your powers right now and I wouldn't know the difference."

"Well, actually it's quite simple, for charming is nothing but the power of persuasion or a form of temporary hypnosis. As I said earlier, I must be in close proximity to you for my powers to work, I must be looking—"

"Directly into my eyes," Chloe finished for him. "Just like in the old Hollywood horror movies. And just like that day in the hotel lobby."

Despite his affirmative nod, Chloe's usual stubbornness won out. "Prove it," she announced, crossing her arms across her chest and raising her chin in challenge.

Tristan leaned up against the wall and crossed his arms across his chest as well. For several moments green eyes locked with brown, with neither of them saying anything. Then a slow sensual smile touched his lips, throwing Chloe's heart into a tailspin. Feeling slightly unnerved by her reaction, she drew the edges of her robe together in a matronly fashion.

"I accept your challenge, my dear," Tristan replied softly before she had the common sense to withdraw it.

"W-what are you going to do?" Chloe asked nervously.

"I am going to prove to you that during the time I courted you I only persuaded you to go out with me, not become the lovesick teenager that you claimed to have become. This time you can gauge for yourself if I'm lying or not. Are you game?"

Chloe looked at him leaning up against the wall, looking debonair and handsome despite his disheveled appearance. God, she hated that she was so damn attracted to him. And even worse, she hated the feelings he aroused in her!

Somehow Tristan Smythe had scaled her impenetrable wall, built during years of being hurt and laughed at, had come inside and wouldn't leave.

"Okay," she replied reluctantly. "But you have to promise to behave yourself while I'm under your charms."

"Cross my heart and hope to die." Tristan lifted his hand and marked an "x" over his heart.

Chapter Eight

Chloe stretched her arms over her head and yawned. When her eyes came into focus, she blinked sleepily at her organza canopy hanging over her head. Startled, she moved to sit up but her movements were hampered by a pink bath towel wrapped around her body. She reached up tentatively and touched her wet hair, which hung heavily around her shoulders.

Seeing a movement out of the corner of her eye, she looked over her shoulder. Tristan was lying back against her bed pillows with nothing on but a matching pink towel and a light covering of chest hair.

Chloe cleared her throat. "We're in my bedroom, aren't we?" Tristan nodded his head. "And we took a shower together, didn't we?"

"Yes, we did, but I behaved like a perfect gentleman. But I do feel I deserve some kind of reward for keeping my promise. At least a kiss or something?"

Chloe felt her cheeks grow hot at his insinuation. "Stop using your charms on me, Tristan," she whispered, yet even to her own ears she didn't sound too convincing.

He chuckled softly. "I'm not using my powers right now, love. Neither did I use them last night at Sir Raleigh's. Or even the day before that," he replied contritely.

Beginning to feel uncomfortable, she pulled the towel closer around her body. Yet it didn't help for she still felt unbearably naked around him.

"Well, even if you didn't, it still doesn't prove that you haven't shaped my feelings for you. If that's all, Mr. Smythe, I need to get dressed and go into my office and work on some things. So I think you better be going now." She moved to leave the bed but Tristan grabbed a hold of the end of her towel.

"But I'm not finished yet," Tristan stated flatly, his hand bunching the towel slowly in his hands.

"W-what do you mean you're not finished?" Chloe asked, her head whipping around to look at him. She gasped loudly when she felt the towel slowly being pulled from around her body.

"I'm not finished proving to you the limitations of my powers. Since I now have your unabated attention, I need you to be a good girl and find me a scarf."

What kind of kinky game is he trying to play now?

"All in due time, my dear... But for right now I need a scarf so that I can blindfold you to make sure that you can no longer use any more excuses to deny what's really in your heart. Now be a good girl and find me a scarf or two so we can get on with this."

Although she wanted to get up from the bed and run, Chloe knew that her naturally curious nature wouldn't let her. So she waited for Tristan to release the towel before she attempted to leave the bed. Once she was free to move, she tightened the material around her breasts before easing off the bed.

Chloe walked over to her bedroom dresser and yanked open the top drawer. She rifled through the contents and pulled out a couple of headscarves. She turned around and looked at Tristan who remained in the same spot she'd left him, his tall muscular frame almost taking up half of the four-poster bed.

Oh God, it should be a sin for a man to be as handsome and sexy as her husband was, Chloe thought, biting her lip.

Although she wanted him to prove himself, Chloe had half a mind to throw the scarves back in the drawer and jump in bed with him and forget the whole thing, but her pride wouldn't let her.

Raising her chin high, she walked over to the side of the bed and climbed up onto the satin coverlet next to him. She gasped when he grabbed a hold of her wrists and pulled them toward him. But before she could protest, he quickly wrapped the material around them until they were securely bound and lying in her lap.

He then draped the other scarf over her eyes and secured that as well, plunging Chloe's world into temporary darkness. Despite the fact that she was at his complete mercy, her clit jumped in excitement and anticipation.

"Can you see anything?" he asked close to her ear. She heard him grunt when she shook her head. "Good, now we can continue."

Although Chloe wasn't too surprised when her towel was pulled away from her body, she wasn't prepared for her nerves to go haywire. "I-I thought you said you were going to behave yourself," she gulped nervously. She jumped when he rested his lips in the valley between her shoulder blades.

"I said that I would not attempt any funny business while using my powers, but right now I'm not using them," he purred as his hands gently caressed her bent knees then snaked up her legs and settled on the tops of her thighs.

Chloe pressed her lips tightly together in an effort to squelch the groan that bubbled up in her throat. *Baby girl, you are in deep trouble!* All he had to do was touch her and her nipples were already hard little nubs and her pussy was becoming moist.

Taking advantage of her preoccupation, Tristan pushed her gently backward until she fell on the bedspread beneath them. Chloe could no longer contain the groan that now escaped her suddenly dry lips as he raised her arms over her head and settled himself between her legs. The light dusting of hair on his muscular thighs sent shivers up her spine.

"You know it really should be a sin how sexy you are," he breathed into the side of her neck, tickling the delicate flesh.

Funny that he would think the same thing of her that she had of him. "Y-you think I'm sexy?" Chloe asked, slightly tongue-tied for the sudden press of his body against hers was sending her senses into overdrive.

"Mm...hm...I think you're sexy here." Tristan kissed her collarbone for emphasis. "And I really think you're rather sexy here as well," he murmured, nibbling the side of her jaw.

She felt an unexplainable heat building deep inside her as he slowly traced her jawline with his tongue. Despite the slow burn of her inner passion, she shuddered uncontrollably when he shifted his position slightly. The head of his cock pressed into her belly as he now focused his attention on her bottom lip.

Wishing he would stop teasing her with his tongue, Chloe parted her lips in invitation and waited. But instead of devouring her mouth with his own, Tristan withdrew from her, causing her to groan in disappointment.

However, her discontent was short-lived for he captured her nipple in his mouth. And began to suckle on it like a newborn babe. Instinctively, she arched her back off the bed as an intense heat shot through her, sparking a passion in her that only he seemed able to ignite.

"You are absolutely delicious!" Tristan growled, swiping his tongue between her breasts. "You are the most delectable and most tantalizing woman I have ever had the pleasure of knowing."

How can he be so calm in a moment like this? Chloe thought through the haze that now clouded her muddled brain. With his flowery compliments, his lascivious tongue and her libido going into overdrive, she'd be lucky if she would be able to form a two-word sentence.

As she struggled to catch her breath along with trying to find her composure, Tristan took her other nipple in his mouth.

Chloe felt like she was going to explode as his tongue swirled around the mocha-colored nub. "And so responsive too," he murmured against her heated flesh. His cool breath sent chills rushing up her spine.

Tristan shifted position again, this time moving lower. Chloe moaned, not only because he'd left her overly responsive nipples exposed to the cool air of the room but because he was dragging his tongue down her body as he went.

Despite her pride, Chloe ached to touch him as well. In earnest, she pulled at the bindings wrapped around her wrists. Yet she instantly ceased her struggles with the

unyielding material when she felt him nestle his head between her thighs, his soft hair tickling the sensitive flesh.

“Such a pretty pink pussy...” he whispered, sliding his hands under her buttocks and pulling her toward him. “Such a wonderful contrast to all this brown loveliness. Do you mind if I have a taste?”

“P-p-please,” Chloe whispered, throwing the last vestiges of her pride out the window. Needing no further encouragement, he dove in wholeheartedly, greedily swiping her slit with the broad side of his tongue as if he were trying to taste all of her at once.

His tongue was insistent as it pushed aside her pussy lips, baring her completely to his exploration. Nothing went untouched as he played with the little nubbin at the top of her pussy, flicking it back and forth until it distended past her now-swollen pussy lips. Therefore, when his long tongue finally plunged deep inside her hot channel, Chloe was unable to contain the loud cry that exploded from her lips or her bucking hips as he speared her over and over again.

In and out his tongue thrust until her juices ran unchecked. Chloe’s blood was boiling at such fever pitch that beads of sweat broke out on her forehead and she writhed uncontrollably in his strong hands.

Then suddenly, like a cold bucket of water thrown on her, he tore his mouth away. Chloe gasped in protest as his heavier weight lifted off her, leaving cold impersonal air in his place. From somewhere above her he spoke.

“Do you want me, Chloe?” he asked, his voice sounding harsh to her ears.

She couldn’t help the frown that creased her brow. Was he daft? He’d just finished eating her pussy! He shouldn’t have any doubts about how much she desired him, for her juices were now coating the inside of her thighs.

Just as she was about to reply sarcastically, she stopped because she suddenly realized that he’d been driving her crazy with desire on purpose.

Chloe lay there and ruminated on the feelings and emotions coursing through her system. She couldn't deny that her body came alive whenever he touched her and when they were apart, even only by a few short feet, she already felt alone and bereft.

He'd proven his point.

Chloe reached down and removed the scarf covering her eyes.

"I put the scarf over your eyes for a reason, woman! Sometimes you exasperate me," he admonished as if chastising a child. When he reached out to take the scarf from her, she quickly bunched the material in her hands.

"I don't need it anymore..." Chloe replied when his eyes swung to hers.

"Are you sure?" he asked, his brows knitting together in confusion. "How will you know if I'm really telling you the truth?"

"I won't...but I'm willing to follow what I feel deep in my heart. And my heart is telling me that without you I'm miserable."

For several long moments, his green eyes searched her face then he rested his forehead on top of hers and he sighed heavily.

"Chloe...Chloe," he whispered as he cupped her face in his large hands. "I'm so sorry if I hurt you. All I wanted to do was make you mine and love you for eternity."

For a brief second the room was completely quiet except for the soft ticking of the clock on the nightstand. Then Tristan reached down and took a hold of her hands. His fingers moved over the ties of her bindings and in quick order she was free. Well, not "quite" free for he tugged her hands over her head like before.

"You know there is no turning back once you have accepted me as your mate. For I am bound to complete the process. So are you sure it's me that you want?" he asked, his expression having grown somber.

Chloe scanned his handsome features and despite the circumstances of their courtship she knew there was no turning back for her. There had never been any turning back for either of them since the day they'd both laid eyes on each other.

"Come here," she purred.

Although she was pinned to the bed, Chloe still felt in control of the situation. When he bent his head, she opened her mouth slightly and ran her tongue over his bottom lip, mimicking his earlier seduction. She slowly retraced it before pressing her lips firmly against his. It wasn't too long before their kisses became urgent, soul-searching.

"Bloody hell, woman, I have no idea what you do to me but you should have it patented," he panted as if out of breath. "I can't wait to have my cock buried deep inside your pussy again and you creaming all over me."

"Then what are you waiting for?" Chloe taunted. She was so feverish with lust herself that it felt like her head was spinning out of control. If he didn't stick his cock in something soon, she was going to scream at the top of her lungs.

"Turn over," he demanded. With a firm hand at her waist, he helped position her on her hands and knees.

"Lovely...absolutely lovely," he whispered from behind her. "Good enough to eat."

Tristan parted her pussy lips then lowered himself until he was eye to eye with her tight channel. Chloe quivered in excitement as she waited for his next move. It wasn't long in coming for he stuck out his tongue and swiped her folds. A teasing imitation of their earlier love play.

He eventually dipped lower and found her clit. He swirled his tongue around the little nub until it swelled again and extended beyond her pussy lips. When he took it into his mouth, Chloe thought she would faint. Then he began to suck on it. Her eyes rolled back in her head and she slipped to her elbows. She was too far gone to hold herself up.

"Do you like this?" Tristan asked, pausing to blow on her swollen clit. "Do you like it when I play with your pussy?"

"Yes," Chloe replied weakly. "Please don't stop again, Tristan. Please finish me off this time. I love what you do to me."

Pleased by her response, he dove back in. Obviously he must have felt her pussy was being neglected for he slid his tongue over her mound until he reached her hot channel. He pushed his long tongue inside again and darted in and out until Chloe's ass cheeks began to quiver.

Tristan rose to his knees behind her and kissed both of her cheeks. Then he whispered against her flesh, "I love your plump ass and rounded hips."

Gripping his cock, he slid the head up and down her slit, smearing her juices all over the engorged head. Once he was well lubricated, he positioned himself over the opening of her pussy. He pushed forward slightly then proceeded slowly to fill her inch by inch. When he was fully seated, he spanked her.

"Ah..." Chloe groaned. "Why did you do that?" Although she protested, her eyes were lit with an inner fire for she thoroughly enjoyed his unnecessary roughness.

"That's for being so bloody tempting," Tristan quipped, swatting her backside once again. Then, without missing a beat, he alternated long teasing strokes with playful spanks until Chloe thought she was going to lose it. But she still wanted more. She wanted to be fucked good and hard.

Deciding to take matters into her own hands, she braced herself on the mattress. Reaching between her legs, she grabbed a hold of his balls. This startled Tristan so much that he stilled behind her.

Chloe took that as her cue and she began to move on his cock. At first, she slid back and forth slowly to establish her rhythm. Then, once she was up and running, she began slamming her ass against his belly. She teasingly ground her pussy against him, smearing her juices all over his groin and pubic hair, a movement that elicited the most tortuous groan from him.

"You are fucking the shit out of me, woman!" Tristan gasped, grabbing a hold of her hair and pulling on it. "I should let you take the lead more often."

A slow heat began to build and burn in the pit of Chloe's stomach. Although he was filling her to virtual capacity, she loved the feel of his hard cock as it dug in her very core. Wanting him even deeper, she arched her back and widened her legs.

"Do you like my cock driving into you? Fucking you?" Even though his voice sounded unaffected, he wasn't immune to their love play because when she looked back at him, his face was coated with light perspiration and his eyes were heavily hooded and appeared almost sleepy.

"Yes, I love it!" Chloe panted as she rode him hard. Just when she thought she couldn't take it anymore and felt her body ready to collapse, Tristan grabbed on to her hips and pulled her back against him. He equaled her in her passion, his thrusts were demanding and his pace just as sure-fire.

"Oh, fuck me!" Chloe cried. "Harder...harder!"

"Tell me you want me!" he growled, his hips pounding against her ass.

"I want you!" Chloe's voice rose a decibel or two as his cock pummeled her pussy.

"Good, I want you to want me, just as much as I want you!"

Despite her labored breathing and lightheadedness, Chloe still yearned for more. Pulling away from him, she spun around in his arms and tackled him so that he fell flat on his back.

Taking advantage of his momentary shock, she quickly grabbed a hold of both of his wrists and thrust them over his head. She then reached over and grabbed a hold of what was left of the silk scarf and began to wrap it around his wrists.

"You know 'what's good for the goose is also good for the gander'."

Once he was tightly secured, she reached between her legs and took a hold of his cock, which was wet with her juices and pulled it forward slightly until it hovered near the opening of her pussy.

"Do you really think I'm sexy, Tristan?" she asked, batting her eyes at him coquettishly.

"Ah, love, you're so sexy that you should be illegal."

"Good answer!"

Chloe lowered her body over his eagerly, pressing her hips against his body until her thighs rested on his lap. Closing her eyes briefly, she waited as her body became accustomed to his girth. Squeezing her inner muscles, she finally moved her hips back and forth slowly over his cock.

"Bloody hell...you're torturing me!" Tristan growled.

"Well...you feel delicious to me," Chloe moaned. "So you better get used to this 'torture' because I'm going to keep riding your cock until you yell my name."

With that said Chloe dug her heels in the bed and began to pump her hips against him. Once she established her rhythm, she leaned forward slightly and placed her hands on his chest. Back and forth, she thrust wildly until the only sound in the room was their labored breathing and the squeaking of the mattress.

"Oh shit...oh shit..." Tristan moaned. He squeezed his eyes shut and began to pant. "Chloe...oh shit...Chloe, ride my cock, baby!"

Chloe raised her hips then slammed them back down. Again and again, she thrust against him. As her tempo increased, Tristan reached between them and, despite his hands being bound, he began to strum her clit.

Undaunted by the mischief he was causing, Chloe continued to ride him hard. She palmed her breasts and looked down at him. She giggled to herself when his eyes began to roll back in his head and his breathing escaped in short puffs. Taking pity on him, she reached down and released his bindings.

His hands went instantly to her hips, clutching her to him. He lifted his hips and thrust up in her, over and over again until he opened his mouth and finally let go, screaming her name while Chloe continued to buck against him.

Tristan's release galvanized Chloe's own climax. She tossed back her head and allowed her passion to take over. On and on, she rode his cock as her blood roared in her ears and her heart thumped wildly against her chest.

Then, just as she was nearing the edge, a searing heat exploded in her chest. She looked down and saw Tristan's head bent over her right breast, his canines embedded in her skin. His cheeks slightly flushed as he feasted on her.

Chloe felt her climax bubbling up inside her like a wellspring. Digging her heels deeper into the mattress, she pounded her pussy onto his cock, heightening her release. Just when she was on the verge of completion, Tristan suddenly released her breast.

"It is time for you to complete the transition. You must drink of my blood. In doing so your existence as a human will be no more." Tristan reached up and ran his index finger across his chest just above his left nipple. The skin parted easily and his blood spilled forth over the now-serrated flesh.

She had never been a big fan of seeing blood in the past, in some cases she'd even become lightheaded when she'd donated. But now Chloe was stunned at how anxious she was to taste him. When she leaned forward, his hand upon her shoulder stopped her. She looked up at him and was surprised at the depth of emotions playing across his face.

"I warn you, this is not to be taken lightly. Once you have accepted me into your body, you will be mine forever. And I will never let you go."

"You better not!" Chloe huffed, removing his hand from her shoulder. "Especially after this emotional roller coaster you've put me through. I'm not going anywhere if I can help it." She lifted her arms and wrapped them around his muscular shoulders. She then leaned forward and parted her lips. She licked her tongue out and tasted his lifeblood, which was beginning to stain his chest.

Chloe drew back in surprise. Although his blood was of the same consistency as her own, it was tinged with a tart sweetness, thoroughly more enjoyable than the coppery

taste she'd been expecting. Wanting to taste more of him, she dipped her head and drank from him.

At that moment, Chloe felt a completeness she'd never known before. It was so ironic how life worked!

Just when she'd accepted herself for who she was—a plus-size diva with a few insecurities—and stopped trying to fit into society's petite-size mold, she'd been sent Tristan Smythe, who'd chosen her to be his mate when he could have chosen any other woman in the world.

Chloe wrapped her arms around Tristan's shoulders and held him tightly to her as she felt her life slowly slipping away.

* * * * *

When Chloe finally drifted back to reality, she felt exhausted but wonderful at the same time. This wasn't how she'd imagined the transition. No pain, no revulsion. She still felt like herself. Just a slight heaviness in her limbs and...happiness. When she looked down, she was surprised to find herself still sitting astride Tristan. But she was even more surprised that he was still hard. When she met his eyes, she smiled for he was looking at her intently as he guided her hips over his cock.

"You're ready to go *again*?" Chloe asked, her eyes heavy with sleep.

"How cannot I not be insatiable with such a lovely inducement?" Tristan growled, rolling her onto her back. Once he was settled snugly between her thighs, he lifted her leg over his shoulders.

"Oh my, you really keep on going and going and going..." Chloe sighed as he thrust up in her. Although she felt like her body had turned to mush from their earlier rounds of sexual play and the effects of the transition, she wasn't adverse to another round.

“Is it a crime that I like my wife’s pussy so much?” Tristan asked, planting a kiss on the side of her neck. “That you’re so hot and tight inside that my cock can’t get enough?”

“Well, when you put it that way, I would be wrong for denying you your pleasure,” Chloe purred. She wrapped her arms around his strong neck and accepted his ardent kisses as his body slid over hers in a leisurely manner. His skin was now hot and sticky but not as hot as his cock as he thrust deeply inside her.

The room itself seemed to grow hotter as his thrusts became more insistent, more demanding. Just when she thought he’d established his rhythm, Tristan stopped and threw her other leg over his shoulder.

His thrusts were so strong and powerful now that he was practically lifting her off the bed, while his balls slapped in time against her bottom.

“Oh...you’re so deep!” Chloe cried as Tristan rose up on his hands, with her legs still wrapped around his shoulders. In this position, she found herself completely open and vulnerable to his driving thrusts. Closing her eyes, she could do nothing but hold on tight as his cock pummeled her.

Chapter Nine

"Mrs. Smythe, there's a Yasmine Patel here to see you..." Chloe heard a popping sound. "She's looking to buy an investment property."

She cringed. She was going to have to talk to Monique about chewing gum at work.

"Isn't Shawn still on the floor?" she asked, throwing aside a good-faith estimate she was preparing for one of her investors.

"No, ma'am, he's gone home. Plus, Ms. Patel is requesting you personally."

Chloe sighed heavily. If she didn't leave soon, she would miss her plane to Las Vegas. She and Tristan had decided to spend some time just the two of them, away from ringing telephones and business demands, which had been taxing for her in her newly weakened state. For Chloe quickly learned that, in her condition, it was almost impossible to run a business and come home and please a randy vampire who wanted to fuck her every single waking moment.

So, three days ago, she'd packed Tristan off to Las Vegas to wrap up some business with the Kensington and to make arrangements for their trip while she'd stayed behind to handle a closing with an influential client. But she'd promised him that as soon as the closing was over she would be on the first flight out. And she was going to make that plane even if it killed her. For despite the fact that he'd only been gone a few short days, it felt like eternity, she missed him so.

"Send her in, Monique. But could you tell her I can only spare a few minutes because I'm on my way out the door. I'm meeting Tristan in Las Vegas and I should have been in my car thirty minutes ago heading for Hartsfield Airport."

"I'll send her right in. By the way, Mrs. Smythe, if you don't need me for anything else, can I call it a night?"

"That's fine, Monique, I'll be out of here myself after I see to this potential client." Chloe hung up the phone. She grabbed her briefcase and readied it to leave. As she tidied up her desk, the door opened.

"Well, well, well. *Mrs. Smythe.*" Chloe looked up from her desk. The woman who just entered her office had to be the most beautiful woman she'd ever seen in her entire life. Of East-Indian ancestry, Yasmine Patel looked no older than forty-five but she had the figure of a woman half that age. Dressed all in white, she sauntered into the office in a pair of four-inch heels, which Chloe secretly admired. Her pitch-black hair, which hung almost to her knees, swung seductively with each step.

"Have we met before?" Chloe murmured. She watched the woman take one of the seats in front of her desk then her eyes darted uneasily to the door, which was now partially blocked by a burly giant.

"You tell me?" the woman asked, crossing her legs. She glanced down at her painted black fingernails then back up at her. "Has your husband never mentioned a Yasmine Patel?"

"No. Should he have?" Chloe asked, her brows knitting together in confusion. But then she remembered the night at Sir Raleigh's and their host speculating about how Tristan had been able to sidestep a certain Yasmine's clutches.

Chloe looked at the other woman warily. Although she wasn't one to back down from a fight, she knew she was too weak to fight her, especially considering her adversary was a vampire as well and a scorned one to boot.

Clearing her throat, she decided to play dumb. "Did Tristan refer you to me?"

The woman threw back her head and laughed, a throaty sensual sound.

"Did you hear that, Ashe? She thinks that Tristan has referred me." As if on command, the woman's companion laughed as well.

"Ms. Patel, please cut to the chase. I have no time for games. I have a plane to catch in an hour and a half."

"Have a care who you're talking to!" The woman came out of her seat and slammed her hand against the top of Chloe's desk, causing it to groan. "I am over six hundred years old! I have eaten women like you for lunch!"

"I don't care if you're as old as Methuselah himself," Chloe replied tightly. "You are not going to come into my office and threaten me." She pushed back her chair and stood up. "I will see you both out now."

She rounded her desk and crossed to the door. But her companion didn't allow her to pass. "Could you call off your goon—" She was unable to finish her sentence as she was suddenly seized from behind, the man taking both of her arms in his meaty hands.

"Be careful, Ashei. We need to keep her in one piece...for now."

Yasmine walked across the office, closing the short distance between them, and stood directly in front of her. She looked Chloe up and down with derision. "I can't believe Tristan had to resort to using his powers to woo such a dull bird as yourself," she mocked. "Why, you're not even passably pretty and your ass is fat. I practically had that man eating out of the palm of my hand at one time. It mystifies me how something like *you* should replace *me*. How bloody ridiculous."

It was lucky for Yasmine that her henchman had a tight hold on Chloe or she would have given her a fat lip. But he didn't have control of her most potent weapon—her tongue.

Chloe charged. "Well, Tristan loves my fat ass and every other roll on my body. It must hurt to know that such an ugly thing like me was able to attract and hold his attention to the point of making me his mate and it was *you* he found lacking and kicked to the curb."

Chloe knew her tongue could cut people to the quick but she wasn't prepared for the anger it elicited in the other woman. Catching her off-guard, Yasmine pulled her hand back and slapped Chloe across her cheek, snapping her head to the side.

Ignoring Chloe's groan of pain, Yasmine then grabbed Chloe's chin and snatched her head back. "Look, bitch, you're lucky that Simon only wants me to hold you as a pawn. Or I would make your death slow and painful."

"Did you say Simon?" Chloe asked. "You're talking about Tristan's brother, right? He's behind you and your goon coming into my office and not Tristan jilting you all those years ago?"

Now she was totally confused! Why would Simon be behind all of this? Especially since he felt it was his duty to make Tristan come clean that night at Sir Raleigh's.

"Yes," Yasmine replied rather tightly. "Sibling rivalry has existed between these two for centuries. More so on Simon's part than Tristan's. The poor boy has this silly notion that Tristan has impeded his chances of ever becoming anything but his brother's shadow."

"But what do I have to do with this?"

"Why, you're leverage, pigeon. Simon is using you as leverage in this little game of intrigue he's cooked up, so that Tristan will have to choose between you or his leadership of the Warwick coven. And with my pledged allegiance as the leader of the Cushmarins, Simon and I will form the most powerful vampire nation our kind has ever known."

"Look, sister. I hate to spoil your well-laid plans, as good as they may seem. But do you actually think you'll be able to stop Tristan from coming after both of you and exacting his revenge? You and I both know Tristan isn't some pushover who is going to let your and Simon's betrayal slide."

"That is true but, by then, Simon will have the allegiance and protection of over half a million vampires. Tristan wouldn't be able to touch us if he tried. Come, Ashe. I'm beginning to feel like an old Saturday morning cartoon, by divulging our entire bloody plan. We need to get her out of here and underground before Tristan discovers that she's missing."

Yasmine's henchman pulled Chloe along behind them as they left the office. As they headed toward the elevator, Chloe tried one last time to talk some sense to her abductors. "You're not going to be able to get away with this. Tristan will find me and all hell is going to break loose."

"Well, pigeon, you better pray that Tristan chooses you or he may never see you again," Yasmine replied confidently. "For what good is leverage when it's no longer needed?"

* * * * *

"So what is so important, gentlemen, that you've called this special session?" Tristan asked, walking into the great hall. "This must be very important or you wouldn't have called me away from my business and halfway around the world."

He stopped in front of the council bench and placed his hands on the table. He hated dealing with these pompous windbags. They took their positions as his advisors way too seriously, especially since he hardly, if ever, consulted them before making a decision regarding the coven. Therefore he had very few friends, if any, on the eight-man body.

Councilman Horatio Fullard, the oldest of the eight in attendance, addressed him first. Having been born a vampire and not made, he was the most pompous of them all. "This special meeting of the council has been called together on account of a violation of the moral code."

"A violation of the moral code, you say?" Tristan asked, his blood turning cold. "What issue, pray tell, has been brought to your attention? Anything I do in my personal life is just that—personal."

"Yes, we understand that, Tristan," Morgan Twist piped in, his jowls wobbling as he spoke. "But when it involves a human then it is no longer personal. Our balance with humans is tenuous at best but when our leader takes it upon himself to abuse his

powers, thus breaking one of our moral codes, we feel that we must step in and make a correction.”

“The council feels that you have set a bad example and that you are not fit to govern. Therefore we are opening the floor to a possible replacement,” Horatio continued.

“You can’t be serious!” Tristan roared, his fist slamming into the council bench table with such force that the sound of cracking wood reverberated through the great hall. “You are taking this too far. I know there is no love lost between us but you have no right to say that my momentary lack of judgment has any bearing on my right to govern as head of Warwick coven.”

“No love lost...indeed. However, the issue still stands. We have decided to open up the floor for a possible replacement,” Horatio replied in a crisp tone. “Prepare yourself. The challenge will begin tomorrow night.”

* * * * *

“So how did it go, Finneus? She didn’t tear into you, did she?”

Tristan glanced over at his solicitor Mr. Winthrop before lunging at his sparring partner, sending the man on the defensive.

“No, Tristan,” Mr. Winthrop sighed. He removed a white linen handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the rain from his face. As usual, the weather in London was miserable. Although the heat in Las Vegas had been unbearable, it had been a delightful change to this nonstop rain. “I have unfortunate news. Your wife never got off the plane.”

Tristan dropped his sword arm and swung around to look at Winthrop. “What do you mean she never got off the plane?”

“Well, actually, Tristan, I stand corrected. According to the plane’s flight log, she never boarded the plane in Atlanta.” Winthrop watched as his employer’s hand tightened around his foil until his knuckles grew white.

"She's a bloody piece of work, that one! What kind of a game is she playing now?" Tristan growled, throwing off his mask and angrily sending it tumbling into the far corner of the practice room. He allowed Colin to take his foil before he'd throw that away in a fit of rage as well.

"This just doesn't make any sense! When I left Atlanta several days ago, everything was okay between us. How could she have changed her mind so quickly?" Tristan yanked his gloves off and tossed them on a nearby bench.

"Tristan, if I may be so bold as to suggest, you should call your wife before jumping to conclusions. Maybe she has a very good excuse," Winthrop replied in a crisp tone. "Then you could save yourself some heartache and aggravation."

"I pay you to be my solicitor, Finneus, not my therapist."

"I know very well what my position is, Tristan. I was only suggesting you call before jumping to conclusions or flying into one of your frequent rages."

Tristan looked at his solicitor sharply. If the man had not worked for him for the past forty or so odd years and his father before him, he would have upbraided him. Instead he sighed heavily as he sat down on the bench. He bowed his head and rubbed his hand along the back of his neck.

"I'm sorry, Finneus. I've been under a lot of pressure lately due to this bloody challenge. And now this."

"Perfectly understandable, Tristan. If there is nothing else, I would like to excuse myself. I came right here once my plane landed. And I have not had the opportunity to freshen up."

"You may go, Finneus. I have no further need of your services today. If I need you, I'll call."

Tristan sat quietly on the bench while Colin, his personal pilot and occasional sparring partner, put their fencing equipment away. Once Colin was done, he walked over to the bench and sat down next to Tristan. Colin reached in his pants pocket and withdrew a small cell phone.

"Do you want to use my phone, sir?" Tristan looked at the phone resting in Colin's palm.

"Colin, it seems like my pride has fallen with my fortunes."

"Yes indeed, sir, it looks like it has but your fortunes can be regained if you would lay aside said pride."

Tristan sighed heavily then took the cell phone from him.

"I'll be outside if you need me." Colin got up from the bench and left him alone in the room to call his wife.

Tristan got up from the bench as well. He crossed the wide expanse of the workout room to look out of the row of windows located on the far side of the room. The lonely click of his heels over the wooden floor his only company. He leaned against the windowpane and looked out over the night sky. He could almost see the top of the London Eye over the roofs of the other row houses. After several drawn-out moments, it finally hit him why he hesitated to call his wife.

He, Tristan Smythe, the leader of one of the most powerful vampire covens in the world, who'd led a successful civil war against the Hessian werewolves in 1608 and suppressed an attempted coup by the Radamakian coven in 1789 was actually scared to death of calling his own wife.

But his wife wasn't a legion of mongrel werewolves, who when combined only had one operative brain amongst them, or a fractured group of rogue vampires led by a madman. She was the first woman who had ever held his heart and unfortunately the first one who would probably break it.

Tristan flipped open Colin's phone and before he lost his resolve, he quickly punched in the numbers to Chloe's cell phone. After several rings no one answered. He then tried her office number.

"Hello, Walker Realty," *pop*, "where anyone can acquire the American dream," *pop*, "Monique speaking."

"Yes, may I speak to Mrs. Chloe Smythe?"

"Sorry, sir, but she's on vacation." *Pop*. "She won't be back in the office until next week." Tristan almost crushed the tiny phone in his hand. If Chloe hadn't boarded the flight to Las Vegas then where the hell was she and with whom?

"Monique, this is Tristan, Chloe's husband. The reason why I'm calling is because Chloe never made her flight."

"What do you mean she never made her flight? She was packed and ready to go. In fact she worked hard all day so she could leave early. That's why she was sort of put out when a couple of potential clients showed up unexpectedly, specifically requesting her services."

"Do you think you could remember the names of these last-minute visitors? Or what they looked like. Maybe they could provide some clues to Chloe's whereabouts." Also, if they were the cause of his wife's disappearance it would make it easier for him to hunt them down and shred them to pieces.

"I'm not very good with names but I definitely remember what the woman looked like. She was hot! She was Indian, not American Indian but from India. She was slim and had straight black hair, which hung past her waist, almost to her knees in fact. And she was with this big, muscular guy who looked like a professional wrestler."

Tristan gripped the phone so tightly it smashed into several pieces. He threw down what was left of it and stalked to the door. Yasmine might be his equal, being the leader of the Cushmarin coven, but she would pay for this. Of course he couldn't necessarily kill her without causing an all-out civil war, for the Cushmarins equaled the Warwicks in number. But there was nothing in the laws that said she couldn't sport a deformity for the rest of her immortal life.

Firm in his resolve, Tristan had his hand on the door and was about to call for Colin when it suddenly opened outward. Simus McDonald, an envoy from the council, stood on the other side. He was accompanied by several armed guards.

"We've come to escort you to the challenge, sir."

"I can't go through with the challenge, Simus. Go back and tell the council that my wife's been kidnapped and that I'm going to find her."

Instead of doing his bidding, the other man stood his ground. "Sorry, Tristan, you know the protocol."

"Fuck protocol! How can I concentrate on something so trivial when my wife might be in danger?" Tristan roared. He attempted to step around Simus but the guards accompanying him blocked his path.

"You are required to attend the challenge, Tristan. You can either walk down to the great hall on your own two feet or the guards will carry you."

Tristan gritted his teeth. Despite the situation, he had no other choice. Once the wheels were set in motion, there was nothing he or anyone could do to prevent it. The sooner he got the challenge over with, the sooner he could find Chloe.

Chapter Ten

The faint roar of the crowd drifted to Tristan's ears as they descended the stairs of Anglesey tower, a fortified moated gatehouse erected in the fourteenth century. Primarily built to protect the northern borders of Warwick territory, the gatehouse was a dismal shadow of the stronghold it once was, having fallen into shambles shortly after the peace treaty was signed between the Warwick coven and the Hessian werewolves.

When they finally stopped just outside the heavy wooden doors, the crowd's bloodlust was almost deafening. Tristan wasn't surprised at their thirst for blood. Challenges always drew a large audience because vampires throughout the vampire nation, not just the Warwick coven, usually attended.

Unwilling to waste any more time, he pushed on the doors and entered the great hall. Upon seeing him, the multitude parted like the Red Sea, allowing him an unhindered path to the front of the assembly.

Horatio called the room to order several times but the unruly mob ignored him. He then beat his gavel angrily on the council bench in an effort to quiet them but it was still ineffectual. Tristan turned to the crowd and raised his arm as a call for silence. Instantly the crowd quieted down.

"Due to a violation of the vampire moral code, the council has deemed it necessary to find a possible replacement for the leader of the Warwick coven. Tonight we open the floor to any challengers who feel they are worthy to lead one of the oldest and most illustrious covens in the vampire nation."

Tristan rolled his eyes impatiently. The old windbag liked to hear himself speak just for the sake of it. "Who comes forth to challenge the authority of our leader, Tristan Smythe?"

Tristan stood his ground and waited. For several drawn-out moments, no one stepped forth from the crowd. Then a lone voice split the silence, "I will challenge him!"

Tristan looked over the sea of people to see who his challenger was and to his utter surprise, a man was shouldering his way through the throng. However, it didn't take too long for surprise to turn into hot molten anger as he suddenly realized that it was his younger brother Simon who had betrayed his confidence.

But why? They'd always been fairly close. In fact, for a long time, Tristan couldn't take a step without Simon hanging on to his coattails and questioning his every move. Yet here he was contesting his right to rule.

"I will challenge him," Simon repeated, coming to stand just to Tristan's left. "I will challenge him for leadership of Warwick coven."

The council conferred briefly then Horatio addressed Tristan. "What say you, Tristan? Do you accept your brother's bid?"

Tristan ignored the council member's question. Instead he turned to face his brother, his movement drawing Simon's attention. Green eyes locked with blue as they stood silently regarding one another.

Thousands of questions raced through Tristan's mind. Yet the one that stood in the forefront was why after all these centuries would his brother betray him, especially since they'd always been close. In fact Tristan trusted his brother with his life and had relied on that fact in many a battle. Therefore this new development, although anger-inducing, confused him more.

What did Simon have to gain from his deceit? He was his equal in everything. For, ever since they were lads, Tristan had shared everything with his younger sibling. Whatever he had, he made sure Simon had it as well. And he hadn't deviated from that upon entering adulthood. For he'd made sure that Simon received the best appointments in his army. He had given him equal stake in the family business, resulting in a fortune that matched his own. For bloody sakes, he'd even shared pussy with him. That was until Chloe came along. In her case, blood *wasn't* thicker than water.

Needing answers to his questions, Tristan broke the silence first. "Good God, man! Have you lost all common sense?"

A smirk marred Simon's normally placid features. "My common sense is perfectly intact, brother. Plus, isn't that the pot calling the kettle black since it was *your* lack of common sense that landed you in this predicament?"

Tristan grimaced in anger for Simon had raised his voice to allow those in attendance to be privy to their conversation.

"But why go through all of this? And why now, Simon?" Tristan asked quietly, loath to play along with Simon's performance. "I've been fair with all my dealings with you. In fact, whatever I have, you have as well."

"You were always so hardheaded, brother." Simon sighed impatiently. "Can you not see that you have the one thing that I covet? The one thing that I have coveted above everything else in this world." At Tristan's raised eyebrow, he continued, "I want what you've kept from me for over three hundred years...the respect and admiration of our people."

"But you already have that, Simon," Tristan snorted. "You're my right-hand man. Everyone knows that the coven's very existence cannot only be attributed to me but you as well."

Simon shook his head slowly. "You cannot see through the forest for the trees, can you? Don't you see that all of the honor and glory has always gone to you? And whatever is left over is thrown to me as if in afterthought. But today, brother, all of that will cease. Before this day is over, I will finally remove the thorn, which has pained my side for far too long. The irony of it all is that you were the one who practically handed me the means to be rid of you forever," Simon chuckled.

Tristan's brow knitted in confusion. "What are you talking about, Simon?"

"Why, I speak of a most valuable 'pawn' at my disposal," Simon jeered, his voice whispering now. "In order to ensure my success this evening, I've acquired your wife as an inducement."

Tristan tried in vain to rein in his anger as it washed over him like water breaking out of a broken dam, threatening to engulf him. Despite his inner turmoil, his façade remained veritably calm, therefore lulling his deceitful brother into a false security.

"It's time for you to make a choice, Tristan. Your wife or the right to lead Warwick coven. You choose."

By challenging him, his brother had betrayed his confidence. But now he'd also played a key role in Chloe's kidnapping. Tristan could no more hold back his rage than one could hold back a hurricane.

"Your deceit has backfired, Simon!" Tristan growled, his hands practically itched now for the nearest weapon. "You will pay for this. Once I'm finished slicing you to bits, I will do the same to Yasmine." Despite his better judgment, he advanced on his brother, who retreated several steps.

"Tristan!" Horatio's booming voice filled the great hall, stopping both men in their tracks. "A challenge has been issued. Do you accept?"

"It would be my pleasure," Tristan replied, his eyes never leaving his prey.

"As both of you know, the challenge is a time-honored tradition amongst vampires. It is a rite we take seriously for it unequivocally chooses the one who will lead us. Gentlemen, you know the rules of the challenge. On either side of the great hall is a stockpile of weapons you may use to weaken your opponent. But remember your opponent's weapons are off-limits or you automatically forfeit the challenge. The first one to die loses."

"Are you ready, brother?" Tristan asked, a wicked smile curving his lips.

"I've been ready for this day my entire life," Simon snarled.

"Good because your life depends upon it." Tristan spun on his heels and approached the arsenal at his disposal. His weapon of choice was a pair of medieval battle-axes. Taking them in both hands, he tossed them lightly into the air, testing their weight. Satisfied with his choice, he swung around and faced Simon, who stood ready with a broadsword clenched in his fist.

Tristan walked to the center of the room and then stopped, as did Simon. As was tradition, they bowed to one another.

Without further preamble, Simon made the first move. He raised the heavy sword above his head and slashed it downward, coming close to severing Tristan's head from his shoulders. Tristan raised his ax in self-defense, effectively blocking Simon's downward swing.

Using the other ax as leverage, Tristan then pushed Simon back. While his brother recovered, he swirled the axes around his body in a protective mode and advanced on him. Tristan's movements were so lightning-quick that everyone in the hall grew silent with awe as the double axes disappeared into a continuous blur.

Simon stood still as well but instead of being impressed by Tristan's skill in weaponry, he was waiting for an opening.

"Always the showoff, aren't you, brother?" he sneered unimpressed.

"Well, I can't make this look too easy," Tristan drawled.

Thinking he had an opening, Simon extended his arm in an attempt to impale Tristan with the tip of his sword. But unlike Simon, Tristan still trained in the old ways and his skills were sharply honed. With a twist of his wrist, he deflected the sword from its intended target. As he brought his arm up, the sword caught in the space between the handle and the head of the ax. Tristan continued to arch his arm upward until the sword was snatched from Simon's hand and was sent flying through the air.

Finding himself suddenly without a weapon, Simon made a move to retrieve it. However, Tristan sliced his ax through the air, effectively blocking his brother's path.

Releasing a cry of rage, Simon spun on his heels and ran back to the table containing the rest of his arsenal. He returned with a mace attached to a long metal chain.

Tristan raised a questioning eyebrow. "Are you sure you know how to use that? Take care, that weapon doesn't come with instructions. It can be more hazardous to its wielder than to the intended target."

When Simon heard Tristan's sarcastic remark, his face turned beet-red in embarrassment. "We all can't be perfect at everything like you, brother. But in a game to the death one doesn't have to be perfect, one just needs to win." Simon raised the mace above his head and swung it around in a wide arc.

Once the weapon gained enough velocity, he loosened his grip on the chain and hurled the mace at Tristan's head. Tristan was too slow in ducking and the spiked ball caught him on his ear. Dropping one of the battle-axes, he grabbed at his ear to help stem the pain. When he withdrew his hand, his fingers were covered with blood.

Tristan looked down at his fingers. No one had drawn his blood in over three hundred years. While he recovered from the shock, Simon readied himself for his next strike.

He yanked the mace back toward him, a triumphant grin playing on his lips. His plan was working! Tristan was so rattled by his betrayal he couldn't think clearly. A veritable lame duck ready to go to slaughter. If he played his cards right, he would be the next leader of the Warwick coven.

Simon swung the mace over his head once again and then let it rip. This time the mace was aimed at Tristan's weapon hand. Still unbelievably dead-on, the mace blasted against Tristan's hand, knocking the ax from his grip.

Chuckling to himself, Simon watched Tristan grabbing his hand in pain. He felt like shouting his good luck to the rafters as his older brother retreated back toward his side of the room, still keeping a watchful eye on the deadly weapon whizzing over Simon's head.

Simon released his weapon once again and the heavy metal ball arced through the air, heading with deadly accuracy toward Tristan. Hesitating only for a brief moment, he quickly moved out of its way. Instead of landing in his chest, the mace thudded heavily against the wooden table at Tristan's back.

Undeterred, Simon quickly wrapped his hand around the chain in order to pull it back for another attack. However, when he yanked on the chain, the mace wouldn't give. In the impact it had become embedded into the top of the wooden table.

Seizing the moment to his advantage, Tristan grabbed a ten-foot wooden pike. He raised his knee and broke it into two pieces.

Seeing Tristan armed once again, Simon released the chain and retreated to the opposite side of the hall with Tristan close at his heels.

Simon ran around the other side of the table, however, he had no chance to choose another weapon for Tristan hauled back his arm and hurled one of the pikes at him. The pike blasted through his right shoulder and propelled him to the back wall, pinning him. Tristan raised the other pike and hurled it into Simon's opposite shoulder. He then stalked around the table and came toe to toe with him. He took a hold of each pike and twisted them farther into the wall behind Simon, making sure he could not escape.

"Call mercy!" Tristan barked.

"Never," Simon choked. "You're going to have to kill me!"

Tristan broke off a piece of the pike protruding out of Simon's shoulder and placed it over his heart. "Stop trifling with me, Simon! Do not think I will not turn you into a pile of dust." Simon pressed his lips together as Tristan pressed the piece of jagged wood against his brother's chest.

"Say it!" Tristan bellowed. Both of their eyes met in a battle of wills then finally Simon dropped his head in defeat and his body slumped against the wall. "Mercy," he whispered.

"What did you say?" Tristan asked. "I did not hear you."

"I said mercy, damn you! You win, like always. You have always bested me! Haven't you had enough of humiliating me? All my life I have lived in your shadow and it seems I will continue to be in that enviable position of never being quite good enough. Are you satisfied?"

Tristan stilled. For the first time in many long years, he saw life through his brother's eyes. What he'd seen as brotherly love would definitely seem like preferential treatment to their kind, considering vampires were such a jaded species. One had to practically jump through hoops to earn a smidgen of respect from their kind. And unfortunately for Simon, whenever he tried to make a mark for himself, he always came up short against Tristan's own exploits.

Tristan winced as he thought about how miserable a life Simon must have had, always being second best, especially when his older brother was an arrogant braggart like himself.

Filled with guilt, Tristan reached out and removed the pikes from his brother's shoulders. Once they were removed, he held his hand out to him in truce.

"I'm sorry, Simon. I'm sure having me as your older brother has made your life at times insufferable. I know I can be extremely arrogant, overbearing and at times an arrogant and pompous ass. From now on, I promise I will stem my assistance in your affairs and allow you to lead your own life."

Simon hesitated for several long moments before taking his hand.

As the crowd erupted into approving cheers, Tristan hauled his brother to him and wrapped him into, what seemed to those around them, a brotherly hug. But Simon knew better as Tristan held him in a viselike grip. "I forgive you, Simon, but I promise you if any harm has come to my wife, I will hunt you down and tear you apart."

Tristan released Simon so suddenly that the other man stumbled backward. He then turned on his heel to leave the great hall. However, Horatio's voice boomed over the excited shouts of the raucous crowd.

"Stop!" he bellowed. Tristan turned around slowly and faced the eight-man council. A black eyebrow rose questioningly.

"This is unacceptable! A challenge has never ended with both opponents still alive."

"Well, a new precedent has been set," Tristan drawled, folding his arms over his broad chest. "Because *this* challenge is over. I know how this must pain you, Horatio,

but I'm still the leader of Warwick coven. And will continue to be as long as I have life in this body."

Horatio slammed his hand against the council bench in anger. "Enough of your insolence! You dare change the rules of a tradition that has been in existence for thousands of years?" Horatio asked, his voice rising several octaves when Tristan suddenly rushed to the council bench.

"I dare to do anything I damn well please," he snarled. "You fail to forget you are nothing but an *advisor*, who can be easily replaced. I have put up with you and the rest of you arrogant sacks of wind for several centuries out of respect to tradition. But lately I have thought long and hard about replacing all of you with a new council."

"I-i-insolence!" Horatio sputtered, his mouth opening and closing sporadically, reminding Tristan of a fish caught on land. However, whatever he was trying to say was thwarted by a council member on either side of him, grabbing him by the arms, hauling him out of his seat and dragging him from the assembly.

Once the doors were shut behind him, the remaining council members conferred with one another. It did not take them long to come to a unanimous decision.

"It has suddenly come to the council's attention," Tristan's eyes swung to Morgan Twist, who was as pompous of an ass as Horatio but was generally viewed as the voice of reason, "that, since this is an 'unprecedented' turn of events, it is the findings of the *present* council to overlook tradition and establish a new interpretation of the law. The challenge will stand. Tristan Smythe will continue as the rightful leader of Warwick coven."

The great hall filled with thunderous applause as the crowd approved of the council's findings. Tristan, however, only acknowledged their decision with a stiff nod of his head. He then turned on his heel and left them behind. His mind already set on more important business.

Finding his wife.

Chapter Eleven

Shortly after they'd left Chloe's office, Ashei drove them to the airport and they boarded a private plane bound for Europe. Once they'd touched down, Yasmine made sure they kept moving until they were safely behind the walls of her private estate somewhere outside London.

Although Chloe had been given her own private room, she was reminded on a daily basis that she was not a guest. There were no bars on the windows or locks on the door but Yasmine made certain she didn't escape. For every night during the past three days, she'd stolen into Chloe's room and fed on her. Yasmine had taken just enough blood to keep Chloe too weak to escape. And considering she was already in a weakened state due to her recent transformation, it was a chore just trying to will herself out of bed.

Lying back against a mountain of silk pillows at her back, she resisted the urge to cry as she took in the luxury around her. Swaths of rich Indian fabrics in various exotic colors hung from the ceiling like flowing incandescent jewels, providing a bit of privacy to the low-slung bed in which she lay.

Despite the decadent environment, it was still a prison. She was quickly coming to realize that the longer she remained as Yasmine's captive the smaller her chances of ever being rescued became.

"Are you ready to play again, love?" Chloe's eyes fluttered open as she recognized her husband's voice. She heard him pad across the room and stop just beyond her reach at the foot of the enormous bed. His chest was bare and a pair of black slacks hung low around his hips revealing his v-cut obliques.

"Please...Tristan, help me." Despite how real he looked, Chloe knew he was only a figment of her imagination. For the same dreams of Tristan rescuing her, of him making

love to her had played out in her mind on a daily basis as she floated in and out of consciousness. Not that it mattered, though, as long as they made her feel better, as long as she could feel close to Tristan on some level. Plus, this one looked so real like never before.

"Of course I will help you, my sweet," her dream man continued. "But, unfortunately, it might not be the kind of help you are in need of."

"It doesn't matter, Tristan... Just help me to forget," Chloe whispered.

"Well, I can definitely make you forget," he purred. She licked her dry lips in anticipation as he sauntered around the side of the bed and stood mere inches from her.

Chloe looked down at the waistband of the tailored slacks he wore and her hands fairly itched to touch him as he began to unbutton them. When his fingers strayed to the zipper, he stopped.

"Do you think you can be a good girl and help me with this?" he asked, placing his arms behind his back and playfully thrusting his hips in her direction. Chloe looked at all that muscular flesh that was hers for the taking. She ached to touch him so badly, her desperate need for him had become more intense with each dream.

Not one for self-torture, Chloe stretched out a heavy arm and allowed her fingers to glide through the slightly coarse hair peppering his rock-hard abs. When he groaned, she peeped up at him and the sight of his heavily hooded eyes now filled with lust made her heart beat faster.

Lowering her gaze, she centered her attention on the growing bulge in his pants. She smiled to herself, grateful for her colorful imagination that had been such a comfort to her over the last couple of days. Eagerly, she ran her hand along the waistband. When she dipped her hand inside, she wasn't surprised to find that he was not wearing any underwear – after all she was calling the shots.

The thought of this sexy, virile, naked man increased the heat between her thighs and her nipples hardened in response. Although her hands shook with excitement,

Chloe was able to unzip his pants without causing him undue harm. Once they were open, his cock sprang forward and flopped against the side of her cheek.

“Do you feel how hot I am for you?” he asked huskily.

Chloe nodded her head and his cock rubbed against her face. Suddenly a desire to see him completely nude filled her. With strength she didn’t know she still possessed, she grabbed on to the black material of his slacks and yanked them quickly down his hips.

She shifted her position in the bed until she was lying kneeling before him. Not needing any encouragement, just the intense passion now pounding through her veins, she wrapped her hand around his cock greedily. She pumped her hand up and down its length several times until it grew rock-hard and solid to the touch.

When he moaned, she felt unbelievably powerful, a treat after all the humiliation she’d had to endure at Yasmine’s hands.

Chloe leaned into him so that his cock was in direct line with her lips. Moistening them first, she then leaned forward another inch. Starting at the base, she followed the bulging vein on the underside of his cock then licked her way up and over the head until she reached the tiny hole at its tip.

Wanting to taste more of him, she opened her mouth eagerly. Inch by slow inch, she took him into her mouth. She was so enjoying the taste of him that she let out a little moan.

“Y-y-yes, beautiful, take me deep in your mouth. Yes, just like that,” he whispered.

At first, Chloe’s movements were slow and hesitant. But when his hands plunged into her hair and he began to whisper words of encouragement, she began to suck him hard and fast.

“Shit! Your lips feel delicious wrapped around my cock,” he groaned as if in pain. Chloe felt his hands trembling in her hair. But she didn’t give him any respite. Instead she let her lips envelop the tip of his cock then gripped the base with both hands. As she

greedily sucked on him, she ran her hands up and down his shaft until he began to squirm and moan.

Turned on by his response and feeling in control, Chloe wanted to taste every available inch of him for she was just as much on fire as he. So much so that she wanted stimulation as well. Tearing her mouth from his cock, she pulled away.

"Do you want to please me?" Chloe asked, her breath coming out in painful gulps.

He licked his lips before replying, "Yes! Just tell me what to do."

"I want you to please me like I'm pleasing you."

"Your wish is my command," he growled, his green eyes lighting up at her request.

Knowing that he wouldn't disappoint her, Chloe slid her mouth down on his cock once again. But she almost lost her rhythm when she felt his questing fingers slide over her slit before dipping inside her hot, eager channel. When his fingers began to thrust in time at the same rate as her mouth moved over him, she almost thought it would be her undoing. However, she bolstered her resolve and continued to work his cock.

"Chloe!" he yelled. "I'm about to come!"

She reached out and palmed his ball sac in her hand and she knew he was telling the truth for his balls had shrunk considerably.

"Would you allow me to cream all over your beautiful breasts, love?"

Instead of answering him, Chloe shifted her position so that she now sat on the edge of the bed, her feet dangling off the side. She palmed her breasts, opening them wide enough so that his cock could easily fit in between.

"Fuck...fuck...fuck..." he panted, placing his hands over her own as he guided her movements. Chloe squeezed her eyes shut as his hot flesh slid in between her twin globes. Loving the feel of him, she lifted and lowered them over his rock-hard shaft, faster and faster until he joined her by bucking his hips.

She looked down just in time to see the first traces of his orgasm began to splash hotly over her bosom.

"Yes, milk every last drop of my cum, baby!" he groaned, still pumping his hips until he had no more of his seed to give. Once he was spent, he reached out his hands and rubbed his cum over her breasts.

"Oh, you little slut!"

Chloe groaned and her hands stilled on her breasts at the sound of the feminine voice that had rudely interrupted her dream. In an attempt to block out her tormentor, she squeezed her eyes shut tightly and willed herself back to sleep.

"Ah! I wonder what your husband would think if he knew you were pleasuring yourself. Obviously he's lost his touch," Yasmine mocked.

"He's done no such thing, bitch," Chloe snapped, coming up on her elbows. Her eyes narrowed angrily as Yasmine, now dressed in a traditional cream-and-gold sari, covered the short distance between them and came to stand in the center of the room.

"Ah! I see you have finally decided to join the living! Well, at least what's left of you," Yasmine snickered. "I do enjoy having you awake for our nightly tête-à-tête. Last night was such a bore. You were passed out for most of it."

Despite her weakened state, Chloe hadn't quite lost her spunk. "Yasmine, please spare me the honor of one of your boring speeches and do what you came to do. But I would like to ask a favor... I would appreciate it if you would take blood from someplace else besides my neck. I don't want you to leave a permanent scar."

As she expected, the other woman began to sputter with rage. It didn't take much to set her off. And she had become a pro at it. Without warning, the bed suddenly dipped and Yasmine scrambled onto it, straddling Chloe's chest.

She then took a hold of her jaw and applied just enough pressure until it opened. "How does he put up with your impertinent tongue?" Yasmine growled. "Maybe I should rip it out and save both of us the aggravation of having to put up with your mouth," she sneered.

"Do as you will, Yasmine, because whatever you do to me, the same is in store for you when Tristan rescues me." Chloe turned her head away from the other woman,

summarily dismissing her. She bit back a groan of pain when Yasmine snatched her face back around.

"How are you so certain Tristan is coming for you? You've been here four days and no sign or word from him. Your kidnapping wasn't entirely done in secret, you know. I supplied my real name and my exotic looks would be easily remembered. Maybe, he's found someone else to replace you already. Tristan is very fickle. I should know. I was with him for over seventy-five years and then one day he just walked out on me."

Yasmine conveniently left out the part that he'd caught her in bed with her new driver.

"Tristan wouldn't do that, he—"

"He what? He loves you?" Yasmine cut in, her laughter grating on Chloe's sensitive nerves. "Ha! You disappoint me, for a minute there I actually thought you had some sense. Tristan doesn't love you. How could he? You're a pale shadow compared to the countless women I've seen on his arm over the centuries."

Although Chloe knew that Yasmine's words were meant to intentionally taunt her, the old Chloe couldn't help but take them to heart. Not willing to continue down that avenue, she decided to do a little reality-checking herself.

"You know I'm aware that you're only saying these things out of envy," Chloe replied matter-of-factly. "Because I know deep down inside it galls you that Tristan chose me as his mate instead of you. Have you ever thought that maybe it's not my *looks* that made him want me? Thank God, for everyone knows that beauty fades."

When Yasmine narrowed her eyes at her, Chloe couldn't help but cringe inwardly. But to her astonishment the other woman moved off her chest and settled next to her in the bed.

"As you said, let's get on with this." Without warning, Yasmine grabbed a hold of Chloe's hand. She lowered her head and ran her full lips along the thin skin on her inner wrist, causing Chloe to gasp in surprise. "I have to admit, you have the softest skin I've ever had the pleasure of tasting, even softer than my own. And such a

beautiful color as well, very arousing.” Yasmine ran her tongue along the inside of Chloe’s wrist, tickling the sensitive flesh.

Chloe attempted to pull her arm free but the other woman’s strength was by far superior to her own. When Yasmine opened her mouth and her canines descended, Chloe braced herself for the worst, but nothing came. Instead the other woman’s weight suddenly lifted off her and the bed dipped next to her.

Chloe heard the low growl first and then the smell of a wild animal, specifically wet dog, drifted to her nostrils. She turned her head slightly to the left and clamped her hand over her mouth to stem the bloodcurdling scream she knew was forthcoming when she saw exactly *what* had lifted Yasmine off her.

Chloe scuttled back against the wall.

“What is the meaning of this?” Yasmine shrieked in disgust. “How dare a Hessian werewolf enter my domain?” To Chloe’s surprise, she balled up her fist and began pelting the giant wolf pinning her to the bed. Yet her strength was no match for the enormous monster that had her pinned to the bed with his enormous front paws.

“He dares because he’s your new master,” Tristan chuckled. Chloe’s head jerked around and she sighed in relief as her husband sauntered into the room.

“W-w-what do you mean?” Yasmine stammered. She was now turning her head from side to side for the beast kept trying to lick her face. “I have no master... I’m the ruler of the Cushmarins!”

“Not...anymore,” Tristan drawled. “Once the council learned of your involvement in Simon’s plot, they unanimously agreed that you needed a masculine hand to keep you in line.”

“And the only thing you could come up with was to seek out th-this beast?” Yasmine spat out as she struggled against the canine’s enormous paws.

“Well, I couldn’t help it that no vampire wanted the job. Fortunately for you, Leopold here seemed to relish the idea.”

“Fortunately?” Yasmine shrieked. “I would rather be cowed by a slimy selkie than being handed over to a filthy werewolf! Why, they only have half a brain—”

However, Yasmine was unable to finish one of her legendary temper tantrums. It stilled in her throat for the wolf suddenly bared his teeth and a menacing growl filled the room.

“Well, my dear, I think that’s our cue,” Tristan announced, picking Chloe up off the bed and gently cradling her in his arms. “Although I might love to see Yasmine receive her comeuppance, I couldn’t bear to see it actually done by a werewolf.”

* * * * *

After leaving Yasmine’s country estate, Tristan took them to his mansion in Mayfair, an imposing masonry structure in the heart of London, just steps away from Hyde Park.

Declining offers of help from the household staff, Tristan held on to her tightly as he made his way across the immaculately polished marble floors of the mansion’s front foyer then he climbed onto the lift, which took them up to the third floor and the master’s quarters.

Once the elevator reached the top floor, he stepped into a short hall flanked by a pair of double doors made of dark teak, the same found in his penthouse suite in Las Vegas.

Shouldering his way into the master suite, he still didn’t set her down. Not until they entered the master bedroom where he finally relinquished her care to a leather wingback chair nearest to an already-lit fireplace. He then went into the adjoining master bath and ran a bath.

He knelt in front of her and took her hands in his, rubbing them to stem the coldness from the chill of the night air. “I’ve run you a bath so you can relax, after that you must feed. Good God, woman, your strength and resilience astound me!” Tristan

exclaimed, running his hand through his thick black hair. "How on earth were you able to hang on for so long?" he asked, concern etched on his handsome features.

"You..." Chloe whispered. "I dreamt of you all the time. I wanted to hang on because of you."

Tristan scooped her into his arms so quickly that Chloe's head swam dizzily from the sudden change in position. Yet she held on tightly as his lips crushed hers. In fact she was so caught up in his spine-tingling kisses that she didn't realize he'd removed her tattered clothing. Not until he set her down near the foot of a Roman bathtub did she finally float back to reality and the realization that she now stood in front of him completely nude.

Although she was a big girl, she'd never been shy about her body and she wasn't going to be now. For the man standing before her loved everything about her, every jiggle, wobble and shake. Chloe smiled at the way his eyes darkened as he raked them over her. He was so hot for her that buttons went flying and the telltale rip of fine material echoed through the bathroom.

Once he was completely nude, Chloe was mildly surprised that he didn't stalk over to her and grab her. Instead he stood proudly before her and did nothing. She found it hard to resist temptation. She stepped forward and rested her hands on his chest, her fingers fanning out widely in an attempt to touch every hill and bump caused by tightly honed muscles.

Drawn to the twin buds beginning to pucker beneath her questing fingers, Chloe captured one of them between her thumb and index finger then rolled it gently between her fingers.

"Woman, what are you doing to me?" Tristan croaked as she applied more pressure to her arsenal. "You're going to make me come before we even get started!"

"I'm sorry, baby, for being so insatiable but I don't know what's come over me. It's like my libido is in overdrive. I don't want to rest. I don't want to feed. All I want is

your thick cock buried deep inside me.” Chloe reached up, wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled his head down toward her.

However, her seduction was thwarted when Tristan suddenly threw his head back and laughed.

“Why are you laughing?” she demanded. She reached down and pulled none too gently on one of his nipples.

But he didn’t flinch. Instead he pushed her up against the wood-paneled wall at her back then palmed her ass in his hands.

“This laughter is from joy, sweetheart! I was only laughing because you are finally one of us! Your avid thirst for sex is one of our daily pursuits, only behind staying alive at all costs and feeding. Fortunately for you, you have a mate who is just as lustful and more than willing to keep you satisfied,” Tristan purred, wiggling his eyebrows at her and palming her ass.

“Oh...and here I was thinking you were charming me again,” Chloe sighed, caressing his chest.

“Why, you little minx!” Tristan growled, lifting her easily from the floor. “I’ll show you my charms all right. Just so you know, a vampire’s charming powers are useless against another vampire,” he supplied then nipped playfully at her shoulder blade.

Tristan wrapped her legs around his waist then leaned slightly forward. She gasped as she felt the engorged head of his cock tease her pussy lips. She flung her arms around his neck and accepted his savage kiss as he slowly lowered her onto him.

Chloe moaned when he was fully inside her, half out of pleasure and half out of pain. He was so deep inside her it was almost painful. But she accepted the pain as she readily accepted who and what he was – and what she now was as well.

“I can’t get enough of your hot pussy!” Tristan grunted as he rammed her up against the wall and his cock relentlessly hammered away at her pussy. Although she loved the almost violent turn of their lovemaking, she silently prayed she wouldn’t have splinters in the morning.

"Fuck, Chloe! You are a goddess...my goddess!" he bit out as his hips ground into her. He pulled back slightly then pushed forward again, sending his cock deeper into her hot pussy.

"Tristan..." Chloe panted as her climax grew to almost fever pitch, making her lightheaded. Knowing her orgasm was near, she also knew she wouldn't be completely satisfied until she had all of him inside her.

"I-I want more!" Chloe moaned as he lifted and then slammed her over and over again onto his massive cock. "I want you inside me in more ways than one, Tristan. I want to feed on you as I come."

Tristan's hands stilled on her waist. He then reached up, grabbed the back of her head and used the pad of his thumb to gently roll her upper lip up. Satisfied by what he saw, he released her. "Ah, they are trying to descend. It would be my honor if you cut your teeth on me, my love."

Chloe licked her lips in anticipation. She gripped his shoulders and pulled herself against him. She lowered her head then ran her nose down the side of his neck. Once she found the telltale blue markings of his jugular vein, she opened her mouth wide.

And for the first time in this new existence of hers, her canines descended. In spite of a slight burning sensation along her upper gums, the experience was exhilarating as she suddenly felt powerful and at one with her being.

Ready to take her first steps, Chloe bit down.

"Good God, woman!" Tristan exclaimed. "Are you trying to bite my head off?"

Chloe jerked away from him so suddenly she splattered blood all over his upper chest. "I-I-I'm so sorry..." she stammered. She quickly blew on his neck in an attempt to assuage the pain. And to her surprise, the tiny holes she'd made in his skin healed before her very eyes, leaving only a purplish scar.

Satisfied with her handiwork, she looked up into his face, empathy etched on her features. However, her expression quickly soured for, despite his complaining tone, Tristan was trying in vain to keep a smirk from threatening his delivery.

Without saying a word, Chloe reached up, grabbed a hold of his ear and yanked his head roughly to the side.

“Ouch! Now you’re going to just rip it off my shoulders?” he cried, his face screwing up into a legitimate expression of true pain.

“Just desserts,” Chloe purred, a smirk lighting her soft features.

Now she had an unobstructed view of her handiwork, a small tattoo featuring the tiny pinpricks caused by her canines. Desire flooded her senses. Then, all teasing remarks forgotten, she leaned forward and bit down once again. Albeit more gently this time.

Chloe marveled at how her clit jumped excitedly as she drank from him almost greedily. Wanting to intensify her enjoyment, she gripped his shoulders tighter then shoved her pussy down on his still rock-hard cock.

“Yes...yes...drink from me as you take every last inch of my cock,” Tristan groaned.

But it was Tristan who came first. He flung his head back and howled his release as his hot, sticky cum shot up into her, its heat warming her inner core.

In an attempt to end her own torment as well, she lifted her hips and began to buck against him wildly.

Chloe continued to pound against him until the bright lights of her own release burst into a kaleidoscope of dazzling colors as she tumbled over the edge on a wave of pure bliss, brought on by a heady mix of blood, sex and true love.

The End

About the Author

Ever since the age of nine, KoKo Brown has had a love for the written word. So much so, that she got the idea to publish her own newspaper. Turning a tidy profit from the very first issue, the publication was unfortunately put out of business by KoKo's grade school principal, who didn't appreciate outside competition.

Undaunted, KoKo has never strayed too far from her "passion", whether it was trying to bring some "liveliness" to her local newspaper's obituary page or trying her hand at erotic fiction.

When not writing, this Florida native likes spending time with family and friends, riding her Yamaha 650 Classic, surfing the internet, or traveling to exotic locales. Since this is her first attempt at writing erotic fiction, KoKo would love to hear back from readers!

Koko welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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