

A Taste of Twilight

Aubrey Ross

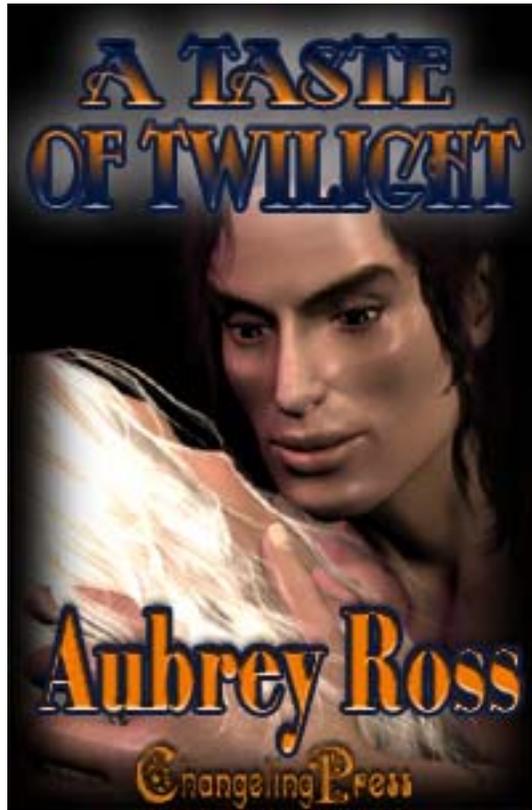
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Prologue

Baltimore, Maryland

"Well, hello, little lady. It's nice to have you back."

Jessie Curtis laughed. "Coming from a crotchety M. E., I'm not sure that's a compliment."

Hank McElroy stepped away from the autopsy table and pulled off his plastic gloves. "What's up?"

"She needs a closer look at my Jane Doe," Dalton Auster replied.

Lumbering across the morgue, Hank grabbed a fresh pair of gloves and winked at Jessie. "I thought they ruled Jane a suicide." He pulled on the gloves with a distinct snap, mischief sparkling in his eyes. "Why do you insist on spitting into the wind? Don't you have enough to do without manufacturing work?"

"You don't believe it anymore than I do, so why are you busting my balls?"

Jessie returned Hank's wink as they approached the body lockers. Provoking her ex-partner was a long standing pastime for her and Hank. This easy camaraderie was one of the few things she missed about her job since leaving the police force two years before. Dalton jerked open one of the silver doors and pulled out the sliding tray. The insubstantial shape beneath the sheet made Jessie's mouth go dry.

"Cause of death was loss of blood from wrist lacerations." Hank lifted the sheet and exposed Jane's right arm. Carefully rotating the slender limb, he displayed one of the wounds. "Each end of the laceration is curiously rounded as if two puncture wounds have been joined. Someone was playing connect the dots and I don't think it was Jane."

"What caused the puncture wounds?" Jessie asked. "The curve is much too pronounced for a needle."

"More like a nail," Dalton agreed.

"I don't know and no one is curious enough to let me find out. She's a nameless suicide, case closed."

Jessie stepped closer to the extended table and lowered the sheet covering the victim's face. Her breath hitched and her stomach knotted. *Two years in the 'burbs has made you soft.* Jane's smooth skin stretched over delicate features, beautiful even in death. Mid-teens if she was lucky, her life snuffed out before it fully formed.

"She didn't look like this when they brought her in," Hank said.

"She was all gothed out. Black lipstick, heavy eyeliner, makeup so pale it was almost gray."

Jessie grinned at Dalton. "When did you become an expert on fashion trends?"

He shook his head and crossed his arms over his chest. "Hank brings out the smart ass in you."

"One of my finer qualities." Hank chuckled and headed back to the autopsy table.

"Give me a few minutes with Jane and I'll meet you upstairs."

Dalton shoved his hands into his pockets and averted his gaze. At six foot four it was hard for Dalton to look boyish, but this expression rolled thirty years off his street-roughed exterior.

Jessie easily guessed the cause of his discomfort. "No one knows I'm here."

His bright blue gaze shot back to hers. "This case is *closed*. I've been ordered to move on. It's best if no one but Hank knows you're back in town."

"No problem." Dalton was the self-appointed champion of lost causes. She'd always loved that about him. "I'll take a cab to your apartment and start digging through the file."

"You're the best." He glanced at the body, his brow furrowed, lips tight. "I've worked homicide for eight years. Why won't this one leave me alone?"

"They're taking the easy way out and that pisses you off. Now, get back to work."

He nodded and left her alone with Jane.

Clairvoyance, intuition, ESP, there were many labels for Jessie's ability and she wasn't comfortable with any of them. She didn't consider herself psychic. She didn't talk to the dead. Years of mental discipline and arduous physical conditioning had made her more sensitive to certain things than other people. It was nothing more metaphysical than that.

Hey, right. You picked this up at the police academy. Admit it, Jessie, you're a freak. A smile curved her lips. Dalton was right; Hank brought out the smart ass in her.

She focused on Jane and a shiver raced down Jessie's spine. Could she really put herself through this again? She'd chalked up her first few impressions to instinct and experience, but the images became too predominant to explain away. So, she'd accepted her gift. And her fiancé bled to death in her arms. Two days later her brother died from injuries sustained in the same shootout. Jessie tendered her resignation. No cop could be effective if they continually doubted themselves and Jessie had lost faith in her abilities.

Pushing back the past, she placed one hand on Jane's forehead and the other hovered over the wound on Jane's wrist. Jessie closed her eyes. Darkness enveloped her. This utter nothingness had become familiar. Often the vacuous space was all she'd sense when she touched a victim, but sometimes there was more.

Who were you? Who did this to you?

Stubbornness drove Jessie deeper. She searched for echoes, fragments of the life now absent from this empty shell. A pinpoint of light appeared in the darkness and with it the faintest tingle of awareness. She heard shallow, panting breaths as a vanquished soul surrendered.

The breathing grew stronger, deeper; the struggle intensified.

Sensation vacillated from pain to pleasure, then back to pain, a sustained burning agony that dragged a groan from Jessie's throat. Her nipples tightened and her core clenched, empty and aching. Jessie shuddered violently. Primal sexual hunger pounded through her veins.

Frenzy. Lust. Overwhelming and ravenous.

Woven through the demanding emotions was a delicate thread of despair. Images swirled and tumbled, remaining muddled and unfocused. Naked and trembling, Jane wrestled in a tangle of bodies and grappling limbs. Terror gripped her, yet she was undeniably aroused. Hands, fingers, and mouths skimmed her flesh and incited her desire.

Violet haze burned through the darkness, enveloping Jane's body in a sparkling cloud. Suspended within the purple fog, Jane writhed and arched. Agony or ecstasy, Jessie couldn't tell. The violet mist divided, swirling around Jane's arms, encircling her wrists. Faster and faster the vapor spun as Jane's screams echoed through Jessie's mind.

Pounding.

Music distorted within her mind; a rumble more vibration than sound. A velvety voice caressed her. She focused on the elusive, familiar timbre, the seductive rasp. She knew that voice, didn't she?

Laughter and the roar of a crowd. Not a crowd, an *audience*...

Jessie gasped and stumbled back, pressing her hand to her throat. Her pulse thumped against her fingertips, echoing the tempo of the song. The sound receded before she could identify the artist, but the exercise hadn't been in vain.

She opened her eyes and whispered, "Bellita." Jane Doe's real name was Bellita Viejo.

* * *

"Her mother didn't report her missing, said she runs off all the time," Dalton muttered as he stormed into his apartment later that evening.

"Then I was right about her name?" Jessie looked up from the file spread across the kitchen table. The compact arrangement of Dalton's apartment allowed her to see the front door from the eating area where she sat.

"As always." He tossed his suit jacket over the back of a chair and removed his shoulder holster before joining her in the kitchen.

"Why are you still scowling?"

"The new information only reinforces their suicide theory. According to Ms. Viejo, Bellita threatened to slit her wrists every time they had an argument. Ms. Viejo said Bellita probably expected to be found and miscalculated the *stunt*. Her word, not mine."

"When was the last time Ms. Viejo saw her daughter?"

"Friday night." He pulled out the chair across from her and sat. "Apparently Bellita won tickets to a Pyrite concert and --"

"Pyrite! Of course, *Hide and Seek*. I'm not losing my mind."

Dalton shook his head and smiled. "You'll never convince anyone with outbursts like that."

"I could hear this song resonating through the..." She tucked her hair behind her ear and sighed. Dalton had no problem with her ability, so why did she still stumble over the concept? He'd encouraged her to push herself and trust the images long before she was ready to accept them herself.

"Vision." His brows raised a bit as he persisted. "Come on, you can say it. You have visions."

"Impressions." Jessie shot him a rebellious look. "The song was *Hide and Seek*."

"I'll take your word for it."

"That's why she was all gothed out. The perp must have picked her up at the Pyrite concert."

"I was curious, so I ran a search for suicides with any similarities to our Jane -- err, Bellita. I found four." He paused as she absorbed the implication. "A young woman has taken her own life by slitting both wrists after each of the last five Pyrite concerts."

"And no one spotted the pattern before now?"

"You have to be looking for a pattern to find one." He shook his head with obvious disgust. "We've got a serial killer stalking Pyrite fans."

"Or a member of Pyrite with a taste for murder."

"I'm not ruling anything out."

"Was the similarity enough to get the case reopened?"

“What do you think?”

Judging from his mood, they were on their own. “What do you intend to do?”

He chuckled and held out a small packet. “I’m so glad you asked.”

Chapter One

Falls Church, Virginia

Rafe Steele swayed to the sensual rhythm of Phillip Noir's guitar. The Carousel was packed but the crowd stilled, their eyes gleaming with anticipation as they recognized the opening strains of *Hide and Seek*. The song had a hypnotic effect. Dark, yet ethereal, the tune rolled, sweeping along everyone in its path. Rafe had never seen it fail. The last chord of Phillip's intro echoed as Rafe began to sing.

"In the darkness of the night, your resistance whets my appetite." He caressed each word, infusing them with seduction. "You run a -- way... You run -- away." Awareness jolted through him, simultaneous and opposite. Desire and Loathing.

They were here!

Rafe glanced at Phillip. His fingers moved effortlessly over the strings of his guitar, but his gaze scanned the audience. He'd felt the stirring too.

"As the blue sky turns to black, I find a way to get you back. I search for you... I search -- for you." The song flowed from Rafe as naturally as breathing, but his instincts refused to relax. "Hide and seek. Like a child, you've got me playing hide and seek. Hide and seek. We're caught up in this game of -- Hide and seek."

Phillip repeated the opening stanza, allowing Rafe to study the crowd. He scanned with his eyes and his mind. Etoro and Natalie might not be visible, but they were here. Damn it! How had they gotten past security?

Phillip's artistic flourish cued Rafe back in. "Now you tell me with your smile that though I've known you all the while, you won't be tamed. You won't -- be tamed. I know you're in it for the chase. By now we both enjoy the race. It's all a game. It's all -- a game." As Rafe repeated the chorus, another sensation penetrated the resentment seething within him. Anxiety, curiosity and fascination, they were not uncommon

emotions. Rafe frequently felt them emanating from the audience, but a bittersweet complexity accompanied the sensation.

Following the unique signal, Rafe located a woman to one side of the dance floor. Her back pressed against a support beam and her gaze swept the crowd with focused intensity. Tall and athletically built, her composed, commanding stance was faintly militant. Interesting.

A tight, black leather skirt left her long, toned legs exposed from mid-thigh down. He caught teasing glimpses of those legs as the people around her shifted and swayed. Her hair was blonde, but the ever changing lights made the exact shade impossible to determine. The thick, wavy mass had been swept away from her face and secured with some sort of clip. She was watching the crowd, searching for... he had no idea what she hoped to find.

The rock star in Rafe rebelled. No one came to a Pyrite show to watch the crowd - except a reporter. Fuck!

Forming a mild awareness compulsion, Rafe projected it toward the nosy blonde. Her head turned and her gaze locked with his. Her lush, red lips parted and she reached behind her, steadying herself against the beam.

Desire curled through him with delicious heat. His pulse raced and tension gathered low in his belly. "Hide and seek. Like a child, you've got me playing hide and seek..." He sang for her, to her, stroking her body with his voice and his gaze. The rest of the room fell away and he stood directly in front of her. "Hide and seek." His lips brushed hers with each word, then time resumed and he was back on stage. "We're caught up in this game of -- Hide and seeek, hide and seeek... hide and seek."

Jessie touched her lips, the clingy material of her top rasping against her erect nipples. What in God's name had just happened? Her heart thundered in her chest and her thighs flexed restlessly. She ached, the tension in her core downright painful. She could still feel the teasing brush of his lips against hers.

It was that stupid song. Every time she heard it, her mind replayed the tune for days. She'd been so captivated by its seductive sway that she'd imagined... It didn't matter. She was here to find a killer, not turn groupie!

Pushing away from the beam, she adjusted her stance in her ridiculous stiletto ankle boots and resumed her visual search. A sea of people crowded together on the dance floor. Rubbing and grinding, their movements were more a parody of sex than any pretence at dancing.

"Anyone catch your eye?"

Jessie gasped and slapped Dalton on the arm. "You scared the shit out of me."

"I called your name twice," he shouted over the music. "I'll throw something at you next time."

"I told you this was a waste of time."

Cupping her elbow, Dalton guided her away from the dance floor. High-backed booths lined two walls in the adjacent room. Jessie skirted the pool tables and slipped into one of the booths. Dalton sat across from her, looking less like a cop than usual. Still, blue jeans and a black tee shirt didn't change his sharp, ever-assessing stare.

"Pyrite is selling out arenas all over the world. Why did they bother with this nightclub?"

Dalton lifted his broad shoulders in an indifferent shrug. "You can ask them as soon as they finish this set."

"Funny man."

"Oh, didn't I tell you?" He grinned. "Brian got us invitations to the post-show party."

Jessie stared at him in stunned silence. Dalton frequently bragged about his brother's connection to Thane Burton, but Jessie hadn't really believed him until tonight. Brian was an investment banker for heaven's sake. Why would he know Pyrite's business manager?

"Don't look so shocked. Have you ever known me to make an idle boast?"

"Please," she snorted. "You're a man."

He narrowed his gaze and leaned across the table, lowering his voice as much as the music would allow. "Did I ever leave you wanting?"

She waved away the question. Their affair had been over before it began. She'd needed comfort after the tragedy and Dalton had been happy to oblige. Still, their friendship meant more to her than the physical pleasure they'd found in each other's arms. She didn't love Dalton and he knew it.

The past two years had given her time to reassess her priorities, to reflect on all she'd lost and determine what she wanted out of life. Never again would she live for her job, take happiness for granted, or waste her time with anything less than a fully committed relationship.

"Did any of the victims have backstage passes?" She drew Dalton's attention back to the case. "Were the members of Pyrite ever questioned?"

He sent the cocktail waitress away with a definitive shake of his head. "*No one* was questioned in any of the cases. They're suicides not homicides."

"What are your instincts telling you? Is this some sort of message to the band?"

"I haven't ruled out the band." He tapped his thumbs against the tabletop, his gaze focused on her face. "If you touch each member of Pyrite, would you be able to... you know, sense whether or not they're the one?"

She unfastened the large barrette holding back her hair. Only a strand or two had come loose, but she needed something to do with her hands. "If I start pawing the members of Pyrite, I'm liable to find myself flat on my back. Rock stars aren't known for their subtlety."

"Brian introduced me to Thane a couple months ago. I don't know if he'll remember me, but if he does, I'll have him introduce you to the others. Just act like a giggly fan while you shake their hands."

"Giggly fan?" She crossed her arms under her breasts and slanted him a look. "Have you ever heard me giggle?"

"Do you have a better idea?"

Finger combing her hair back into place, she refastened the barrette and glanced toward the stage. Her lips tingled and aching desire erupted between her thighs. She acknowledged her body's response to Rafe's skillful performance. He had perfected the role he played. That's all there was to it. He played a role to promote his music and she'd play a role to catch a killer.

"I've worked undercover before," she said, more to herself than to Dalton. "This isn't any different."

He nodded and offered an encouraging smile. "I'll see if I can find Thane. Don't go downstairs without me. Brian said there's going to be media coverage at the party, so they should be on their best behavior. Still," he paused as his gaze swept her body, "you look especially hot tonight."

He melted into the crowd before she could reply. His protectiveness was sweet, but unnecessary. Jessie could take care of herself.

Relaxing against the booth, she let the music surround her. She couldn't see the band from where she sat, but the husky rasp of Rafe Steele's voice called his image to mind. His glossy black hair just brushed his shoulders. Thick-lashed dark eyes dominated his angular features, and his mouth defined carnality.

Another hot tingle spiraled into her abdomen. She clutched the edge of the table with both hands. It wasn't just Rafe. Pyrite's music was blatantly sexual. The driving rhythm accented her heartbeat, while the blistering guitar riffs fired her blood. She squirmed, understanding the primal movements of the people on the dance floor. It was almost unavoidable. She wanted to cup her breasts and -- thrust.

She caught her bottom lip between her teeth and closed her eyes. Bodies wrestled through her imagination, naked, sweat dampened, grasping and straining. The image focused and Rafe knelt between her thighs, his gaze burning into hers. He caught the backs of her knees with his hands and pushed her legs up and back. Her clit responded to the fantasy with an especially intense throb.

Yes! Fuck me, fill me, make me yours.

Her eyes flew open and she pressed her hand to her upper chest. This was ridiculous. Were they pumping pheromones through the ventilation system or lacing the drinks with --

"Thane's already downstairs." Dalton's voice penetrated the sensual haze. How long had he stood beside the table watching her fidget? "Are you all right?"

She expelled a ragged breath and managed to nod. "Just a bit of a headache."

"Can't imagine why you'd have a headache." He smiled, motioning for her to follow him. "Evette suggested we find Thane now. Once the band goes downstairs, we'll be lucky to get near him."

"Who's Evette?" Jessie scooted out of the booth, ignoring the ache still centered between her thighs.

"Thane's sister. The Burtons own The Carousel."

Doubtlessly the reason Pyrite was playing such a small venue. Dalton took her hand as they worked their way through the crowd. Good thing he knew where they were going. A burly man checked their invitations before allowing them down the corridor adjacent to the stage.

Jessie wasn't sure what she expected, but the spacious, artfully decorated lounge was a pleasant surprise. The crimson and gold décor was a bit garish, but there were no half-naked groupies and no illegal substances -- yet. She smiled. A lavish buffet had been laid out against one wall with an attended bar on the end. A tall, dark-haired man stood across the room from them, speaking with a lovely blonde woman.

"That's Thane and his wife. I don't remember her name." The crowd erupted in rowdy applause and shrill whistles. "Sounds like we escaped just in time." With his hand at the small of her back, Dalton hurried her toward the attractive couple.

The dark-haired man noticed their approach and inclined his head. "Hello, Dalton."

Dalton stuck out his hand. "I wasn't sure you'd remember me. This is Jessica Curtis. She's a huge Pyrite fan."

“I hope you both enjoyed the show.” He indicated the woman at his side. “This is my wife, Marissa.”

Jessie smiled and shook hands with Marissa. As she turned to Thane, a vivid image erupted in her mind. Thane and a blond man held Marissa sandwiched between them, stroking her naked body as she reveled in the attention. Christ, was it The Carousel? Did the whole nightclub radiate sexual intensity?

The door at the top of the stairs opened to the roaring of the crowd. The members of Pyrite rushed down the stairs. Jessie’s gaze moved immediately to Rafe. His hair was damp, his clothing sweat soaked and still she longed to wrap her arms around him, to rub her body against his until they were both wild.

“Give us fifteen, Thane. We need to freshen up,” Phillip Noir called before ducking inside the adjoining room near the buffet table.

Rafe turned as he neared the door. Whatever he’d meant to say vanished as his gaze fell on Jessie. After wiping his face with the towel in his hand, he tossed it over his shoulder and crossed the room. Jessie’s pulse increased with each step he took.

She tried to drag her gaze away from his face, but his expression commanded her attention. Recognition shone in his eyes, igniting a slow, melting heat in Jessie. It hadn’t been her imagination. Somehow, in the midst of his screaming fans, he’d spotted her, connected with her.

Fuck me, fill me, make me yours.

This couldn’t be happening. She was here to catch a killer!

Rafe glanced at Dalton, then turned to Thane. “Get security down here.” He pointed to Dalton. “This asshole is bugged, and she’s a reporter.”

Chapter Two

Jessie stared at Rafe, dumfounded by his accusation. "Are you on drugs? I am not a reporter."

"I saw you upstairs, sweetheart, and you weren't watching the show." He moved closer, hostility shining in his dark eyes.

"That doesn't even make sense." She held her ground, refusing to be browbeaten by this irrational celebrity. "Wouldn't a reporter be especially interested in the show?"

"Not if the concert wasn't the story."

"Then what *is* the story?" Placing her hands on her hips, she attempted to stare him down.

Without breaking eye contact with her, Rafe repeated his order. "Get security down here, now!"

Dalton pulled his tee shirt off over his head and held his arms out away from his body. "No bugs, Mr. Steele. I'm not sure what we did to upset you, but --"

"It's not that sort of bug." He glanced at Dalton. "A powerful telepath is using you to spy on me."

"Are you sure about this?" Thane didn't seem surprised by Rafe's outlandish claim.

"A psychic bug?" Jessie laughed.

"Why would the concept surprise you?" Rafe returned her challenging stare.

"Rafe's never wrong about these things. You're going to have to leave." Thane motioned Dalton toward the staircase across the room. "It's probably best if you both go."

"No." Rafe stepped forward and wrapped his hand around Jessie's upper arm. "I want to talk to her."

His warm fingers pressed into her flesh. He was an arrogant jerk, so why had her heartbeat kicked up the moment he touched her skin? "I don't think so."

"Jess, you wanted to meet the other members of the band. It's a shame to waste this opportunity. Just say hello. Hopefully the others aren't as obnoxious as Mr. Steele. I'll wait for you in the parking lot." Dalton's soft tone was filled with meaning and Jessie wanted to kick him. The investigation was important, but how the hell had Rafe known she was clairvoyant?

"I'll make sure she gets home safely," Marissa assured him. "We should probably figure out what's going on."

"I'll wait in the car," Dalton insisted. "There's no reason this should take more than a minute or two."

"You will go home and worry no more about the safety of your companion."

Jessie bit back another laugh. Who was Rafe trying to impress with that imperious tone?

Dalton kissed her on the cheek and headed for the stairs.

Holy shit! She looked at Rafe with a mixture of fear and disbelief. "What did you just do to him?"

* * *

Natalie released her telepathic hold on the human with an exasperated sigh. "Damn it! Rafe shouldn't have been able to sense my link." She braced her hands against the window frame, panting softly.

"He has always been unusually perceptive." Etoro shrugged. "It's a bit premature, but no real harm was done. The pieces are falling into place beautifully."

Turning from the window and the city lights beyond, she glanced around the cheap hotel room. They'd spent far too many nights in hotels over the last few months and this one was worse than most. She was restless and frustrated. This confrontation was long overdue. She wanted it finished once and for all; she wanted to go home.

"His reaction to Jessie was encouraging, I suppose." She tapped her chin with one long, sculpted fingernail. "I didn't expect the attraction to be so intense."

“He deserted the stage to begin his seduction. We’re finally on our way.” Etoro took her hand and pulled her away from the window. “Come, my love. The connection has drained you. Let’s play with our new toys.”

His pale green eyes caressed her face, glistening with tenderness and anticipation. She waited until he looked away to glare. Each time he uttered an endearment, she found it harder to conceal her disgust.

Etoro was a means to an end and that end was nearly upon them.

He was right, however. She was exhausted. Maintaining a telepathic link with an untrained mind required enormous amounts of energy. She ran her tongue over her canines, savoring the sensation as they extended to their full length.

Etoro crossed the hall and opened a door identical to theirs. Natalie swept into the moonlit room. As Etoro paused to latch the door, Natalie examined their newest toys. A young couple huddled together on the bed naked, wrapped in each other’s arms.

“We’ve decided we don’t want to do this,” the young man said. “The money would be great, but... this is just too weird. Can we have our clothes back?”

“Is it ‘too weird’ if we double the money?” Etoro clasped his hands behind his back as he approached the bed.

The young man looked at his girlfriend with obvious excitement. “Lisa, that’s ten grand.”

Lisa shifted her gaze from Etoro to Natalie and back, her lush mouth trembling. “All you’ll do is watch? No one touches me but Matt?”

Natalie swept the girl’s body with an objective glance. She hadn’t looked so young in the provocative clothing she’d worn to the Pyrite concert. They’d sent one of their human slaves to The Carousel with a very specific shopping list. Lisa’s long blonde hair and wide hazel eyes were perfect. The male was unimportant. Rafe would understand the message as soon as he saw the female.

“How much would you require if I want to do more than watch?”

Natalie smiled as Etoro continued the negotiation. It didn't matter what he promised. They had no intention of paying the humans anything.

"For twenty-five K, I'll do whatever you want," Matt volunteered, "but no one touches Lisa unless she says it's all right."

Taking the girl's slender hands between his, Etoro drew her to her knees. "I want to taste you. I want to feel you come around my tongue." A delicate shudder shook her slender body and her gaze darted toward Matt. Etoro turned her face back around. "A woman's taste is fouled if her pleasure is forced. Will you let me feast on your pussy?"

Natalie wanted to laugh. Etoro was a master of these games. There was no denying his skill. Lisa's nipples were already pebble hard and a rosy flush tinged her smooth skin. A trace of fear tainted the girl's excitement, but arousal would win out in the end. It always did.

"You love it when I eat you, baby." Matt cupped one of her small breasts and stroked her hair. "If you relax, this could be incredible."

"No one fucks me but Matt," Lisa asserted, her voice suddenly strong.

"Agreed." Etoro spread out on his back and pulled Lisa on top of him. Matt looked on with a mixture of concern and fascination. With a few deft movements, Etoro had Lisa straddling his face, her body aligned with his. He hadn't told her to suck his cock, but her face hovered over his crotch.

Natalie didn't have the patience for seduction. Why bother when it was so simple to control humans with mental compulsions? Unzipping Etoro's fly, she boldly stroked his shaft, bringing the flared head scant inches from Lisa's lips. *Suck him. Swallow every inch. Delight in the taste of his cock.* She sent the command into Lisa's mind.

"If she doesn't want to --" Before Matt could complete his objection, Lisa parted her lips and sucked Etoro's cock into her mouth.

Natalie looked at Matt, her expression challenging. "She seems to have accepted the situation."

He pressed his lips into a thin line, his nostrils flaring. "You may be able to get off watching them, but it just makes me horny."

“Then by all means, let’s find you something to do.” Crawling across the bed, Matt reached for her hand. Natalie stepped back and shook her head. “No one touches me but Etoro.” It was an exaggeration, but humans were good for one thing and one thing only.

Etoro wasn’t much better, but he had fathered her children, a feat nearly miraculous for a vampire. She despised Etoro, loathed his touch. Still, she continued to fuck him, hoping he would impregnate her again.

Natalie pulled a tube of lubricant from her pocket and motioned Matt to the side of the bed. “If you’re the only one she’ll fuck, you better get busy.”

Etoro held Lisa’s hips, lapping and sucking her feminine folds, while she enthusiastically swallowed his cock. Reaching up, he parted her with his thumbs and stabbed his tongue into her cunt. She murmured incoherently, the bobbing motion of her head halting for a moment. Thrilled by the graphic tableau, Natalie passed the lube to Matt.

“Etoro has her pussy pretty well occupied.” She didn’t take her eyes off the couple on the bed. “Think you can find another way to satisfy yourself?”

“You are seriously twisted.” Matt’s amusement annoyed Natalie. It was better when they resisted. He was too eager to play, too willing to please. Natalie held the girl’s ass cheeks apart while Matt inserted the long, thin nozzle.

Lisa wiggled and objected as well as she could with Etoro moving in her mouth. Matt’s cock wasn’t long, but the circumference made Natalie smile. Little Lisa wasn’t going to like this.

After lubing the head of his cock, Matt positioned himself against Lisa’s anus. “Come on, baby, push back against me. I’ll try not to hurt you.”

“Too badly,” Natalie added.

The girl’s ass cheeks flexed beneath Natalie’s fingers, the flesh smooth and incredibly warm. Hunger surged within her. She needed to feed. Matt pushed inward, stuffing his thick cock into his slender lover. Natalie watched inch after glorious inch disappear up Lisa’s ass.

“Now fuck her hard and fast. Make her scream.”

Etoro latched on to Lisa’s clit and suckled ruthlessly while Matt rammed into her again and again. Muffled little cries escaped from Lisa, but Natalie couldn’t tell if she was excited or distressed. It didn’t matter. Heat surged through Natalie. Bloodlust fogged her vision with a glistening crimson mist.

“Enough, Etoro. I want to watch her ride her lover.” Matt started to pull out. “No. Hold her against you tightly and crawl onto the bed. If your bodies separate, Etoro will take your place.”

“But you said --”

“Move slowly and make sure you don’t lose him.” Natalie cut Lisa off. Etoro scooted out from under Lisa and she carefully crawled forward. Matt kept his groin flush with her bottom as he followed her on the bed. “Now lie back and raise your hands above your head. I don’t want you to help her. Lisa must willingly impale herself on you.”

Natalie cast Matt into silent thrall as Lisa adjusted her position. With her knees bent nearly to her chest, Lisa rocked forward and back, sliding her body up and down the length of Matt’s shaft.

Now, my love. Let’s feed together. Lisa continued rocking as Natalie and Etoro lifted Matt’s wrists to their mouths. They drank slowly, savoring the hot lust infused essence of Matt’s young life.

Unaware of her lover’s fate, Lisa raised and lowered her hips, taking his shaft deep again and again. “Why is everyone so quiet? Do you want us in a different position?”

“Yes.” Natalie moved forward, into Lisa’s line of sight. “Matt, hold perfectly still. Lisa, lie back against his chest. I want to see all of you.” They supported Lisa’s back as she reclined against Matt. Fear erupted in her eyes as she looked from Natalie to Etoro. “Is his cock still hard inside you?”

“Not as hard as it was. Is he okay?”

“Close your eyes and don’t make a sound,” Etoro said. “If you just surrender, there will be no pain.”

Why did he have to reassure them? Natalie enjoyed it when they struggled. True, fear tainted their blood, made it taste bitter, but the rush of energy was well worth the less appealing taste. Etoro stroked Lisa’s hand as he brought her wrist to his mouth. Natalie sank her fangs deep without hesitation or warning. Lisa whimpered, her body lax and malleable.

Natalie and Etoro stared into each other’s eyes over the bodies of their new toys. They fed. They gorged. They reveled in another successful conquest.

Natalie drew back, licking the blood from her lips. “Roll them to their sides. I want them entwined when they’re found.”

Careful to keep Matt’s cock buried deep inside Lisa’s ass, Etoro shifted them to their sides. He wrapped Matt’s arms around Lisa, then folded her arms over Matt’s.

Natalie stood back and watched; her hunger satisfied for the moment. “They look so sweet.” She chuckled and retrieved the suicide pact they had prepared earlier. Etoro placed the note beside the dying couple and used his fingernail to slash their wrists.

Chapter Three

Jessie jerked her arm out of Rafe's grasp and assumed a fighting stance.

"Rafe, calm down." Marissa stepped in front of Jessie. "Thane thought I was a reporter when he first saw me too."

"If curiosity wasn't synonymous with female, we wouldn't make these assumptions." Thane grinned at his wife.

"Are you a reporter?" Marissa glanced over her shoulder.

"No."

The door at the top of the stairs opened again and a stream of excited people crowded the staircase.

"*You will come with me,*" Rafe said in the same commanding tone he'd used on Dalton.

"You will kiss my ass." Jessie punctuated her rejoinder with a provoking smile.

"Obviously she's gifted, so stop trying to bully her." Marissa turned to Jessie. "Something strange is going on. Rafe isn't going to hurt you. Just answer his questions honestly."

Interpreting Marissa's comments as permission, Rafe grabbed Jessie's arm and hauled her toward the door through which the other members of the band had disappeared. She tugged against his hold, but his grip was unbreakable now. "How did you... What..." She couldn't complete the questions without confirming his assumption. How had he known she was clairvoyant and what had he done with his voice? Dalton hadn't batted an eye as he turned and walked away.

Rafe opened the door and nudged her into the dressing room. Phillip Noir turned and grinned at her, eyes narrowed with speculation. A shiver ran down Jessie's spine. If Rafe was the personification of lust, then Phillip exemplified danger.

“Do we get to play with another reporter?” Phillip’s whiskey brown eyes glimmered.

“She insists she’s not a reporter. Her escort was the bug.” Rafe shrugged. “I’m not sure what to do with her.”

Phillip chuckled as he ambled forward. It was impossible to appreciate the true power of his presence from the stage. Tattoos decorated both arms and the portion of his chest left bare by his leather vest. He’d changed his clothes and styled his jet black hair. Jessie suddenly wished she had her gun.

“I’d be happy to offer a few suggestions, but we can’t all hide in here. Someone has to entertain our guests.”

“Is being near us enough or do you need to touch?” Rafe asked.

Jessie sucked in a breath. Did Rafe realize what she was trying to learn or just that she was trying to scan them?

“This sounds like fun,” Phillip drawled. “Maybe I will stick around.”

“No, you need to get out there just like you said.” Rafe nudged her toward Phillip. “If you need to touch him, get it over with.”

Phillip took her hands and drew her closer. “Any particular place you need to touch?”

How the hell was she supposed to concentrate? There was entirely too much testosterone in this room. Phillip stared into her eyes as she raised her hands and framed his face. She licked her lips and he licked his. Damn it! He was mocking her. Closing her eyes, she prayed her ability would kick in quickly. Her heart couldn’t take much more of this.

Phillip’s warm palms mirrored her touch. She shivered and a steady stream of images flowed into her mind. Performances, recording sessions, endless hours of travel, parties and photo shoots. This was all so routine. Where was the debauchery and excess?

“Satisfied?” Rafe’s voice came from behind her.

"I didn't realize satisfaction was the goal." Phillip wrapped his arms around her, pulling her against the firm heat of his lean body. "Let's try this again."

Rafe peeled Phillip's arms off her with a throaty growl. "Get out of here."

Chad and Jason emerged from the back room moments after Phillip left. Jessie scanned their minds and found more of the same. A gorgeous woman with strawberry blonde hair appeared in both of their memories, but that seemed to be the only anomaly.

"What are you looking for?" Rafe asked when they were finally alone.

Jessie hesitated. This had been so neat and tidy, as if they'd meticulously filtered the images. Real life didn't work that way for Average Joe, much less the members of Pyrite. "Who would want to spy on you?" If they could control what she sensed, scanning Rafe was a waste of time.

"What's your name?"

That's right. Thane hadn't introduced them before Rafe started making demands. "Can't you read my mind?"

"People seldom refer to themselves by name in their own mind." He crossed his arms over his chest and narrowed his gaze. "You might not be a reporter, but you didn't come to enjoy the show. Are you a cop?"

"Not anymore." A long pause followed as they stared at each other. His dark eyes bore into hers, searching, assessing. Was he scanning her mind even now? She suspected his abilities greatly exceeded hers. Marissa had assumed she was clairvoyant. Rafe had *known*.

"We have a problem." He advanced with lazy menace. She didn't even realize she was backing up until she felt the wall behind her. "I'm tired. I desperately need a shower, but I can't trust you to be here when I get back."

"So, tie me to a chair." She licked her lips as heat pooled between her thighs. This was irrational! She couldn't be attracted to this asshole. He'd been nothing but rude and antagonistic. Still, she sensed a connection beyond his arrogance, a longing she couldn't quite define.

He smiled and her heart fluttered madly. "I left my handcuffs in the hotel."

"Have Marissa baby sit me until you're through."

"Marissa and Thane are in his office fucking their brains out."

"How charming." She crossed her arms over her chest. He wasn't touching her, just invading her personal space. "You don't smell -- too badly. Let's finish our conversation, then you can go take a shower."

"Let's finish our conversation in the shower."

"Let's not." She pushed past him and made it almost to the door before his arm banded her waist.

"You only got that far so I could look at your ass."

She gasped. What a Neanderthal! "If you don't turn me loose, I'm going to scream the place down."

"Why do women do that? If you're going to scream, scream. Why threaten to scream when you have no intention --"

She cut off the rest of his rant with a shrill scream. He laughed. No one burst through the door to see what was wrong so she didn't bother yelling again. Either everyone's ears were still ringing from the concert or vocal outbursts weren't unusual at these parties.

"You can undress or shower fully clothed. It makes no difference to me." He paused for about three seconds before shifting his grasp to her arm and dragging her toward the dressing room.

"What sort of bar has a shower in the basement?" Jessie tended to blurt out whatever she was thinking when she got nervous and her nerves were stretched beyond endurance right now. Did he really intend to strip down and drag her into a shower? She was off balance and wobbly. Maybe getting out of these ridiculous boots wasn't such a bad idea.

He grabbed several towels from a shelf by the door and half-led, half-dragged her toward the bank of shower stalls lining the far wall. "The Carousel was designed

with performers in mind. That's part of the reason so many big names are willing to play here."

His grip eased. Maybe she'd stumbled on to something. Distract him with incidentals, then run like hell. "How long has Thane been your manager?"

Positioning himself between her and the door, he pulled his damp shirt off over his head. "Thane manages Pyrite. I think everyone would agree I'm unmanageable."

Lean, tightly defined muscles shaped his chest and upper arms. He reached for the waistband of his black leather pants and she sank to the bench behind her. She had to remain focused. It didn't matter that she was alone with the sexiest man she'd ever met or that he was rapidly undressing. Innocent women were dying. Her libido would just have to deal. She bent over and unlaced her boots. He circled around behind her.

"Who sent you?" He unfastened the barrette, freeing her hair.

She swallowed hard. "No one sent me. Dalton's brother works for Burton and Associates and got us the tickets. Before I met you, I was actually a fan."

He chuckled softly and pushed his fingers into her hair. "You were looking at everything but the stage. What were you hoping to find? What do you think we've done?"

Slipping her feet out of her boots, she pushed to her feet and turned around. His hands ended up on her shoulders. The bench pressed into her knees, a feeble excuse for a barrier. If he was the murderer, he already knew they were suspicious. If he wasn't, perhaps he could help with the investigation.

"Do you have enemies, Mr. Steele? Someone who hates you enough to frame you for murder?" Studying his expression, she waited for him to react. She couldn't allow herself to be distracted by his striking features or the fact that she stood in the arms of a world famous rock star -- a *naked* rock star, she corrected.

"Who was murdered?" His eyebrows drew together over his nose. "What are the circumstances surrounding the crime?"

She couldn't bring herself to share the details. Years of training had taught her to be suspicious of everyone. Rafe sensed her abilities before she'd given any indication

she was clairvoyant and he'd commanded Dalton with some sort of hypnotic suggestion. There was a lot more to this man than met the eye.

As if of its own volition, her gaze drifted along his body. Every inch of him was toned, sleekly muscled... His cock hung between his thighs, thick and long. And he wasn't even hard yet! Her breath caught in her lungs and her pussy clenched. He radiated sexuality like rays off the sun. Was he a skilled lover or was his sexy strut just part of the show?

He cupped her chin, raising her face until her wayward gaze returned to his face. Desire smoldered in his eyes and the hint of a smile curved his lips. His hands encircled her upper arms, pulling her toward him with gradual pressure. Her torso angled and he kept right on pulling until she bent her legs and knelt on the bench.

One of his hands held the back of her neck, the other brushing up and down her spine. "I thought a taste would be enough, but it only made me hungry for more."

Her breath escaped on a sigh as his mouth settled over hers. He couldn't mean what his words implied. She'd imagined his kiss during the concert. She had to have imagined it. Warm and surprisingly soft, his mouth contoured to hers, rubbing until her lips parted. The faint echo of *Hide and Seek* sounded in her mind. She curved her fingers around his shoulders, trying to keep some distance between their bodies. It was impossible; he wouldn't allow it. His hand slipped under her skirt and squeezed her ass. She could feel him hardening against her belly and her entire body tingled in response.

Get out now or you'll spend what's left of the night with his cock buried inside you.

His tongue stroked her bottom lip, teasing, coaxing, wonderful. She gave herself a firm mental shake and turned her face away. "I can't do this."

"I promise we'll talk after."

"After?" Her voice broke over the word.

"After we shower."

She scrambled off the bench and scooped up her boots. "I'm not taking a shower with you, or anything else you might be imagining."

"I'm not the only one imagining."

His smug smile dissolved the lingering fragments of attraction. *What a cocky prick!* She'd had enough of his arrogance. Whatever information he might provide wasn't worth putting up with his attitude.

"Good night, Mr. Steele."

He took a step as if to stop her, then shook his head and waved her away. "Go on. We'll finish this later."

* * *

Showered and adorned in clean clothes, Rafe left the dressing room a short time later. His mystery guest was nowhere in sight, but Thane and Marissa had returned from their private party in Thane's office.

"Who is she?" Rafe asked without preamble.

"Her name is Jessica Curtis," Thane told him. "That's about all I know."

"Where did she go when she left here?"

"What's your interest in this human?" Marissa asked, suspicion narrowing her crystal blue eyes.

"We didn't finish our conversation." He pictured her flushed face and lush red lips. Oh yes, their conversation had barely begun. "She claims a murder investigation led her to Pyrite. Have either of you heard anything about a murder?"

Marissa shook her head. "What exactly does she suspect?"

"I'm not sure. She wasn't real comfortable with our conversation."

"You had her trapped in the dressing room. I can't imagine why she'd be uncomfortable."

He ignored the knowing look that passed between his friends. "I need to find her."

"Your driver offered to take her home, but she insisted on calling a cab," Thane said.

"I'll see what I can find out." He kissed Marissa on the cheek and headed for the stairs. Fans stopped him several times before he reached the landing. Offering them as much attention as his distracted mind would allow, he worked his way across the room.

"Who was the blonde and why did you encourage her to scan us?" Phillip followed him up the stairs.

"You were never in any danger. She doesn't have the faintest idea how to use her gift. Most of her power is latent."

"And the man?" They ducked down a narrow hallway and out the backdoor. Invitations were necessary to access the Green Room party, but The Carousel was still teeming with people.

"He was a pawn. I seriously doubt he knew Natalie had linked with his mind."

"They had to have made contact at some point. Not even Natalie can form a mental link with a human without a blood bond." Philip paused, his dark brows arched. "He was human, wasn't he?"

"As far as I could tell." A siren drew his attention toward the mouth of the alley. Strobes flashed through the night, making the sky pulse with color. "What's going on out front?"

Phillip shrugged. "Let's find out."

They released their corporeal bodies and drifted up into the night sky. Two blocks down, on the other side of the street, several squad cars had congregated. Rafe projected his essence toward the disturbance, filtering out emotions and isolating voices.

"We're not ready to make a statement." Rafe located the source of the irritated voice in a hall on the second story of the seedy hotel. "Tell the reporters to have a seat in the lounge. I won't be rushed!" A burly man in a rumpled suit dispatched two uniformed officers with his decision.

The suit walked back into one of the hotel rooms. Rafe followed him. Jessica and her male companion stood on the far side of the bed. *What are they doing here?* Rafe sent

the thought to Phillip. He couldn't see the other vampire, but he could sense his being nearby.

Maybe they know the two on the bed.

Rafe focused on the apparent cause of the disturbance. A young couple lay on the bed, naked and embracing. Blood coated their arms and smeared the woman's abdomen.

"It's *not* suicide," Jessica insisted.

"There's a signed suicide pact and everything." The suit motioned toward the bed. "If Dalton hadn't called me and warned me this was likely to happen --"

"You wouldn't have given it a second thought?" she finished impatiently.

"Jessie's right. There has been an apparent suicide found in every city Pyrite has played."

The suit snorted and scrubbed his stubbly jaw with his fingertips. "Please tell me this isn't a 'Don't Fear the Reaper' sort of thing."

"They aren't being driven to suicide. They're being murdered." She pushed past Dalton and approached the bed. "Where's the razor blade or knife? How did they slit their wrists?"

The suit studied the entwined bodies with new interest. "Damn good point." He poked around with his glove-covered hands and then paused and looked at Jessie. "You know, this vic looks an awful lot like you."

Chapter Four

Jessie glanced back at the young woman, bile rising into the back of her throat. Detective Fat-Ass was right. The female victim could be her younger sister, if she had a younger sister.

Sloppy investigation and apathy, no wonder these crimes had gone unsolved.

Dalton laid his hand on her shoulder. "It's a stretch for me to be here. We really can't justify you. We don't want to compromise the investigation."

"Is there going to be an investigation?"

"I'll make sure of it. Take the rental back to our hotel and lock yourself in."

She stepped closer and lowered her voice, her eyes boring into his. "It's escalating. The others felt much more random. This smacks of ritual."

"I know. Do you want an escort back to the hotel?"

She shook her head. "Ride him hard. Pyrite has a six day break. I don't want there to be another one."

Dalton smiled. "Despite the sexual connotation, I'll ride him hard."

Jessie nodded and slipped from the room. This is what they'd been hoping for. She despised the fact that two people had to sacrifice their lives to bring them to this point, but no one in their right mind would brush this off as an unhappy coincidence.

A crowd had gathered in front of the hotel. Uniformed officers were doing their best to keep the throng under control. Gauging by their outfits, many of the onlookers had migrated down the street from The Carousel. She could picture the headlines. *Serial Killer Stalks Pyrite Fans.*

Knowing how quickly pandemonium took over a crime scene, Dalton had parked the rental car in a lot two blocks down from the hotel. She withdrew the keys from her pocket and looked under the car as she approached.

"How many have there been?"

She gasped, recognizing the deep male voice half a second before she turned around. No one had been following her. She was sure of it. "Where did you come from?"

"Originally?" Rafe's dark eyes shimmered in the moonlight.

"I was watching to make sure no one was following me. How did you -- never mind. What was your question?"

"According to the crowd out front, there has been *another* suicide. I wondered how many there have been."

"This makes six and seven."

He tucked his hands into the pockets of his black leather jacket and moved closer. "You don't believe they're suicides?"

"What makes you ask?" She could barely complete a coherent thought when Rafe was near. All she could think about was touching him and being touched by him. This was so unlike her. Casual affairs had never been appealing, and after Dalton she'd determined it was all or nothing. She'd find a man with whom she could spend the rest of her life or she wouldn't bother sharing her body.

So how did this arrogant rock star dismantle her determination without even trying?

"You asked me if someone hated me enough to frame me for murder, not if I had heard of Pyrite fans taking their own lives."

She shivered, more from the disturbing thought than the cool night air. He shrugged out of his jacket and draped it around her shoulders. His body heat still warmed the leather and she was suddenly surrounded by his scent. Moonlight cast his chiseled features into high relief, accenting his eyes and the flash of his teeth.

"Can we go somewhere and talk?" Low and suspiciously polite, his voice caressed her.

Story hounds would be out in force tonight. A restaurant was risky. He was Rafe Steele after all. "If I take you to my hotel, do you promise to behave?"

"No." A slow, sexy smile parted his lips. "I promise to exhaust your curiosity before we misbehave."

She smiled. She couldn't help it. He was incorrigible. "Fair enough. Just be warned. I can be very curious."

"And I get paid to misbehave." He walked around the car and waited for her to trigger the locks. "How did you find out about the newest incident?"

Settling in behind the wheel, she started the engine while Rafe fastened his seatbelt. The party gave the band members alibis for tonight's murder at least. On an instinctive level, she'd never believed they were involved. This felt like something directed at Pyrite, not perpetrated by them.

"Still not sure if you can trust me?"

"I know I can't trust you, but I don't think you're a murderer." She backed out of the parking space and drove across the lot. "Dalton is a cop. He used to be my partner. He asked the local detective to call him if they found a suicide victim during or after your show."

"Does the fact that Dalton predicted the crime help or hurt the case?"

"It should help." She tried to rid her mind of the female vic's face, but the similarity to her own kept the image vivid. "There were other indications that this wasn't a suicide."

"Why did you leave the police force?"

"Long story."

"Or butt the hell out, whichever I prefer?"

"Exactly." She maneuvered the car with unconscious skill as she determined what to ask and how much to confide. "Are any of the band members married?"

"Why?"

"These crimes are making some sort of statement. They're not random acts of violence. They're premeditated, meticulously planned and executed."

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned?"

"Something like that."

“Chad and Jason are happily involved in a long-term relationship. Phillip and I are not.”

The woman with strawberry blonde hair flashed through Jessie’s memory. Did they realize they were involved with the same woman? Better leave well enough alone. “Do you have any rivals? Who managed Pyrite before Thane Burton?”

“No rivals that I know of and Thane has been our manager for thirty years. There are no skeletons in our financial closet.”

“Pyrite has been together for thirty years?” She shot him a disbelieving glance. “How old are you?”

He smiled and looked out the window. “Is Dalton your lover?”

She smiled, stealing a peek at his profile. He didn’t miss a beat. If she stepped off course, he casually followed. “I’m sorry. That was rude.”

“Back to the couple in the hotel room. How do you know they attended our show?”

The hairs on the back of her neck bristled. How had he known they were a couple? She’d only told him there were two victims. Detective Fat-Ass had given specific orders that no information be released until the parents were notified.

“You know I’m clairvoyant,” he said, still gazing out the window. “Even now their image is clear within your mind.”

Jessie nodded even though he wasn’t looking at her. They were almost to her hotel. Tension knotted her stomach and her grip on the steering wheel tightened. She’d take him to the hotel bar. He was too unpredictable to take to her room. Hell, her reactions to him were too unpredictable.

“Are we almost there?” He echoed her thoughts.

“Yes, but I just thought of something. How will you get to your hotel when we’ve finished talking?” If he expected to spend the night, he was deluded.

“I’ll call my driver. It’s not a problem.” He stroked her cheek with the backs of his fingers; his gentle touch catching her by surprise. “Why are you so uneasy? You weren’t afraid when we got in the car.”

Fear didn't automatically make a person weak. Jessie had learned to listen to her instincts a long time ago. Rafe was dangerous. Even if he wasn't involved in the murders, he was dangerous. His sexy nonchalance just didn't add up with the shrewd intelligence gleaming in his eyes.

"I don't know you and I think it's unwise for a woman to be completely alone with a man she doesn't know. Any man."

"Were you victimized by a man? Is that what made you so untrusting?"

She pulled into the hotel's parking lot and pulled her keys out of the ignition. "This isn't a personal affront. I just prefer that our conversation take place in the hotel lounge."

"Jessica." He waited until she looked at him to continue. "I would never hurt you."

"I don't know that for sure." She opened her car door before adding, "If you knew me at all, you'd know I prefer Jessie."

Chapter Five

Rafe got out of the car and folded his arms on the roof as he scanned the parking lot. They appeared to be alone. Good, it was better if no one saw them disappear. He'd wanted to calmly explain what was going on and then transport with Jessica to his fortress in upstate New York. Her stubborn streak was forcing his hand.

"I know which diminutive you prefer, *Jessica*. I think it's ridiculous for someone so beautiful to be called by such a masculine name."

She turned around, as he knew she would, and marched back to him. "Being a female cop was a pain in the ass. Any physical appeal I might possess was and will always be an unwelcome complication. I don't appreciate your condescension and I won't answer to Jessica. My name is Jessie."

"If you insist." He shrugged and held out his hand. "You're wearing my jacket."

Her jaw dropped for an instant before she snapped it shut. "If I won't answer to Jessica, you won't answer my questions?"

"I'm not a cop, you asked me here, and you're a beautiful woman whether you're willing to acknowledge the fact or not."

She sighed and swung his jacket from her shoulders. "Call me whatever you like, but you're not coming up to my room."

"Fair enough." She held out his jacket and he grabbed her wrist, reeling her in until she was flush with his body. "We'll go to mine." He wrapped his arms around her and constructed a detailed image within his mind. *Home. Take us home.*

She shoved against his chest, then cried out and wrapped her arms around him as they catapulted into the sky. Warm and soft, she felt wonderful clinging to him. He focused on their destination and soared. Cool air caressed his skin and whipped his hair

across his face. Sight wasn't necessary to guide their course, so he buried his face in her hair and held her close.

Faelon claimed he knew Antonelli was meant for him the first time he kissed her. He'd described it as an elemental stirring, an instinctive knowing that he'd found his mate. Rafe had thought it romantic drivel, until he kissed Jessica. Her spirit fascinated him. He sensed her nobility, but more than anything she felt *right* in his arms.

"This isn't real, it isn't real. You're dreaming. People can't fly."

Her disbelieving whisper made him smile. Headstrong and self-assured, Jessica was trying to rationalize away the experience even as they sped through the night. And, unfortunately for her, the surprises had just begun. He'd wanted to ease her into this, to offer her analytical mind information and allow her senses to confirm the undeniable truths. Natalie had thrown down the gauntlet. Whether Jessica was ready or not, the competition had begun.

"We're almost there, sweetheart. Try and relax. Landings can be tricky."

Visualizing his bedroom, he finalized their destination. He tightened his arms around her, pressing her trembling body against his chest, his groin, his thighs. She might have been more at ease if they materialized in his living room, but his bed would offer a softer landing.

She cried out when they penetrated the roof. The upper story passed in a blur as her cry escalated to a scream. He twisted, landing on his big four poster bed, Jessie sprawled on top of him.

She stared into his eyes, her features contorted with fear and disbelief. "What... where... Oh my god!" She scrambled away from him and scooted off the bed. Her breasts heaved with each frantic breath and she braced her hands against her knees. "What are you?"

Rafe sat, swinging his legs over the side of the bed. "I intended to break this to you gently, but you remembered some date rape seminar you'd attended and --"

"I *gave* the seminars and there's nothing amusing about date rape! Women have far less control than men, but there are certain things we can do to decrease our chances

of being victimized." Her practiced speech ended and she was faced with the reality of her situation. "I... we were... flying."

"I had to bring you somewhere safe. My house is surrounded by shields. As long as you stay here, they can't reach you."

"What are you talking about? Who can't reach me?"

"Jessie." He took her hands between his. Her fingers were ice cold. "I do have enemies. I thought our last run-in had ended their irrational need to best me, but apparently I was wrong."

She licked her lips and drew her hands out of his grasp. "How does killing your fans best you?" Her gaze darted about the room, taking in the massive tester bed and the marble top dressers. "This is your house?"

"Would you like something to drink? This could take a while."

Jessie glanced from the bed to Rafe and shivered. Her skin still tingled and the faint humming hadn't left her ears. He flew her to his house to protect her. Her muddled brain slowly began to function. Flew! He wrapped his arms around her and...

"What are you?" she asked again.

"We'll get to that. You need to relax and listen. Where will you be most comfortable?"

"I suspect what you're going to tell me isn't going to make me comfortable anywhere."

He smiled, pushing his hair off his forehead. "I suspect you're right." He took her hand and led her from the bedroom. "Etoro and I were friends a very long time ago. We had a falling out and our friendship turned to rivalry."

They stepped out into a massive living room. Vaulted ceilings accented the railed gallery extending along two walls. Doors opened off the gallery, but Jessie could only guess at the purpose for the rooms. An informal eating area was situated in one corner of the main floor, with a gourmet kitchen accessible through a wide archway.

"Nice house," she muttered. "Where are we?"

“Upstate New York, not far from Saratoga Springs.”

She had no idea where that was, but the detail seemed unimportant given the means by which they’d arrived. “So, you believe Etoro is killing your fans?”

“Etoro and Natalie. They allied against me long ago.”

“They want to vote you off the island?” He just stared at her, so she shook her head. “Never mind. What makes you so certain it was them and how am I involved?”

“I believe the others were bait to draw you into the -- situation. You are the object of the competition.”

“Competition?” Connecting the word with seven brutal murders made Jessie’s stomach lurch. She pulled out one of the dinette chairs and sat. “What makes you think it’s them?”

He opened the refrigerator and looked at her over his shoulder. “Soda, wine, or beer?”

“Could I talk you out of a cup of coffee? My head is pounding.”

“Of course. Will coffee take care of your headache? I might be able to scrounge up an aspirin or Tylenol.”

“Let’s start with the coffee.” He ground coffee beans and filled the coffeemaker with water as she looked around the immaculate house. “You don’t spend much time here, do you?”

“Why do you ask?” While the coffee brewed, he retrieved a mug from one of the cupboards.

“It just doesn’t look lived in. More like a show home.”

“I bought the place seven years ago and I’ve probably slept here twelve times. I have an apartment in Manhattan, but I spend the majority of my time in hotels or at the band house.”

“The band house?”

“We bought a house in Falls Church not far from The Carousel. We go there to work on new material and hide from publicity hounds.”

“I can’t believe Pyrite has been together for thirty years.”

He filled the mug with coffee and brought it to her. "We weren't always Pyrite, but the members have been mostly the same... for a long time. Do you take anything in that?" He nodded toward her steaming mug.

She shook her head and he sat down across the table from her. "This smells wonderful." After taking a careful sip, she met his gaze. "Back to Etoro and Natalie."

"In the basement of The Carousel, I sensed Natalie. She is stronger telepathically than Etoro."

"The psychic bug." It all seemed surreal. Telepaths, vendettas, and people who could fly. How could she take any of it seriously?

She swallowed hard. She was sitting at Rafe's kitchen table in upstate New York. How could she not take it seriously? "Natalie was using Dalton to spy on you?"

"Basically."

"Is Dalton in danger?" She set down her mug and tucked her hair behind her ears.

"They delivered the message, so they should have no further use for your friend."

"What message? I still don't understand."

He averted his gaze and folded his hands on the tabletop. "I don't know how to explain this to you without just saying it." He fidgeted, obviously uncomfortable with what he needed to reveal.

"Just say it." Tension banded her chest. Cocky Rafe Steele was squirming like a guilty school boy. This couldn't be good.

"I'm a vampire." He turned his face back toward hers as violet light ignited in the depths of his dark gaze.

She slammed the mug down and stood so abruptly her chair toppled. "Bullshit." Even as she muttered the word evidence flooded her mind. His clairvoyance, the grace with which he moved -- for fuck's sake he could fly!

Other images rushed in as her mind continued to reject the obvious conclusion. Dalton marching across the Green Room like a robot. Her most recent vision replayed.

Bellita writhed as two entities swirled around her naked body. Purple, like Rafe's eyes, the mist encircled Bellita's wrists.

"They slit their wrists to conceal the bite marks." She shuddered. "You're all vampires."

He stood as well and rounded the table, his eyes dark again. "Etoro and I were court musicians in Ferrara, Italy."

"Court musicians?" She took a step backward for every step he advanced. Her self-defense course didn't anticipate the existence of vampires. How the hell was she supposed to protect herself from this?

"I'm not going to hurt you." Had he read her expression or her mind? She had never felt so helpless in her entire life. "I can smell your fear, and humans transmit when they're upset. I don't need to access your mind; you're blasting me with your thoughts." He crossed his arms over his chest; his gaze filled with frustration. "I brought you here to protect you. If I wanted to drain your blood or ravage your body, why wouldn't I have attacked you in the car?"

Her butt collided with the back of a sofa and half a room separated them. She took several deep breaths. He was right. If he'd wanted to kill her, she'd be dead. And if he'd wanted to fuck her, he wouldn't have let her go in the dressing room.

"Oh, I still want to fuck you, don't doubt that for a minute. But let me make this perfectly clear, when I fuck you, Jessica, you'll want me as much as I want you."

His gaze caressed her face for a long, silent moment. The rhythm of her heart changed as desire eroded her fear. She'd never met a man before who affected her senses with a look, sent her heart racing with the brush of his fingertips. How would she survive if he ever got serious about this seduction?

"Can I finish my explanation or would you rather explore the emotions you're transmitting now?" He softened the question with a gentle smile.

"You were court musicians in Italy," she prompted, dragging her gaze away from his smoldering eyes. "When was this?"

"The important events began in 1471."

"1471? You were born during the renaissance?" Her heart began to hammer all over again.

"I caught the eye of an Italian aristocrat named Antonelli. Her husband indulged her every whim. She wanted me, so Faelon gave me to her."

"I'm not sure what you mean. Were you a slave?"

Rafe sighed and raked his hair with both hands. "Can we sit? This is all rather complicated." She moved around the sofa and sat. He joined her, giving her plenty of room. "Vampires can form several kinds of bonds. I don't want to confuse the issue, so I'll explain the ones directly pertaining to these events."

He wasn't trying to be condescending, but his arrogance annoyed her. "I'll do my best to follow along."

"When a vampire takes blood from someone, whether the donor is willing or not, it opens a telepathic link. This link remains active until the blood has been metabolized."

"Do vampires take blood from each other?"

"Yes. That sort of bond is called an alliance, but let me explain the events in order. Antonelli wanted me, so Faelon took my blood, which made me susceptible to his mental suggestions."

"You controlled Dalton without taking his blood. Why was it necessary for Faelon to... drink from you?"

"Humans with psychic abilities are often resistant to mental compulsions. During the concert, I told you to look at me. Were you aware of the compulsion or did you simply obey?"

"I felt something unusual, then I looked at the stage." She shrugged. "It could have been either, I guess."

"You didn't respond to my verbal command. More than likely, I would have to establish a blood bond to have any control over you."

"I'll keep that in mind." She already had so many questions and he'd hardly begun his story. "You had psychic abilities before you became a vampire?"

He nodded. "Few humans can survive the transformation, but humans with psychic abilities fare better than most."

Jessie's heart lurched at his casual statement. "Is that why Etoro and Natalie are after me? If they decide to transform me, I'm more likely to survive?"

"It's possible. However, knowing them, I suspect their motives are more convoluted."

"Sorry. Back to Italy."

He inclined his head. "If Faelon had taken my blood repeatedly, his control would have increased until I was a mindless puppet. We call this a slave bond. Human slaves rapidly weaken and often go mad. This sort of bond is forbidden by the Covenant, a code of conduct by which all vampires are bound."

"Who enforces the Covenant? Do you have vampire police?"

His gaze narrowed and he extended his arm along the back of the couch. "Are you distracting me intentionally?"

"No. Well, maybe." During her years as an investigator, she thought she'd seen everything. She never expected to be sitting next to a celebrity, much less a vampire. A part of her refused to accept what was right in front of her. "I'll try not to interrupt again."

"There are so many subtleties. I think it might be better if I just show you."

Before she could object, Rafe pulled her into his arms, cradled her against his chest and sank his fangs into her throat.

Chapter Six

“He is spectacular, my love. You are too good to me.”

“If he pleases you, he pleases me.”

The vision slammed into Jessie’s mind, overshadowing reality. Colors danced before her eyes, then two figures came into focus. A petite, brown-haired woman stood beside a tall, blond man. The man stroked the woman’s unbound hair, his bright blue eyes focused on her heart-shaped face.

Faelon and Antonelli. Jessie heard Rafe’s voice inside her mind. *See the adoration in his eyes? He will do anything for her.*

At first glance, the woman looked innocent, almost child-like. Her eyes, however, shone with knowledge far beyond her youthful appearance. The man’s rugged features and piercing gaze would never be described as handsome. Even in the vision, Jessie could sense his supremacy. Predator, ruthless hunter, there could be no mistaking his basic nature. Still, his long-fingered hand touched Antonelli with such tenderness. The contrast was mesmerizing.

Antonelli strolled forward and the vision shifted. A young man lay chained to a bed, naked and utterly helpless. Terror and defiance battled within his dark eyes as he yanked against the leather cuffs encircling his wrists and ankles. It took Jessie a moment to recognize Rafe’s features. His body was thin, lacking the muscular symmetry she’d admired in the dressing room.

I was much younger then.

“Do you understand why you are here?” Antonelli’s gaze swept Rafe’s body before returning to his face. The gag distorted his expression. “You are meant for greater things than you can possibly imagine. I am willing to teach you, to guide you, but you must be willing to learn.”

He shook his head and twisted, fighting the restraints with all his strength. His fury ricocheted through Jessie. He cursed his helplessness and mentally damned the bitch to hell.

Antonelli studied his face, a smile curving her lips. "Such spirit. I knew I had to have you as I listened to you sing. Your voice resonates with passion." She sat on the edge of the bed and stroked his face. Rafe jerked away from her light touch. "I am not going to hurt you, but I must insist on your cooperation for one month. If you see no value in my lessons at the end of that time, I will release you."

He glared up at her as he clenched and unclenched his hands. Emotions burst within Jessie -- anger, frustration and desire. Rafe was tempted by Antonelli's offer, which only made him loathe his own weakness. She had him bound and helpless. He should feel nothing but disdain.

"Do you sense the strength of his spirit, my love?" She looked at Faelon. "You should think about transforming him."

"If he excels as you believe he will, I shall consider it." Faelon stood back, ever watchful, his arms folded across his chest.

Pushing to her feet beside the bed, Antonelli untied the belt on her dressing gown and shrugged out of the simple garment. Rafe's eyes widened and his gaze darted to Faelon. Why was he just standing there? Was this woman his wife?

"Carnality." Antonelli paused, waiting for Rafe to look at her. "It is a tool, a weapon, but few comprehend its power or have the skills to use it effectively. I will teach you, Rafael. Are you willing to learn?"

Rafe forced his dry throat to swallow. Even as he shook his head, refusing her offer, his gaze descended. Her breasts were high and round, her nipples tightly puckered. Her woman's mound was smooth, like the rest of her skin. Why had she removed the hair? He didn't want to respond to her nakedness, but already his cock hardened. His gaze shot again to the man. The woman obviously meant to couple with him, but what role would the man serve?

“Your very nature is carnal. I hear it in your voice and see it in your eyes. You could be my greatest student, if you let yourself learn.” Antonelli licked her lips and ran her index finger along his thigh. “You are wonderfully made. Long and lean, with the promise of a greater strength to come. I will teach you how to use your fingers, your lips, your teeth, your tongue. You will learn how to heighten pleasure with anticipation, how to control and focus, dominate and surrender.” She closed her fingers around his cock, rubbing the tip with her thumb. “Look at me, Rafael. Have you ever tasted passion?”

His cock lengthened and thickened within her grasp. How could he resist such temptation? She crawled onto the bed at his side, parting her thighs, displaying her folds and dusky passage. He wanted to touch her, thrust inside, and learn all the wicked skills she’d promised to teach him.

“Would you like to touch me?” Desire pulled his balls up tight against his body. He closed his eyes and bit down hard on the gag. “There is no shame in your desire. Shall I pleasure you with my mouth? Would you like that?” His eyes flew open and his arms flexed, his hands tightly fisted. She chuckled. “What is he thinking, Faelon. I don’t want to overwhelm him.”

“Desire has already overcome his fear, but he resents being bound. His actual experience is minimal, though he has entertained extremely adventurous fantasies.”

“I see.”

Faelon moved closer to the bed, drawing Rafe’s wary gaze. “The plain truth is you have no choice. You can submit to Antonelli’s ministrations and benefit from her teachings or I will enslave your mind.” Purple fire ignited in Faelon’s eyes and he opened his mouth, revealing long, pointed fangs.

Rafe screamed behind the gag, jerking violently against his bonds. *Demon! Fiend!* He had heard stories of such creatures. Prayers from his childhood echoed through his mind. What had he done? Why was he being punished?

“*Be calm.*” Faelon’s voice rang with authority. “*Stop struggling.*”

Peace flowed through Rafe, sweeping aside his fear and anger. He sagged against the bed, panting, exhausted.

"No more compulsions," Antonelli said firmly. "I want him to submit of his own free will." She turned back to Rafe and trailed her fingers down the center of his chest. "If you relax and allow yourself to enjoy my kiss, I will release you from the chains. I much prefer a willing student, but you must earn my trust." Her mouth closed around the head of his cock. His body arched, tight as a bowstring, and the vision faded to black.

Jessie trembled in Rafe's arms, her mind muddled, her body burning. His mouth moved against her throat, his tongue gently stroking. Desire sizzled within her. She felt dizzy and weak. Tangling her fingers in his hair, she pulled his face away from her neck.

"What did you... How did you... You bit me!" With the same intensity as the vision assailed her mind, reality returned. She scrambled off the sofa, her fingers pressed over the side of her neck. "What will this do to me?"

"Nothing." He sighed and stood as well. "I only used my fangs so you could see how it began for me."

She licked her lips, ignoring the strange tingle erupting in the wake of her tongue. "How long were you her -- student?"

He chuckled. "The word doesn't insult me. I learned more from Antonelli than even I anticipated. I shared their home for six years when Faelon agreed to transform me."

"*Agreed* to transform you?" She hadn't meant for her voice to sound so disapproving. "You *wanted* to become a vampire?"

"Vampires are stronger, faster, and healthier than humans." He shrugged. "Why wouldn't I want to be a vampire?" A lazy smile parted his lips. His fangs had retracted. "Surely you don't believe I'm a soulless demon? I was a superstitious lad when I encountered Faelon. You're a street-wise ex-cop."

“Which makes it harder for me to accept this sort of thing.” She took a step toward him, studying his relaxed posture, his calm expression, and his assessing stare. He’d had over five hundred years to accept the existence of vampires. She’d had less than an hour. “I’ve been trained to believe what I can see, smell, hear, and touch.”

“And taste?” He grinned.

The vision left her achy and restless. She’d been susceptible to his charm when her world wasn’t reeling. She didn’t trust herself near him now. “If being a vampire is so wonderful, why didn’t Faelon transform Antonelli?”

“Many long for transformation, but few can survive the change. Antonelli is a perfect example. She has spent centuries at Faelon’s side wishing she could be what he is.”

“Antonelli is still alive?” He merely nodded. “How is that possible?”

“Soul-bonding is the most intimate form of connection. Most often a soul-bond is formed between two vampires, but it is possible for a vampire to establish a soul-bond with a blood ally.”

“How do Etoro and Natalie fit in to all this?” Jessie tried to concentrate on the present, but she couldn’t rid her mind of the vision. Rafe’s bittersweet longing thrummed through her still. He’d wanted Antonelli with every fiber of his being and hated himself for that desire. She understood the contradiction all too well.

He joined her on the sofa, his movements smooth and restrained. “After my transformation, we traveled for many years. We came across Etoro in Venice. It was a magnificent city in the height of its splendor. Etoro was a musician at one of the balls we attended. Time had not been kind to him, while I had thrived and flourished. He wanted to know how I’d remained so young, so healthy. I did my best to evade his questions, but Etoro was determined to learn the source of my vitality.”

“How did he find out what you’d become?”

“He followed me for weeks until he caught me feeding. I didn’t recognize his obsession until it was too late. I’d only been a vampire for eleven years, so my powers were still developing.”

After eleven years his powers were still developing? Time obviously passed differently for vampires. "What did he do?"

"He threatened to reveal what I was if I didn't transform him." His tone was even, conversational. Did the events no longer affect him or was he remaining calm for her benefit?

"Reveal it to whom? It wasn't like they had cameras back then. Wouldn't it have been his word against yours?"

"People were different then. Superstition and political unrest made for a volatile combination. Italy escaped the worst of it, but the Inquisitors in Spain executed thousands for refusing to convert to the 'true faith.' What do you think such people would have done with a man who didn't age?"

Jessie enjoyed reading about history, studying the customs and developments of different eras. Rafe had experienced the evolution of humanity. He'd survived wars and witnessed the rise and fall of societies. It gave her chills just thinking about all he'd experienced.

She drew her thoughts back to Etoro. "Did you transform him?"

"I couldn't have if I'd wanted to. My own transformation wasn't complete." He paused, his lips pressed into a tight line. "Faelon refused to be manipulated by threats, but more importantly, he sensed an imbalance in Etoro that made him unwilling to even consider triggering the change."

"Well, I know Etoro is a vampire now, so who transformed him?"

"A female named Cecilia. She was once Faelon's mate." He raked his hands through his hair and rushed on before she could distract him with more questions. "When Faelon forced Etoro to look elsewhere for transformation, we became the enemy."

She released a shuddering breath. Logic, routine, and instinct were as important to her as her gun, yet she was completely out of her element right now. *Vampires are real*. She repeated the words until her brain stopped rejecting them. "What does Etoro

want with me? You didn't even know me until tonight. How does he intend to use me in this ongoing battle?"

"I have lots of suspicions, just nothing I can prove. Faelon will be able to tell us more."

"You're going to take me to Faelon?" The vampire's unrelenting features and piercing eyes flashed through her memory.

"He knows more about Etoro than anyone else alive. Etoro enjoys antagonizing me, but he despises Faelon."

She inclined her head and carefully guarded her thoughts. There was no way in hell she was going to let this happen. Faelon had enslaved Rafe, offered him up to his wife bound in chains. A heated tingle skittered down her spine. It was so easy to picture herself in Rafe's place, restrained and helpless as Rafe lowered his mouth to her pussy.

"When do we leave?" She cleared her throat, ridding her tone of its hushed purr. "Does he still live in Italy?"

Rafe didn't reply, so she looked at him. Shit! His eyes glowed with violet fire and he slowly licked his lips. "If you step beyond the shields without me, you will learn what it means to be helpless. This is not a game."

Calm, quiet, lethal, his tone belied the intensity in his gaze. "How do I know that?" She pushed to her feet and crept around the glass-topped coffee table. "Faelon and Antonelli are obviously fond of games, and you learned from them. How do I know Etoro even exists? Have you been commanded to bring me to your master? Is that what this is really about?" She made it to the door as she rattled off her string of questions. Escape was her only option. She spun and collided with Rafe. She screamed.

"I can't let you leave. I don't yet understand his motivation, but Etoro is real." Rafe scooped her up in his arms and carried her across the room. Jessie wiggled and twisted, clawing at his hands and kicking her feet. "We'll leave tomorrow for Italy. I must regain my strength before I attempt another flight."

She went still in his arms, her eyes wide and luminous. "How do you regain your strength?"

He grinned, moonlight accenting his fangs. "Despite your attempts to deny your excitement, I've seen the image in your mind. We will reenact my first night with Antonelli and see if *you* are willing to learn." He set her down beside his bed and she lunged for the door. With a patient chuckle, he flung her onto the bed. "You can resist the pleasure and scream until your voice fails, but I will not fuck you or take your blood until you freely offer me the bond."

"You're insane!" She rolled toward the opposite side of the bed. He caught her ankles and flipped her onto her back. She screamed and flailed as he shredded her clothes and wrestled her into position, binding her wrists and ankles in fur-lined cuffs. Tugging against the restraints with all her strength, she confirmed that she was helpless, as he had been in the vision.

He paused, staring down at her with luminous purple eyes. "I know it's your nature to be stubborn, but surrender will serve you better tonight."

Chapter Seven

With a negligent wave of his hand, Rafe dissolved his clothing and joined her on the bed. "To remain true to the reenactment, I should gag you, but that would prevent me from kissing you."

Jessie licked her lips, her gaze focused on his sensual mouth. "Did Antonelli kiss you?"

"Not that first night." He stretched out on his side and slipped one arm beneath her neck.

"Did you and Faelon ever..."

"Antonelli is a sexual connoisseur. She enjoys men and women in every imaginable combination."

"You and Faelon took Antonelli together?" It didn't take much imagination to picture Antonelli's slender body sandwiched between the two powerful men. Had Rafe been on the bottom or had he filled Antonelli's ass? A violent shiver shook her and she looked away from his otherworldly gaze. Why was she encouraging him? She should resist this depravity, or at least stay silent.

"She rode my cock, while Faelon stuffed her ass." He slipped his hand between her thighs and bent down to whisper in her ear. "You're wet. Does the idea of being taken by two men appeal to you, or is it simply the subject matter?"

"I'm chained to your bed and you're fingering my clit." Grasping for the rapidly eroding remnants of her resistance, Jessie concentrated on her breathing. She couldn't give in without a fight. She just couldn't!

"Antonelli enjoys having a woman tongue fuck her while the woman is being fucked from behind. Have you ever tasted a woman's cunt?"

"No. I have no desire to be a sexual connoisseur." He pushed one of his fingers into her core and Jessie clenched her teeth.

"Relax and we'll begin our lesson."

She shook her head, her breasts quivering as her breathing hitched. He'd said he wouldn't fuck her unless she accepted the bond willingly. That was small consolation when the sound of his voice had gotten her wet. A few strokes of his thumb would doubtlessly make her come. When had she become such an easy conquest?

"Vampires are nourished by the liquids humans secrete." He pulled his arm out from under her neck and sat beside her on the bed. His other hand continued its lazy slide between her thighs. "Saliva has healing properties. If I were wounded, you could help me heal with a long, passionate kiss."

She squirmed, distracted by the teasing penetration of his finger. "And blood?"

"Blood provides the highest concentration of the nutrients we require. But this," he pulled his finger out of her core and raised it to his mouth, "is intoxicating. The more we have, the more we want. Passion is addictive. Blood also tastes sweetest when infused with passion. Are you ready to feed me, Jessica?"

"You said you wouldn't take my blood unless I --"

"I wasn't thinking about your blood." He moved between her legs and slipped his hands under her bottom. Parting her folds with his thumbs, he paused to savor her scent. "It's exhausting for the human, but a vampire can survive on cum. Be as stubborn as you like. This tastes better anyway."

Jessie thought she knew what to expect. She'd been engaged for Christ's sake. But Rafe shattered her expectations with the first stroke of his tongue. He licked her cleft from back to front over and over, lapping up her juices with noisy relish. There was nothing hesitant in his caress, nothing tender. His mouth moved over her, meticulously sucking her delicate folds and teased her aching core. He savored the last drop of her passion before positioning his mouth over her clit.

He'd licked her clean; now he intended to make her wet again. The realization sent violent shivers up and down her spine. Her nipples tightened and her core throbbed.

It's exhausting for the human, but a vampire can survive on cum. He'd meant it literally. He flicked his tongue against her clit, starting a new cycle of arousal. She trembled, her spirit rebelling. "Stop it!" She wouldn't lie here passively while he fed from her sex. They would share this experience or she wanted out. He ignored her objection and continued to devour her cream.

Tension gripped her belly, pleasure mounting with astonishing speed. Her thighs flexed, spread wide by her position. He lifted her, tilting her hips as his mouth closed over her mound. Sucking, and rubbing her clit with his tongue, he summoned wave after wave of sensation. She cried out, arching into his mouth, then violently twisting away. Why did it have to feel so good?

Stark and unapologetic, he took what he needed and rewarded her with exquisite pleasure. Over and over he commanded her release. Jessie tugged against her bonds, frightened by his detachment. Regardless of the staggering orgasms, she didn't want to be his -- food.

"Please," she cried. "No more. I don't want... this."

Kneeling between her thighs, he raised his face. His mouth gleamed with her cream and his gaze bore into hers. "What do you want?"

Rafe watched her eyes, judging her reaction. If he took this any further, opened a link between their minds, she would feel the emotions seething inside him. Never had his spirit responded with such intense and conflicting feelings. Her taste enticed him. Her resistance fueled his determination. He wanted to conquer, to fuck her hard and fast with no more pretence. She was his and her body knew it. Yet, the desire to release her from the cuffs and cradle her in his arms was every bit as strong.

"I don't have casual sex and this is even worse." Tears shone behind her lashes. She stubbornly blinked them away. "You feel nothing but -- hunger when you touch me and I won't be anyone's meal."

"You have no idea what I'm feeling." He'd meant the words as comfort despite the growl in his voice. "Offer me your throat and I'll show you."

"If you take my blood, I'll be your slave. You said so yourself."

"The blood bond will only last as long as your blood is in my body; a few hours, a day at most. Controlling you is not what I want."

"What do you want?" she repeated his question.

"Accept the bond and I'll show you."

She pressed her lips together in an attempt to hide their trembling. "I hate this. Why do I have to surrender control?"

"You don't." He cupped the side of her face, teasing her lips with his thumb. "The cuffs are now at your command. Wish them away and you'll be free."

Her brow furrowed and she nipped his thumb, uncertainty expanding within her eyes. She paused, her movements stilled for a moment, then her long legs wrapped around his hips. He looked at her hands, waiting for her to banish the other set of cuffs. She just smiled at him.

"I like a man who understands compromise." She turned her head and kissed the center of his palm. "Get it over with," she whispered, her warm breath wafting against his skin.

He turned her head until their gazes locked. "It doesn't have to hurt." Leaning down, he covered her mouth with his, caressing her lips and nibbling her chin. "I want to be inside you when I establish the bond."

Her breath released in a long, ragged sigh. "I want that too."

Still on his knees, he rotated her hips, lifting one of her ankles to his shoulder. Hot, wet, ready, her body opened for him. She watched him, her eyes wide and passion bright, her arms stretched above her head in willing surrender. He traced her slit with

the head of his cock, teasing her and lubricating him. Antonelli had taught him to savor the moment of penetration. Any beast could ram a cock into a hole.

He circled her opening and pressed her clit with his thumb, waiting for the telltale throb of her slick pussy. She murmured and pushed up with her free leg. He smiled, not yet ready to fill her. Anticipation was its own sort of pleasure. He had learned to be ruthlessly patient. Pushing just the flared head of his cock inside her, he paused and looked into her eyes.

“Vampires are elemental creatures, much more so than humans.” As soon as he formed the blood bond, she would sense his overwhelming possessiveness. He didn’t want to frighten her. “We don’t mate indiscriminately.” He drove deeper, watching her body welcome his shaft.

Her breasts quivered and she tossed her head, her expression wild. “Do we have to talk about this now?”

“We often fuck when we feed. Sexual energy enriches the blood, makes the taste more pleasurable. That’s not what I’m talking about.” Deeper and deeper, her slick passage accepted his cock. She shook, obviously on the verge of orgasm. He watched her face and circled her clit with his fingertips as he pushed in the last few inches. She came with a sharp cry, her inner muscles rippling rhythmically. “There’s nothing casual about what I feel for you. I just wanted you to be prepared.”

Shifting her legs to his waist, he arched over her and started moving. Her soft breasts pressed against his chest, the nipples forming hard little points. He braced himself on one forearm, leaving his other hand free to touch her. Cupping her chin, he turned her face to the side and angled his head. He moved faster, drove deeper, distracting her from what he was about to do.

Even so she tensed, her legs tightening around him. He licked her neck, from the base of her shoulder to the sensitive spot behind her ear. Trailing his tongue and scraping his teeth, he waited for her to relax. Had she forgotten she could wish away the chains or did she find security in the restraints? The thought intrigued him, but now was not the time for questions. He sank his fangs into her throat without breaking the

rhythm of his hips. She gasped, shuddered, then groaned, her pussy fluttering in response.

He reached for her mind, delighted to find her open and waiting. They met and embraced, the bond more profound than their physical joining. She whimpered. He sensed wonder, not fear, so he poured affection across the newly formed link.

Her fingers tangled in his hair. She'd finally rid herself of the cuffs. He paused for a moment, giving her the opportunity to push him away. She trembled. "I feel so hot," she whispered.

Do you want me to stop?

"No! I just... I think I'm going to --"

Her cunt gripped him so tightly he pulled his fangs from her throat, panting. She was incredibly responsive, accepting the new sensations without hesitation, reveling in the pleasure. Framing her face between his palms, he captured her mouth, matching each hard thrust with his tongue.

You're amazing. He sent the words to her mind, and a staggering rush of emotion returned across the telepathic link. Passion and curiosity. Greedy and impatient, she demanded his breath, his heat, his strength, his virility. Thrilled by her ravenous desire, he claimed her without reservation. She matched him thrust for thrust, her fingers still tangled in his hair.

His balls tingled with the onset of his orgasm and he reached again for her mind, sharing the splendor he had only found in her arms. She clung to him, wrapping her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist as her inner muscles triggered his release. He raised her hips off the bed and came in shuddering spurts, his entire body trembling with the intensity of his pleasure.

Panting and shaken, he wrapped his arms around her hips, holding her flush against his body. She continued to pulse with tiny aftershocks as she sagged back against the bed.

"Is it always like this?" she asked with a sleepy smile.

“It will be for us.” There was so much more he wanted to say, but he knew better. She needed time to accept the rapid changes, to release her hold on her old life and accept what lay ahead. Wrapping his arms around her, he rolled them to their sides. One of her legs extended as they rolled, the other still circled his waist. He stroked her warm thigh and savored her breath against his chest. It had been centuries since he’d felt so alive.

Chapter Eight

Jessie took the square of caramel filled chocolate from Rafe's fingers, sighing in contentment as the confection melted on her tongue. They sat in the middle of his bed facing each other, her legs wrapped loosely around his hips.

"Somebody has a sweet tooth." He smiled into her eyes, watching as she licked the sticky residue from her lips.

"Where did you get a Caramello at this hour?" She slid her hands up his chest and explored his shoulders, enjoying the feel of his flesh nearly as much as the chocolate. "You were only gone a few minutes." And he'd wasted no time getting naked and back into bed.

"I live to fulfill your every desire."

She chuckled. "I'll keep that in mind." He'd transported her up the coast without breaking a sweat. Pilfering a candy bar wasn't even a challenge. He held out another square and she nipped his fingertips as she took the treat.

He scowled with playful menace. "You shouldn't bite the hand that feeds you."

"Isn't that a bit hypocritical?" A shiver raced down her spine and the small wound on her neck tingled. "So, what's true and what's superstition?"

"In regard to vampires?" She nodded. "We don't sleep in coffins. At least we don't need to. I know several who find it amusing."

"How did it all begin?" She combed her fingers through his hair, luxuriating in the silky texture. "Faelon transformed you, but who transformed him?"

"Faelon is organic." He smiled at her startled expression. "He was born a vampire. That's why he's so powerful. There are few organic vampires left."

Jessie just stared at him for a moment, her mind in turmoil. It never occurred to her that someone could give birth to a vampire. More of the lore and superstition had

taken root than she cared to admit. "Are Faelon's children vampires? How many vampires are there in the world? Are you immortal?"

He chuckled and slipped another piece of candy into her mouth. "Immortality is relative. A true immortal would live forever. Vampires are immune to disease and are able to heal most wounds, but we can be killed. I have no idea how many vampires exist worldwide. What else did you ask? Ah yes, children. Faelon agreed to an arranged marriage and produced one vampiric child, but he was miserable and so was his wife."

"Cecilia, the female who transformed Etoro." It wasn't really a question. She was just setting another puzzle piece in place. Rafe nodded. "When did Faelon meet Antonelli?"

"They had been lovers for many years when Faelon bowed to convention and agreed to accept an 'appropriate' mate. The union produced a daughter who despises him nearly as much as her mother. Needless to say, Faelon returned to Antonelli and has been content without other children."

"Only organic vampires can produce children?"

He set the rest of the candy bar aside and traced her lips with his fingertip. "It's rare for any vampire to be able to procreate. That's why we resort to transformation. Very lucky ones are able to conceive with their soul-bonded mate."

"There have always been vampires?" She still couldn't wrap her mind around the concept. "How have you kept it a secret from the vast majority of humans?"

"Humans believe what they want to believe. Every culture has recorded some form of vampirism since written history began. The Covenant requires that we be discreet and integrate with established societies as much as possible. Intentionally bringing attention to our kind is grounds for punishment, sometimes execution."

"Who determines which and who carries out the punishment?" She suddenly pictured Buffy the Vampire Slayer and smiled.

"Why are you smiling?" He cupped her breast and arched his brow. "Is this really what you want to talk about?"

"I'm just trying to understand your world."

"My world?" He grinned. "As far as I know, we're both indigenous to Earth."

"You know what I mean." His other hand grasped her bottom, pulling her groin snug against his. She ignored his growing erection and asked, "Can you go out in the sunlight?"

"Vampires are nocturnal by nature and we're extremely allergic to ultraviolet light. The invention of sunscreen has given us some freedom, but it's generally not worth the risk." He traced her spine and nuzzled her neck. Each time his moist breath wafted across the puncture wound heat curled into her chest.

"Can I read the Covenant?"

"Right now?" He teased her nipple with the pad of his thumb.

"Have you ever had a mate? How many people have you transformed?"

He sighed and moved both his hands to her hips. "Why did you leave the police force?"

It was his way of warning her away from any more questions. He expected her to retreat. Instead, she called his bluff. "Dalton and I were working an especially horrible case involving a serial rapist. Jeff, my fiancé, was part of the multi-jurisdictional task force. I had one of my -- visions, which led the entire team into an ambush. Four people were killed because of my *gift*. Jeff and my brother were among them."

He framed her face with his hands and pressed his lips to her forehead. "I'm sorry." Easing back, he looked into her eyes. "You said ambush. Was there more than one rapist?"

"During the raid we took out someone with DNA linking him to most of the victims, but there were at least three others shooting at us. None of it makes sense. But there have been no more attacks, so the case is closed."

"Did you and your fiancé often work the same cases?"

"No. This guy had every branch of law enforcement in three states ready to do anything to stop him. He had eighteen victims that we know of, seven who didn't survive his brutality."

"And others were assisting him during the shoot out?"

"I told you it didn't make sense."

He stroked her cheek with the backs of his fingers. "Where did you go when you left Baltimore?"

"Colorado. I'm a private investigator."

"What do you investigate?"

She smiled. Her present occupation was worlds away from working homicide. "I take on a variety of cases, but most of my clients are suspicious of their soon-to-be-former lovers."

"You catch people cheating on their significant others?"

"Yep. Where there's smoke there's usually fire. I guess that makes me a firefighter." She tightened her legs around his hips and pressed her breasts against his chest. "Can we talk about something else now?"

"I have a better suggestion."

"What did you have in mind?"

He met her gaze, his eyes taking on a faint purple glow. Vivid images rolled through her mind. She saw herself kneeling beside the bed, sucking his cock with greedy enthusiasm. Then, he stood beside the bed and she knelt upon it. He thrust fast and deep between her thighs.

"I see," she whispered as his mouth covered hers.

* * *

Jessie awoke several hours later and carefully disentangled herself from Rafe's warm embrace. Everything was happening so quickly. She felt off balance and overwhelmed. He would likely sleep until sunset and she welcomed a short period of solitude.

Tiptoeing into the bathroom, she found a stack of neatly folded towels and draped one over the warming rack as she waited for the shower to heat. The bonding had been unlike anything she'd experienced before. She'd had some pretty decent orgasms with Jeff. Still, nothing compared to the absolute intimacy of joining, body, mind, and spirit.

Blood bonding... she'd allowed a vampire to drink her blood. She turned to the wide mirror above the double sinks and gathered her hair away from her neck. The wound was hardly noticeable, two small puncture marks, but the significance left her shaken. Vampires were real and she was caught in the middle of a centuries old rivalry. Out of all the women in the world Etoro had singled her out, led her to Rafe with a string of dead bodies scattered like breadcrumbs upon the ground. There had to be a reason. None of this was random. But what? She wasn't the only human with psychic abilities and she hadn't known Rafe before tonight.

"I can see he drank from you," a female spoke from directly behind Jessie, "but did you drink from him?"

Jessie snatched the towel from the warming rack as she turned around. Before Jessie could do more than gasp, purple light flashed in the woman's eyes. An invisible fist closed around Jessie's throat. Her mouth gaped and she clutched her neck.

"Don't make a sound."

The pressure lessened, allowing her to breathe. Torn between shock and fury, Jessie searched for a weapon, a heavy object, a plunger, anything she could use to defend herself. Her throat ached, her larynx paralyzed. Her attacker had incapacitated her with a glance. How was a plunger going to help?

"Did he feed you his blood?" Her tone snapped with impatience.

Jessie studied the intruder, memorizing her features and the unique cadence of her voice. Petite, almost waif-like, vivid blue eyes dominated her heart-shaped face. "Who are you?" Her bruised throat burned with each word.

"Who I am is unimportant. Answer my question and I'll leave."

Rafe said the house was shielded. How had this person gotten past his security? Jessie clutched the towel to her chest, exasperated by her helplessness.

"Are you daft or just annoying? Did you drink his blood?"

Jessie shook her head.

“How much does your tall, blond friend mean to you?” She smiled, a cold, cruel bowing of her lips. “Don’t try to answer, just listen carefully. You must convince Rafe to transform you or Dalton dies.”

Threats never sat well with Jessie. She lunged forward, abandoning modesty in favor of action. The woman disappeared before Jessie could touch her. Laughter echoed in the room.

“Is that the best you can do?” Jessie spun around and found the woman behind her. “I thought you were a bad-ass ex-cop.”

This had to be Natalie, unless Rafe had more skeletons in his closet. “What do you want?” She mouthed the words more than speaking them, little sound escaped her throat.

“I told you. Convince Rafe to transform you.” Her eyes glowed menacingly. “If you tell him about our conversation, I’ll torture your friend before I kill him. Do you understand?”

Livid, Jessie bent down and picked up the towel. *How does she benefit if Rafe transforms me?*

“Just see that it’s done,” she snapped.

Was she transmitting her thoughts or did the blood bond make her mind accessible to any vampire? “How do I know you won’t kill Dalton anyway?”

Natalie smirked. “You don’t.”

She faded from sight and Jessie flew for the door, wrapping the towel around her as she went. She made it to the bed before Natalie’s threat stopped her. If Natalie could appear inside the house it was likely she could see and hear what went on.

Fuck! What the hell am I supposed to do?

Rafe stirred, rolling onto his back. “What’s wrong?” He rubbed his face and blinked repeatedly. “Why are you shouting?”

Tormented by indecision, Jessie paced beside the bed. One wrong move and Dalton died. *If Natalie was telling the truth!* Jessie hurried around the bed and grabbed

the phone off the nightstand, frantically punching in the number for Dalton's cell phone.

Rafe sat and reached for her hand. She kept her eyes averted.

"Who are you calling?"

The call went straight to voice mail. *Shit!* She tossed the cordless receiver in the general direction of the nightstand and turned to Rafe.

"What's going on? You're white as a sheet."

If Natalie knew what went on inside the house, she would have known whether or not Rafe transformed her. *That lying bitch!* "She said they have Dalton." Her throat protested every word.

He pulled her between his legs and gently touched her neck. "What happened?" She opened her mouth to explain and he laid his fingers across her lips. "Send your thoughts to me. How did you get these bruises on your throat?"

Natalie. I thought you said she couldn't get past your shield.

"Natalie tried to strangle you?" He circled her neck with his hands and soothing heat sank deep into the bruised tissue. "Did she actually touch you?" Jessie shook her head. "She projected an illusion. She was never really there." He reinforced the reassurance with another wave of healing warmth.

"The illusion was real enough to strangle me." Her tone was tentative and thin. He moved his hands to her shoulders and she blew out a shuddering breath. It still stung to speak, but at least she could form words. "She threatened to kill Dalton if I don't convince you to transform me. Italy will have to wait. We need to find out if she really has him."

He nodded. "Go take your shower. I'll make some calls."

Jessie hesitated. During the course of her life Jessie had faced criminals armed with a variety of weapons. She had no defense against a person who could kill with a thought.

"Do you want me to come with you?"

She shook her head. If Natalie wanted her dead, she'd be dead already. Their only weapon was information. They had to unravel the enemy's motivation, then outmaneuver them. "Go find Dalton."

Chapter Nine

After a perfunctory knock, Rafe entered his bedroom. Jessie stood at the French doors staring out into the twilight. "I found you something else to wear." Tossing the bundle onto the bed, he waited for her to turn around. She didn't. "I think you look charming in my bathrobe, but --"

"Does she have him or not?" She still didn't turn around.

"All indications support her claim. Dalton wasn't in his hotel room and the rental car is still in the parking lot where we left it. Phillip has some friends who have agreed to help us. No one can track like the Unseleighe Sidhe."

"The unseely what?" She met his gaze in the glass.

"Dark Elves." He put his hands on her shoulders and pressed in close against her back. "Phillip spent most of the sixteenth century in the Unseleighe realm. Several of the Elves have remained friends with him even though it makes them unpopular back home."

"Phillip is a vampire." It wasn't a question. She finally turned around, dislodging his hands in the process. "Of course he is. They all are, aren't they? How long has Pyrite really been together?"

"We've known each other for centuries."

She folded her arms under her breasts, her shoulders squared, her expression determined. "What's our next move? Do you have any idea where they took Dalton? Why is Natalie so interested in my transformation?"

"Phillip and the Elves are searching for Dalton. There isn't much we can do to help them." He paused. She had accepted so much already. Any option he could offer her now would draw her deeper into the Vampire realm.

"I want you to transform me."

The statement caught him like a sucker punch in the jaw. "What?"

"I refuse to be helpless." Her tone brooked no argument. She had apparently made up her mind. "Natalie could have killed me and we weren't even in the same room. I have no resources, no way to defend myself. All that changes if you transform me."

She had no idea what she was suggesting. He'd only mentioned the advantages of being a vampire, not the dangers and challenges. A year long waiting period was part of the guidelines for transformation detailed in the Covenant.

"Natalie has had centuries to amass her skills and build her power. Transforming you wouldn't --"

"Would I be less helpless than I am now?"

"I can protect you."

"No." She stepped beyond him, defiance flashing through her gaze. "I welcome your assistance, but I won't be left powerless."

"We need to know why she wants you transformed. This isn't something you can turn off and on."

"You said we're protected within the shields. How will you get me to Italy without exposing me to risk?"

Jessie was right. As soon as they passed beyond the shield, Natalie would link with Jessie's mind. Faelon was strong enough to sever the link once they reached Italy, but Natalie would know everything Jessie knew in the blink of an eye.

"I'll make you an ally, but we have to understand her motivation before we even consider transformation."

"What's the difference?"

He paused for a long moment. Could he use Natalie's telepathic sensitivity against her? It was risky as hell and Jessie would believe him a beast until it was safe to release the illusion. If he could use her anger to save her life, it would be well worth enduring her temper.

"There might be another way, but you'll have to trust me."

"I'm listening."

"Natalie's mental abilities are second only to Faelon's. If she sensed my essence inside you, she might presume I've begun the transformation process."

"Your essence is already inside me." She blushed and glanced away.

They didn't have time for subtleties. "I didn't come in your mouth last night because a vampire's cum has a stronger effect on humans when it's ingested."

"So I swallow your cum and Natalie will think you're transforming me?"

"I'll have to implant a mental suggestion to make you believe it as well or she'll see through the ploy."

She raked her hair out of her eyes; her lips pressed together. "I have no problem with the blow job, but this doesn't really help me. I'll still be powerless."

"No, you won't. You'll take on characteristics of a vampire for as long as it takes your body to metabolize --"

"Your essence?"

"Exactly." He motioned toward the bed. "I didn't sleep as long as I had hoped to. If you'll let me feed while you feed, it will strengthen me for the journey." Without a word, she unfastened the bathrobe and let it slip from her shoulders. He pulled her into his arms before she could crawl onto the bed. "I want so much more for us than this. I will make love to you as you deserve as soon as this crisis is over."

She kissed his mouth, communicating her determination across their mental bond. He found it ironic that she was reassuring him. It should have been the other way around.

Stretching out on her back, she waited while he shed his jeans. She looked at his erection with resignation and Rafe paused. Damn it! He wanted to caress her and bring her to slow, breath-stealing orgasms. He wanted to spend days discovering all of her erogenous zones.

"Come on." She held out her hand and managed a smile. "I enjoyed having you in my mouth last night."

She didn't really understand what he intended. The only other choice was a true transformation. This was a much better option. Joining her on the bed, he guided his cock toward her mouth and she did the rest. Her tongue swirled, then her lips formed a snug circle. She sucked him slowly, drawing him deeper and deeper into her mouth. He covered her mound with his mouth and traced her slit with the tip of his tongue. She was already slick and hot, amazingly responsive. Her taste intoxicated him. He inhaled her scent and licked her folds. She groaned and worked his cock in earnest.

It felt so damn good. He wanted to enjoy the pleasure of her hot, wet mouth, then turn around and sink slowly into her passage. For the first few weeks after transformation, a newly made vampire had to be strictly controlled, dominated, or they often turned rogue. If he didn't make the illusion realistic, Natalie would know it was a ruse.

Dreading what must be done he accessed her mind and constructed the illusion. He pinned her to the bed and thrust to the hilt inside her tight pussy. *You're mine. Now and forever. Accept my blood.* He opened a wound on his wrist with the tip of his fang and pressed it to her lips. She resisted, afraid and repulsed by the metallic taste and the demand in his expression. He pulled nearly out, then impaled her again and again. She cried out, each parting of her lips filling her mouth with blood. She shuddered and moaned, her inner muscles gripping him.

That's right. Drink. Join me. Feel the power of my blood seeping into your body. Feel my cock claiming you. Submit. Surrender. You were born for this day.

Her mouth latched on to his wrist, sucking firmly, deeply. She was helpless to prevent her body's response to the intoxicating nature of his blood. Without removing her mouth from his wrist, he turned her face to the side and sank his fangs into her throat, completing the circle of transformation. She screamed in release, arching and bucking beneath him.

Easing out of her mind, Rafe felt her body trembling. Utterly lost in the illusion, she would believe he had ravaged her, fucked her ruthlessly, and forced his blood

down her throat. Transformations were always violent, even when the human begged for the change.

He forced aside his regret. This was a temporary change. She would have the opportunity to decide if this was really what she wanted once the crisis had past. He sucked on her cunt as he fucked her mouth. There was nothing gentle in the act. Tenderness would weaken the illusion. He triggered orgasm after orgasm, feasting on her cream, strengthening himself for the journey. She whimpered, fear seeping through her desire. Unwilling to subject her to any more, he thrust into her throat and released his seed, infusing her as completely as he could.

* * *

Natalie sank to her knees as the vision left her. "I don't believe it."

"What did you see?" Etoro helped her back to her feet, his arm supporting the small of her back.

"Rafe... I didn't think he'd do it. He has never instigated a transformation in five hundred years, not even one."

"What about Phillip Noir?"

Natalie glared at him. "My mistakes are few and far between. You'd do well not to remind me of them."

"It's difficult not to, my love, when you insist on repeating them." He nodded toward the human laying motionless on the bed. "How is threatening Rafe with the cop different from what you tried to do back then?"

"The cop means nothing to Rafe." She waved Etoro's concern aside. "You know what you need to know and nothing more. Rafe refuses to transform others, he has always refused. That will be his undoing."

"Women have always been Rafe's undoing."

"No, no, no!" She stomped her foot and shoved Etoro back a step. "If he figures out what we're really after, it will ruin everything. I don't intend to lose this time. Do you?"

“What do you suggest?” Etoro sounded bored and Natalie swung at him. He easily caught her wrist. His eyes narrowed and he bared his fangs. “Do we have time to play? It’s been a long time since we determined who’s stronger.”

He was right and they both knew it. Rafe hadn’t taken the bait. She curled her long nails into her palm until blood trickled down her wrist. Rafe might have won this round, but the fight had barely begun.

“Make sure the cop is bound and gagged,” she ordered. “We’re going to Italy.”

Chapter Ten

Rafe hadn't been home in fifty-seven years. Ferrara wasn't the city of his birth, but it was the home of his transformation. Jessie sagged against him as he landed on the wide front lawn of Faelon's sprawling estate. Vampires surrounded the majestic building, only visible to blood allies.

Antonelli threw open the front door and ran down the sweeping stone stairs. "Rafael!" Ignoring Jessie's wobbly form, she kissed Rafe on both cheeks and smiled up at him. "I could not believe it when Faelon told me you were coming. You have stayed away far too long."

"You look ravishing as always. Unfortunately, this is not a social call. Where is Faelon?"

"Who is your friend?" She made an impatient gesture toward Jessie.

Jessie hissed, fangs gleaming in the moonlight.

Antonelli gasped. "Has she gone rogue?"

Until Faelon severed Natalie's telepathic connection, Rafe had to play his part. "I decided to transform her, and it's not going as well as I had hoped."

"He's expecting you." Her eyes reflected her suspicion, but she motioned toward the house.

Rafe followed her across the foyer and down a short corridor. She pushed the library door open and nodded inside. "I'll be upstairs if there is any way I can help." Which meant she found Jessie physically attractive.

"Thank you."

Jessie hissed again as they passed into the library. Faelon stood near the hearth, his gaze assessing them as they crossed the room.

Your guest is bugged. Faelon used the private mental strand they had constructed over the years. Its range was limited, but a select few could access the transmission.

I know. Please play along for a few minutes then sever Natalie's link.

"It's been ages, Rafael. You know you're always welcome in my home, but what is this about?"

"I had no choice but to begin transformation. Natalie is holding a dear friend hostage."

"Giving in to Natalie is never wise. What do you need from me?"

"I'm losing control of the transformation. Will you help me complete the process?"

Faelon slanted him a disbelieving look. "Your scent is all over this woman. Are you sure you want me to fuck her?"

"I don't see that there's much choice. Either we transform her together or I'll have to destroy her." *Discover Natalie's link as soon as you kiss her.*

I kiss no one but Antonelli. I'll lick her pussy instead.

Rafe glared at his maker. He was demanding a show of obedience. *She'll fight you like a demon.*

All the more convincing, don't you think? Faelon's gaze swept up and down Jessie's body and a smile curved one corner of his mouth.

This isn't necessary and you know it.

I say it is. "I'm always willing to help out a friend." Faelon took Jessie's hand and pulled her toward him. "Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you."

Jessie stared around her in stunned confusion. Was this really Italy? Her mind was muddled and her body weak. Moments after Rafe's brutal attack, he'd helped her dress and they'd departed. He'd forced her to drink his blood. No, she'd told him to transform her. She just didn't understand what transformation entailed. Even as he pounded into her body, exquisite pleasure burst over and over again.

A warm hand closed around her icy fingers and she looked up into a stranger's face. Wrong again. She knew this man, if only from a shared vision. "Faelon?"

"Yes, little one." He turned her face toward the light, his bright blue eyes assessing her features. Gold streaked brown hair had been swept straight back from his angular face. "She's lovely. Let's get her out of these clothes."

"Let's not." She jerked her hand out of his and took a large step backward. "I think I'll wait in the car while you talk to your buddy here."

Rafe smiled, but his eyes remained veiled. "There's no car to wait in and you need this more than you know."

"I don't need anything that requires the removal of my clothes." She spun toward the door and collided with the closed portal. "What the..."

"You're starting to change." Rafe came up behind her, his voice soft and low. "This is all part of your world now, preternatural speed, having access to your senses as you never have before, and establishing bonds. Faelon is my sire, my mentor. It is customary that you bond with him."

She braced her hands against the door. "I have to drink his blood?"

"That is a *privilege* you have yet to earn," Faelon snapped.

"Faelon was never transformed," Rafe patiently reminded her. "I explained this to you."

"He can drink my blood without taking my clothes off."

Rafe turned her around, pressing his hands against the door on either side of her shoulders. "Yes, he can. He doesn't want your blood. You're not yet transformed. It would pollute his blood to drink yours. He wants to lick your pussy and you're going to let him." She tried to duck under his arm, but he caught her around the waist. "Stop it! You wanted this. You asked me to transform you. Obedience is part of the vampire code."

She threw her head back hard against his chest and clawed at his arms. "I won't!"

Faelon approached, his eyes morphing from blue to purple in an instant. "You have much to learn, fledgling." He shot Rafe a furious glance. "Bring her."

Rafe tossed her over his shoulder and trapped her legs against his chest. "You could have spared yourself a forceful initiation. All he was going to do was taste you."

Clutching the back of his shirt with both hands, Jessie reached for his mind. Silence. She trembled. He'd shut himself off from her completely. It was her nature to fight. She'd been fighting her entire life. But Faelon didn't know that. He only knew a subordinate was being disrespectful.

They descended a narrow staircase. Jessie's heart sank with each step. Would Faelon whip her, rape her? She'd infuriated an organic vampire and disgraced Rafe in the process.

"The link is severed. Not even my guards are aware of what goes on in here."

Rafe lowered her feet to the floor. His arms lingered around her waist as she turned around.

"I've never had a taste for rape," Faelon informed her, then his gaze shifted to Rafe. "Now tell me what the hell is going on."

"Natalie is holding a close friend of Jessie's hostage, but the situation is even more bizarre than that. She appeared to Jessie and demanded that Jessie convince me to transform her."

They stood in a wine cellar, the racks empty and covered with cobwebs. She'd imagined a torture chamber or a dungeon at least.

Faelon chuckled. "My playroom is upstairs and I only whip my partners when they insist. I much prefer pleasure to pain."

"I am *so* lost." Jessie rubbed her temples.

"Natalie connected with your mind as soon as we left the shield surrounding my house. Faelon just severed the link." She felt Rafe ease into her mind and the memory of her transformation disintegrated.

"That wasn't real?" Relief and disappointment combined in a dizzying rush. She'd felt his big body pinning her to the bed, his fangs, and the demanding fullness of

his cock slamming into her over and over. She raised her fingers to her lips. The taste of his blood still lingered in her mouth.

"Natalie needed to believe it was real, so you had to believe it was real." His voice was soft and apologetic.

"I don't know how you've survived all these years." Faelon scowled. "I should have taught you to be a vampire before Antonelli expanded your carnality. You're a predator."

"I learned your lessons as well as I learned Antonelli's. We have different ideas of what it means to be a predator."

Faelon approached Jessie, his gaze had returned to blue. "Why did you want him to transform you?"

Jessie squared her shoulders and looked him in the eye. "I'm not above accepting assistance, but no one fights my battles for me. I'm helpless as a human and Dalton means a lot to me."

"Is he your lover?" He shot Rafe a challenging look.

"Once, a long time ago." She rushed on before he could distract her. "Our affair was a three week mistake. I don't regret the time I spent with him, but I have no desire to... that's all beside the point."

"What is the point? Why does Dalton mean so much to you?"

"Others depended on me and lost their lives because of it. I will never fail again if there's any alternative. I'm not sure what Natalie wants with me, but I know I'll be useless if I'm still human."

He studied her for a long, silent minute and she studied him. When he wasn't scowling, Faelon was almost handsome.

"What did your vision reveal to you?"

Rafe's question drew her attention away from Faelon. "Which vision?"

"Right before the ambush?"

"I saw a deserted warehouse and the person I believed would be the next victim. It took me four exasperating hours to convince the team leader to move. When he did... it was as if they knew we were coming."

Rafe filled Faelon in on the task force as well as the murder/suicides. "This all began two years ago," he concluded.

Jessie eased away from Rafe, so she could see both men. "Why is this important now?"

"I think Natalie has been playing with you a lot longer than I first realized," Rafe said.

"You think she had something to do... the rapist was male, there's no doubt about that."

"Natalie and Etoro had two children," Faelon began. "The first was born while Etoro was still in the process of transforming. No one was surprised that it was human."

This obviously had something to do with the rapist or he wouldn't have brought it up. "And the second?"

"The second was born vampire. They named him Kyrel and he was a surprisingly charming boy until he went through the vampire equivalent of puberty. He became sexually aggressive and -- vicious. When he refused to appear before the council, they sent assassins after him."

"You think Kyrel was the rapist? Wait a minute. There was a man killed during the shootout who they linked to many of the crimes."

"Many but not all?" Faelon asked and Jessie nodded. "He was likely one of Natalie's slaves set up to take the fall. One of the assassins claims to have killed Kyrel, but he failed to produce a body. He only brought back a heart."

"The council couldn't tell if it was Kyrel's heart?"

"We had no reason to doubt the assassins report, but the physical examination was inconclusive."

Without a sample of Kyrel's DNA to compare the heart to, Jessie wasn't sure human forensics could have drawn a conclusion either. She rubbed her temples and closed her eyes. Dread formed a tight knot in the pit of her stomach. "What does this have to do with the suicides and why does Natalie want me transformed?"

"Natalie was fiercely protective of Kyrel. If you participated in his destruction, however indirectly, she would consider you her enemy." Faelon gazed past her, his expression contemplative.

"She was unable to protect Kyrel, so she wants us to feel her pain," Rafe elaborated. "You won't be able to protect Dalton and I won't be able to protect you."

"That's unacceptable," Jessie flared. "I'm not going to surrender without a fight. We have to find them. We have to --" Both men were smiling, so Jessie didn't bother completing the sentence.

"I was explaining her perspective, not endorsing her plan." Rafe wrapped his arm around her shoulder and pulled her against his side.

"I think you were on the right track." Faelon's paced the small room as he considered their options. "The one thing she can't be expecting is that you'll actually transform Jessie."

"Why is that so improbable?"

"I've transformed two people in my life. The first didn't survive the change and the second nearly turned rogue. If it weren't for a stubborn Dark Elf named Brenna Skyler, I would have lost Phillip too."

"Does Natalie know about this?"

"Of course," Faelon replied. "She's the one who slit Phillip's throat and left Rafe no choice but to transform him."

"She told me if I didn't transform him, she would." Rafe shuddered, obviously remembering events better left forgotten.

"When a vampire transforms someone they become mentor, friend, and parent for the next hundred years." Faelon drew her attention away from Rafe, allowing him

time to regain his composure. "The Covenant makes them responsible for whatever their fledglings do."

"That's why we're damn careful who we transform."

"How do we find her? How do we destroy her before she causes any more harm?"

"We won't have to find her," Faelon predicted, "she'll find you. Natalie has never been patient. As I see it, these are our options. We can transform you. Rafe is uncomfortable with this, but I've successfully transformed many. We can each feed you a small amount of our blood. This will trigger a temporary change in your physiology. You will take on characteristics of both Rafe and me until your body metabolizes the blood."

"Sort of like what he did before we left?"

Faelon grinned. "Blood is more effective, but if you're offering to suck my cock, I'd be honored to accept."

Rafe glared in silent warning. "It worked once, but Natalie is not a fool. I can almost bet she's figure out it was a ruse by now. She knows me too well."

"Why does she hate you so much?" She looked up into Rafe's dark eyes, but Faelon answered.

"Natalie is my only biological offspring. I claimed an organic vampire as my mate because it was my duty to our kind. Her name was Cecilia and she detested me, but we were both organic vampires and times were very different then. I came to her each night until she became pregnant, then I left her here and never returned until she was destroyed by --"

"That's horrible." Apparently dysfunctional families weren't limited to the human race.

"It was a mercy for both of us. I reluctantly submitted to the obligations of the Covenant, while Cecilia felt violated each time I touched her. If Natalie had been male, I would have taken the child with me, but a girl belongs with her mother." He paused for a moment as memories clouded his gaze. "After Natalie's birth, we simply lived

separate lives. I made sure they had everything they needed and I didn't insult Cecilia with my presence. I visited Natalie as often as Cecilia would allow and with each visit it became more apparent that Cecilia was poisoning the girl's mind against me, making her hate me as Cecilia hated me. Natalie felt as if I'd deserted her and chosen 'my whore' over my family."

Children often suffered from the choices their parents made. "I'm sorry your daughter hates you, but what does this have to do with Rafe?"

"Natalie was perhaps sixteen and Cecilia began pressuring me to arrange a marriage for her, an organic vampire, of course. Rafe was not organic, but I loved him like a brother, so I suggested the match to Cecilia."

He was already fucking your mistress; why not give him your daughter too?

Faelon laughed and Jessie shielded her face with one hand. She kept forgetting vampires could read minds.

"It sounds odd now, but it made sense at the time."

"Not to me," Rafe objected. "I'd watched Natalie grow up. She was the closest thing I'd ever had to a sister."

"I was hoping to restore peace to my family through the union of Rafe and Natalie," Faelon said. "I mentioned it to Natalie first. I knew the only way I would gain Cecilia's cooperation was through Natalie. She was enamored of Rafe and had been for some time. The prospect of being his mate thrilled her."

"I had no idea Faelon had already spoken with Natalie when he proposed the union to Cecilia," Rafe interjected. "I was there at the time and I can't honestly say who objected more profusely, Cecilia or me."

Jessie could almost picture the scene. Natalie must have been humiliated and heartbroken at Rafe's rejection and her mother's refusal to consider the match. "How did Natalie end up with Etoro?"

Faelon sighed and sadly shook his head. "After Rafe and I refused to transform Etoro, he found his way to Cecilia. Cecilia thought she was being clever when she transformed Etoro to spite me, but he was in control the entire time. He played the role

of humble student while he ruthlessly seduced Natalie. She was upset by Rafe's rejection and susceptible to an older, sexually experienced male. When Cecilia threw him out, he took Natalie with him. Etoro and Natalie have been together off and on ever since. We suspect Etoro was emotionally, perhaps physically abusive until Natalie gained enough strength to stop him."

"She blames you for deserting her and Rafe for rejecting her."

"That about sums it up," Rafe agreed.

"If she's more powerful than Etoro now, why does she stay with him?"

"He impregnated her twice," Faelon reminded her. "You must not underestimate the significance of that."

"Can vampires soul-bond with more than one person?" she persisted. "Isn't Antonelli your soul-bonded mate?"

Faelon looked at Rafe and smiled. "Is she always like this?"

"She swears her specialty is investigation. I think it's interrogation."

"Etoro gorged himself on blood and violent energy," Faelon said. "Then at the end of his first century as a vampire, he returned to challenge Cecilia as the Covenant allows."

"The Covenant allows vampires to kill the one who transformed them?"

Faelon's only response was an impatient nod, so Rafe elaborated. "The challenge was instigated for several reasons. First, if a human is transformed against their will, destroying their maker reverses the transformation."

"But only after a hundred years?" She pursed her lips and shook her head. "What good is that? Everyone you know and love would be dead. The entire world would have changed."

"It takes that long for the transformation to stabilize." He slipped his hand under her hair and gently rubbed the tension building at the nape of her neck. The simple touch relaxed her neck, her shoulders and the upper portion of her back. He could make a fortune as a masseur. "Few who are truly unhappy survive that long."

"The challenge makes vampires very careful about who they transform."

Unwilling to deprive herself of Rafe's touch, she shifted her gaze toward Faelon as he spoke. "Rafe could have challenged you after his first hundred years?"

"He could have tried." Faelon grinned.

"Etoro's transformation wasn't reversed when he destroyed Cecilia," Jessie pointed out. "He's still a vampire."

"He wasn't transformed against his will," Rafe clarified. "If the challenge is won by a willing fledgling, they absorb the energy of their maker. Etoro knew organic vampires were the most powerful, so he spent his first hundred years hoarding energy in preparation for the challenge."

"Talk about premeditated. Damn." More and more she was curious about the Covenant. There was a lot more to vampires than drinking blood -- and phenomenal sex.

Weary regret aged Faelon's face. "Cecilia's destruction gave Natalie one more reason to hate us. Etoro's resentment of Rafe brought Etoro into her life and my unfaithfulness left her unprotected."

Jessie felt the weight of his loss and her heart gave a little flutter. *Kill me now. I'm feeling sorry for a vampire!*

Her sarcastic thought brought ferocity back to his eyes. He rolled his shoulders and flicked a dust bunny off his sleeve. "I harbor no illusions about my daughter's fate. Natalie must be stopped, which brings us to our final option. Organic vampires are much harder to kill than transformed vampires. I honestly believe our best chance of defeating Natalie is forming a three-way blood bond."

Chapter Eleven

"This won't make me a vampire?"

Rafe couldn't decide if her reaction amused or insulted him. "Having two cocks moving inside you and two sets of fangs sucking at your throat is less upsetting than becoming a vampire?"

"That's not what I meant." Faelon had taken them to the guest bedroom and instructed them to talk things over. If they decided on the three-way blood bond, Rafe had only to call out telepathically. If Faelon heard nothing, he would presume they'd chosen another course. "Faelon said we'd drink each other's blood. Won't that make me a vampire?"

"Not enough blood is exchanged during this sort of bonding to trigger the change. You'll take on some of his abilities and some of mine, but only temporarily."

She sat on the edge of the massive bed, her hands folded in her lap. Her head was slightly averted, so he couldn't see her eyes. He lightly touched her mind and found a veritable buffet of emotions, uncertainty and fascination, excitement and hesitation. Underlying it all was her indomitable spirit and the urgency of knowing Dalton's life hung in the balance.

"I've never been with two men before." She was calm and rational, even when faced with surreal obstacles. Rafe's admiration grew right alongside his desire.

"I didn't figure you had."

"But you and Faelon have shared Antonelli?"

"You know we have." He glanced toward the gilt framed mirror that dominated one wall. Were Faelon and Antonelli watching? He couldn't sense either at the moment, which made it likely they were in the small room on the other side of that wall. "Why do you bring it up now?"

“If we do this... if we form the three-way bond, will it change the way you feel about me?”

He moved to the bed, nudging her legs apart so he could frame her face between his hands. “I’m amazed by your loyalty and moved by your courage.” He stared into her eyes, revealing the depth of his emotions. “I’m not saying I want Faelon to share our pleasure every night, but this will in no way diminish the way I feel about you.”

“Do you trust him? Is this the best way to combat Natalie and Etoro?”

“I trust Faelon with my life, and yours.” He brushed his lips against hers. “He isn’t just trying to get in your pants.”

“Then, let’s get it over with. The longer we delay, the longer --”

“Get it over with?” Faelon’s question made Rafe smile and turn around. Dressed in a royal blue robe, Faelon stood in front of the enormous mirror, confirming Rafe’s suspicion that Faelon had been watching them. “What an insult. If Rafe’s touch has been so unskilled you wish to get it over with, he is in desperate need of a refresher course.”

Jessie stood and walked toward Faelon, her eyes wide, lips parted. “The mirror thing is superstition too.”

Faelon’s back was clearly reflected in the mirror. “Encouraging vampire lore has always been a valuable way of -- hiding in plain sight. It would be impossible to convince every human that vampires don’t exist, so we convolute the truth and camouflage ourselves in legends.”

“Rafe said vampires aren’t immortal. What does it take to kill one?”

“Incineration, decapitation, or the removal of the heart are the three injuries from which a vampire cannot regenerate.”

She accepted the information with a stiff nod. “Are there specific steps we have to take to form this bond? I didn’t mean to insult you before. I’m just worried about Dalton and I don’t want Rafe to...”

Rafe joined them in front of the mirror, caressing her face with his gaze. “I’ve been forming blood bonds for centuries, but I know this is all new to you. I want you to

be as comfortable as possible before we begin. Faelon's mental control is unmatched. If you allow him to touch your mind, he might be able to guide you to Dalton."

"A wise suggestion." Faelon reached for her hand. "If you are sure your friend is well, will you be able to relax?"

She licked her lips and glanced at Rafe. "I'll try."

"Look at me and don't close your eyes." Shifting her gaze back to Faelon, she pressed her lips together and swayed. "Think of the last time you saw him, remember the last words he spoke, what he was wearing, how he smelled."

Rafe watched her closely, resisting the impulse to meld with her mind. Until they had formed the three-way bond, his presence would only distract her. He didn't want to be jealous of Dalton, but Jessie's devotion to her ex-partner annoyed him.

"Is that him?" Faelon was asking.

"Yes," Jessie whispered. "It's a hotel room. Can you tell which one?"

"I have no idea." Faelon released her hand and glanced in the mirror. Antonelli must still be watching them. "He was irritable, but unharmed."

"The irritable part is not unusual for Dalton." She touched Faelon's arm and smiled. "Thank you."

He inclined his head. "Are you ready, or do you need a bit more time to adjust to the idea?"

"I'm not sure I'll ever adjust to the idea, so let's just go for it." Jessie stared at their reflections in the mirror fascinated by all the contrasts. Rafe stood a step back from them, watchful, darkly handsome. The gold streaks in Faelon's brown hair were about the same color as her wavy tresses. Faelon was half a head taller than Rafe who was half a head taller than her. Rafe was by far the most physically attractive, but Faelon emanated power and authority.

So what the hell am I doing here?

Rafe came up behind her and wrapped his arm around her waist. Their gazes met in the mirror. "You really don't see how beautiful you are?"

"Antonelli is beautiful. You're beautiful. I'm..."

“Strong, fiercely loyal, extraordinary.” Rafe tilted her head up and back, covering her mouth with his. She twisted her torso, without turning around, parting her lips for his tongue and curving her fingers around his neck.

Faelon unbuttoned her blouse, then eased his hands between her and Rafe to unclasp her bra. She went right on kissing Rafe, concentrating on the sweet intimacy of his mouth, his breath, his tongue. This was necessary. Was she supposed to enjoy the warm brush of Faelon’s fingers or the heat radiating from his body?

I’m right here with you. We’re sharing this experience. There’s nothing disloyal in what we’re doing.

Faelon eased her jeans down over her hips, taking her panties with them. Years of strict morality contradicted Rafe’s reassurance. This felt wicked and daring. Her nipples tingled and moist heat gathered between her thighs.

“Watch me, Jessie,” Faelon whispered. “Look at yourself in the mirror. See the beauty you truly possess.”

Blinking the into focus, Jessie gasped. Faelon had shed his robe and he knelt on the folded garment. Candlelight gleamed off his long, lean body. Rafe raised both her hands to the back of his neck, lifting her breasts and arching her spine. His dark gaze moved over her naked reflection, ravenous and appreciative.

She focused on herself, forcing aside all preconceptions and just looking at her body in the mirror. Her skin was smooth and golden, marred only by faint tan lines. Long and toned, she’d always been proud of her legs. Her hips flared and her tummy was slightly rounded, but her torso was narrow, her breasts high and round.

“Put your foot on my shoulder.”

Rafe cupped both her breasts and steadied her against his chest. This was going to get a lot more wanton before the bond was formed. She bent her knee and raised her foot to Faelon’s shoulder.

“Ah, yes.” He stroked down her inner thigh. She followed his progress in the mirror as tingles fanned out across her skin. He traced her slit with his middle finger. The simple touch accented the ache gathering in her core. She glanced at Rafe. His dark

eyes glowed with just a hint of purple. Faelon pushed his finger into her pussy and she closed her eyes. "No. Watch me. Watch your cream coat my finger; watch your cunt swallow me whole."

She trembled. Her cunt was eager to swallow more than his finger. Each slow, teasing slide made her inner muscles pulse for the fullness of a thick, hard cock. He pumped. She watched, mesmerized by the graphic display.

Without warning, he withdrew his finger and hooked both her legs over his shoulders. She cried out, shocked by the erotic pose. Rafe held her against Faelon's face as the master vampire feasted. Faelon's hands steadied her hips, but she was literally draped across his face. His mouth moved against her folds, his tongue steadily thrusting.

His lips kept her open, accessibly to the bold exploration of his tongue. He stroked the velvety walls of her core, retreated to circle her clit, then pushed inside again. On and on he drove her, building the pressure until it bordered on pain.

"Oh, oh god!" She came hard, her thighs flexing against Faelon's cheeks. He grabbed the back of her knees and shifted the angle of her hips, drawing her cum into his mouth. Growling deep in his throat, he licked and sucked until the last tingle of her orgasm passed.

Rafe lifted her off Faelon's face, cradling in his arms. "If this gets too intense, let us know and we'll slow down." He kissed her with tender reassurance and Jessie clung to him. Where had his clothes gone? She couldn't remember him taking time to undress.

Faelon positioned the padded vanity bench in front of the mirror. Rafe placed her on the bench on her back. "Is there some reason we're not using the bed?"

"I like to watch." Faelon grinned.

Rafe knelt on the floor at one end of the bench and Faelon pulled Jessie toward him until her head angled off the other end. Jessie reached for Faelon's erection, but he guided her hands to his hips instead. "I want your mouth, little fledgling, not your fingers."

She relaxed against the bench and let the men position her. Whenever she thought about being dominated by a lover, she'd imagined resenting the passivity required of a sub. Oddly, she found it liberating. All she had to do was enjoy.

Opening her legs wide before he hooked her ankles behind his neck, Rafe paused to explore her folds with his fingers. Jessie couldn't really see what he was doing, until she looked in the mirror. Faelon had positioned the bench to display her body for --

"Is Antonelli behind the mirror?" She tried to sit up, but Faelon held her down. "How many people are enjoying this show?"

"Whenever I'm with another lover, Antonelli either participates or watches. It's an agreement we made long ago. Her participation would complicate the bonding and we thought you would be more comfortable without her in the room."

Rafe parted her folds and licked from her anus to her clit with one slow stroke. "Does it upset you that she's watching?" he asked without raising his head from between her thighs.

She pictured the petite blonde on the other side of the mirror, watching her mate pleasure another woman. Was she touching herself? Did she have a vibrator or dildo? "Is it only Antonelli?"

"Yes." Faelon rubbed his cock against her lips. "Would you rather she join us?"

With a guilty shake of her head, she opened her mouth and closed her eyes. Faelon pushed all the way to the back of her throat before slowly drawing back. Rafe circled her clit, shooting sensations up her spine with each pass of his clever tongue. Jessie matched the movement of Rafe's tongue, synchronizing the carnal dance. Faelon slid, Rafe licked, and Jessie sucked. Two warm hands cupped her breasts, but she couldn't be sure whose. The hands shifted, surrounding her breasts, while fingers plucked her nipples. Four hands, two men, this was all so overwhelming.

Faelon moved faster, his cock rubbing against her tongue, nudging the back of her throat at the apex of each thrust. Rafe caught her clit between his teeth, flicking his tongue over the sensitive nub, while Faelon pinched her nipples.

She squirmed, restless and hot. Only a few minutes had passed since her first orgasm. She couldn't be ready to come again. Faelon supported the back of her head as he thrust into her throat. His cum jetted out in hot, rhythmic spurts. She shuddered, swallowing again and again.

Tingling heat sank to her stomach, then fanned out across her abdomen. Rafe lifted her pussy to his mouth, swirling his tongue inside her core. Languid waves washed over her, sweeping her along on currents of pleasure. It could have been minutes or hours, she honestly couldn't say.

"This bench isn't going to work for the rest," Faelon said, easing his cock out of her mouth. He scooped her up in his arms as Rafe pushed to his feet.

Rafe sat on the foot of the bed and watched as Faelon approached with Jessie cradled in his arms. "I don't think she's ever had anyone in her ass, so make sure you prepare her really well."

Faelon chuckled, his passion bright gaze shifting to Jessie. "Is this true? Will I be the first?"

"The first and most likely the last. I've never been interested in anal play."

His eyebrows arched and a smile curved his lips. "How can you dismiss what you've never tried?"

"This isn't about sexual liberation. I'm trying to save the life of my friend."

"Of course."

Jessie narrowed her eyes. She *was* only doing this because they needed the bond to save Dalton. She wasn't enjoying... her tingling body branded her a liar. Everything they'd done so far had been shockingly pleasurable.

"Don't encourage her to talk or she'll analyze this to death." Rafe lowered himself to his back, his feet dangling over the side of the bed. "I'm the only one who hasn't come yet. I'm feeling a bit neglected."

Faelon chuckled and set Jessie down on top of him, straddling his hips. "Would you like my assistance with this, or do you know what to do with that?" He nodded toward the world-class hard-on extending nearly to Rafe's navel.

Jessie took a moment to stroke Rafe's cock before she shifted her weight to her knees and positioned him at her entrance. Supporting herself against Rafe's shoulders and staring into his dark eyes, she lowered her body onto his throbbing cock. He didn't move, didn't try to help or hurry her. He simply poured desire across their mental link and let her take him.

Her inner muscles opened for him, caressed him. He shuddered beneath her. "Fuck! That feels good." She smiled and tightened her pussy, squeezing him as tight as she could. He groaned. "And that feels even better."

"Lie down across his chest and try to relax, or better yet kiss him." Faelon rested one hand on her hip, waiting for her to comply.

She lowered her mouth to Rafe's and pushed her fingers into his hair. The comforting familiarity of their kiss didn't quite distract her from what Faelon was doing. He parted her ass cheeks and smeared something slippery around her anus, then he eased a slender object into her hole. A warm gush followed and she realized he was lubricating her for his cock, the same, long, thick cock she could barely fit in her mouth.

We won't let you feel anything but pleasure. Relax and kiss me.

Faelon stroked her back with one hand while he prepared her with the other. First one finger, then two stretched her tight hole. He slid in and out, twisted, spread his fingers. "One more, then we'll try the real thing. Just keep kissing Rafe."

She felt more of the warm lubricant enter with his third finger. She felt pressure and movement, but no stinging pain. Faelon withdrew his fingers with slow deliberation and pushed the head of his cock past her sphincter while it was still relaxed.

Jessie gasped. His shaft was much bigger than his fingers. She felt stretched, stuffed, filled. He grasped her butt cheeks with both hands and soothing heat swirled up through her anus and lodged in her clit.

Now, that's a nice trick.

Rafe chuckled, his cock bobbing inside her.

“Liked that, did you?” Faelon did it again, increasing the intensity of the sensation.

Her clit throbbed, her cunt pulsed, and her anus tightened, all at the same time. She pushed up against Rafe’s chest dazed and breathless. “What now?”

They gave her no warning, but some silent signal passed between them. They lunged at exactly the same time. Rafe reared up and sank his fangs into her throat, while Faelon claimed her shoulder. Jessie screamed. Pleasure exploded in her body, zinging through her bloodstream like fiery darts. Part of her demanded she struggle, twist and writhe like a wild thing. Another part reveled in the ancient power surrounding her.

Together they sucked, long, deep pulls that triggered pulses of pleasure all over her body. Faelon cupped her breasts, holding her motionless. Impaled on their hard cocks, trapped by their sharp fangs, Jessie could only surrender.

Faelon brushed her nipples with his thumbs and she came, crying out with pleasure. Rafe eased his fingers between their bodies and rubbed her clit. With a harsh gasp she came again. They released her at exactly the same time. A purple mist hovered around them.

The room spun. Faelon held his wrist against her mouth and she struggled. Hot and bitter -- they expected her to swallow blood! She shook her head. He held her firmly, pressing hard with his wrist.

The metallic smell filled her head. She couldn’t breathe. Gasping, she parted her lips and blood filled her mouth. *No!* She shook and gagged as the grotesque liquid slid down her throat. Fire ignited within her chest. Her vision blurred, then snapped into vivid clarity, shocking and surreal.

Faelon pulled his wrist away and pushed her down on top of Rafe. “Hold her. She’s still resisting the effects.”

Rafe’s arms wrapped around her as Faelon moved in her ass. She was so hot. Each firm thrust of Faelon’s cock accented the heat. Clutching the covers beside Rafe, she tried to make sense of it all. Her heart thundered in her chest, painful, demanding,

but demanding what? She pressed her face against Rafe's throat, comforted by his familiar smell.

"Lick my skin, sweetheart," Rafe coaxed. "Your body knows what to do."

Her breasts swelled against his chest and tension gathered low in her belly. She'd always been amazed when she had more than one orgasm. This was impossible.

"Taste will trigger the rest. Lick me."

She stroked Rafe's neck with the flat of her tongue and hunger slammed into her gut. Turning his face to the side, she bit him hard, piercing his throat with fangs she hadn't realized she had.

"Yes!" Faelon pulled her hips up, sliding her cunt along Rafe's length. He guided her back down as he pulled nearly out of her ass.

The tension burst and her whole body trembled. He moved faster, sliding her back and forth, pulling her off one cock as he pushed her onto the other. Jessie was acutely aware of every sensation, yet everything seemed jumbled, twisting in on itself like a child's kaleidoscope.

"Stop or you'll trigger the transformation." Rafe's voice sounded shaky and hoarse.

She licked the blood off her lips and pushed against his chest so she could look into his eyes. The link opened suddenly; their bodies jerking with one violent start. Faelon's savage hunger frightened her. He wanted to ravage her, conquer her in ways Rafe would never consider. Rafe took her face between his hands, his gaze warm and tender.

Look at me, think only of me. I will never let anyone hurt you.

They moved together, strengthening the blood bond with each thrust, each emotion transmitted across the mental link. Jessie stared into Rafe's eyes, amazed at his control. The fullness shocked her. How was her body able to accommodate this frenzy?

"Now!" Faelon yelled. "We must all come together."

Rafe clutched her hips, Faelon held her waist, and Jessie arched her back. Pleasure passed from Faelon, through Jessie, burst in Rafe, then returned. They clung to each other, both men buried to the hilt as they pumped their seed into her pulsing body.

Chapter Twelve

Being a vampire had its advantages. Both men turned into mist and reappeared a moment later clean and dry. Jessie glared at them and Rafe laughed. He took her by the hand and led her into the adjoining bathroom. Even though he was already clean, he joined her in the shower, insisting on scrubbing her still tingling body.

“When will my temporary powers manifest?” she asked as he worked shampoo through her thick hair.

“It’s hard to say. You don’t feel any different?”

She smiled, glad he was behind her. “I ache in places I have no business aching, but I don’t feel super strong or like I could fly.”

“I doubt flight will develop. It’s a very rare ability.” He turned her toward him and pressed her against his body while the water rinsed the suds away. “Did Faelon hurt you? He’s usually very careful.”

Blinking away the water and shook her head. “There was no pain, just like you promised. I thought the illusion you implanted was intense. This was... unbelievable.” They just held each other for a long time, enjoying the warm rush of the water. “Maybe a small toy.”

“What?”

She pushed back and smiled. “If we want to be adventurous, maybe we can get a toy.”

He kissed her deeply, his tongue sliding over hers. “We’ve got the rest of our lives to explore all the things that please us and disregard the things that don’t.”

“I’ve got to ask you something before I forget.”

He chuckled. “Why doesn’t that surprise me?”

“Why do you hate reporters? You treated me like shit when you thought I was one.”

“Private investigators aren’t much better.” He nipped her lower lip as the warm water massaged their bodies. “You said it yourself when I mentioned Etoro’s threat to expose me. For centuries it would have been his word against mine. As soon as film was invented all that changed. He’s made a fortune turning me in to various reporters and news publications. It’s a regular pain in the ass.”

“Then vampires can be recorded on film?”

He laughed. “Haven’t you ever seen a Pyrite video?”

“Good point.” A soft female giggle sounded in Jessie’s mind. “Antonelli just crawled into bed with Faelon.”

Rafe tilted his head, his gaze moving toward the bathroom door. “You’re right, but how did you know?”

“You didn’t hear her laugh?”

“Nope.”

“Apparently my abilities have started to manifest.”

Rafe dried her off and took her back into the bedroom. Jessie wasn’t sure what to expect, but Antonelli naked and unabashedly sucking her mate’s cock was a bit shocking. Faelon caressed her hair as she swallowed his entire shaft with expert skill.

“Shame is a human concept,” Rafe said softly. “Vampires enjoy sex.”

Feeling particularly liberated by the recent experience, Jessie nodded toward the other couple. “Kneel behind her and make her come. She watched us perform. It’s only fair.”

“Are you sure?”

“Oh, yes. I want to watch you lick her pussy.”

Rafe hesitated another minute, but Antonelli shifted position, bringing her body closer to the edge of the bed. Rafe knelt behind her and parted her dusky folds. Jessie swallowed hard. She’d watched an adult movie or two. This was completely different. Heat pooled between her thighs and her nipples tingled as Rafe licked Antonelli’s slit.

Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. She hadn't thought she was capable of getting turned on again after all the orgasms she'd just had. Rafe kept his head angled so she could see his tongue. He circled Antonelli's opening, then focused on her clit. He licked, using only the tip of his tongue, so Jessie could watch him.

Faelon cried out and thrust deep, signaling his release. "Now, see what you started." He pulled out of Antonelli's mouth. Rafe flipped her over and pushed her legs up and back, spreading her wide for his hungry mouth.

Faelon stalked toward Jessie, a predator's smile parting his lips. "You learn quickly, little fledgling, but I can smell your arousal. No one goes unsatisfied in my home."

Antonelli said something to Rafe and he nodded. They quickly repositioned. She straddled his face and took his cock into her mouth as Faelon pushed Jessie up against the wall. He arched his brow and lifted her leg to his shoulder. "Watch them. That's what you wanted." His mouth settled over her slit and her gaze drifted back to the bed. Rafe's thick cock slid in and out of Antonelli's mouth. He wet his middle finger in her pussy and pushed it up her ass. She made a sound... half cry, half purr.

Faelon's tongue teased Jessie's folds and flicked over her clit. She couldn't see exactly what Rafe was doing now, but it didn't matter. Sensations pulsed from Antonelli to Faelon and he passed them on to Jessie. Dizzying, intoxicating, carnal, they abandoned themselves to the pleasure. A short, sharp orgasm burst in Jessie. Faelon didn't stop. He pulled her more firmly against his mouth and began to feed.

Rafe came in Antonelli's mouth, then wrapped his arms around her hips. The men were both feeding, Jessie realized, feasting on female passion. She cupped her breasts and watched Antonelli. The other woman rose, rocking against Rafe's mouth, so her cum flowed more freely. She shuddered, her head thrown back, hair streaming to her hips.

With one final lick, Faelon lowered Jessie's leg to the floor. He turned and watched the two on the bed. "Antonelli has learned to enjoy being food for vampires."

"I can see that."

Faelon strode back to the bed. "Enough. My indulgence only extends so far." He lifted his mate off Rafe's face and lay down with her, wrapping his big body around her. He made one firm thrust with his hips and then fell asleep.

Rafe crooked his finger, motioning her toward the bed. "I need to sleep too."

"So, sleep." She teased as she climbed onto the high mattress. He pulled her into a position identical to Faelon and Antonelli. He pressed his body against her back, slipped one arm beneath her neck and the other around her waist. Easing her thighs apart, with the same firm thrust of his hips, he impaled her with his cock.

Stunned, Jessie stared at Antonelli. "They always sleep like this?"

She smiled, her blue eyes shining. "As often as they can. He'll make it worth your while when he wakes up."

"And I swore I wouldn't turn groupie," she whispered.

Antonelli chuckled. "This isn't about Rafe's band and you know it. Your motives are noble and pure."

"Pure?" Jessie laughed. "That's a hard word to apply to what just happened in this bed."

"You'll get used to it." Antonelli moved Faelon's hand to her breast and wiggled her bottom, no doubt bringing his cock deeper inside her. "You must remember one thing when the battle begins."

The battle, the reason for everything she had done today. "What's that?"

"Faelon has accepted that Natalie is beyond redemption, but he would rather not take her life. If there is any other way, please spare him that horror. She is still his daughter."

Jessie nodded and closed her eyes.

* * *

"I'm not telepathic." Antonelli held perfectly still as Natalie pressed her blade into the delicate skin of her throat. "No one can hear us down here. Why won't you believe me?"

“I do believe you, but my father is incredibly attuned to what happens to you.” Natalie clutched the handle of the knife until her fingers ached. “He always has been.” So what had him so distracted? He should have sensed the danger as soon as she summoned his precious Antonelli.

The entrance to the smugglers’ tunnel had been bricked up, but once inside the dank passage led right to the old wine cellar. Natalie had spent half her childhood exploring these musty tunnels. Faelon had blood allies protecting the mansion, but the cellar door had been sealed by Faelon himself after he returned to the estate three hundred years before.

A mistake that would cost him his life.

Natalie’s biological connection to Faelon allowed her to manipulate his energy. She weakened the seal enough to enter the wine cellar without alerting the guards. This was a good plan. She wasn’t going to be flustered by a minor delay.

Lowering the knife, Natalie shoved Antonelli into Etoro’s arms. “Bend her over that half rack and rape her. Don’t stop raping her until they run to her rescue.”

The color drained from Etoro’s face. “I -- can’t.”

“She’s a whore! Not only does she fuck everything that gets her wet, she teaches others to enjoy her depravity. She’s a twisted slut and --”

“I can’t force myself on a woman. I’ve tried. My dick goes limp as soon as I smell their fear.”

Natalie shook her head. “Why doesn’t that surprise me?” She could compel them into a sexual frenzy, but that wouldn’t alert Faelon. His human whore lived in a state of perpetual lubrication. “You’re useless.” She sneered at Etoro. Without the element of surprise on their side, the close quarters of the wine cellar became a liability. This had to be fast and focused. She’d commanded the guards to sleep, but they wouldn’t remain incapacitated indefinitely. “Grab her by the hair. If she gets away from you, I’ll make you pay in ways you can’t imagine.”

“Don’t threaten me. I’m not your lackey.”

He was less than that, but she wasn't going to argue with him. Adjusting her hold on her long, lethal knife, she headed up the stairs. Guns were useless when it came to vampires. Swords worked well, but they were cumbersome.

"Why are you doing this?" Antonelli's shrill voice was really starting to grate.

No sooner had they reached the top of the stairs than her father appeared in front of them, Rafe and Jessie two steps behind. Daddy had sensed her arrival after all.

With a cop's shrewd assessment, Jessie studied the enemy. Hate burned in Natalie's eyes, belying her delicate appearance. The long, sharp looking knife in her fist only added to the contrast. A tall, dark-haired man clutched Antonelli by the hair. This must be Etoro.

"Isn't this touching?" Natalie drawled. "Come to watch us gut your whore? You might have kept her alive long past her prime, but she's still *human*."

"Your argument is with me." Faelon's fists clenched and his nostrils flared. "There is no reason to hurt Antonelli."

"Really." Natalie reached over and casually sliced the upper curve of Antonelli's breast. Antonelli shrieked, writhing in Etoro's arms. "This bitch has been enjoying my inheritance for the past three hundred years. Mother wasn't strong enough to destroy you, but I assure you I am."

Faelon turned his glowing gaze on Etoro. "*Turn her loose. This is not your fight.*"

Etoro's fingers relaxed as he shook his head, battling the compulsion. Antonelli jerked out of his grasp and ran behind Faelon.

"You fool!" Natalie yelled. "Your mind is so weak you cannot --"

Etoro backhanded her onto the floor, knocking her knife out of her hand. "I've heard enough of your insults."

Rafe charged Natalie as she scrambled for the knife. Faelon and Jessie both lunged for Etoro. His back slammed into the wall, denting the plaster and knocking down pictures. Jessie heard Natalie scream, but she kept her eyes fixed on her target.

"*You will sleep,*" Faelon commanded Etoro.

Etoro's eyelids drooped, but again he resisted the compulsion.

"Take the knife and help Rafe. I can control this one."

Faelon has accepted that Natalie is beyond redemption, but he would rather not take her life. If there is any other way, please spare him that horror. She is still his daughter. Remembering Antonelli's request, Jessie released her hold on Etoro and stepped back. Antonelli handed her the knife.

Rafe and Natalie battled in the foyer. Her long nails had shredded his arms and blood ran from the corner of her mouth. She jumped shoulder high, attempting to kick him in the face. He caught her ankle and slammed her against the marble floor.

Decapitation, incineration, or removal of the heart, Jessie could only accomplish one with Natalie's knife. Rafe pinned Natalie to the floor, forcing her face to one side. He released a terrifying snarl and sank his fangs into her throat. He'd angled his body, so Natalie's chest was accessible, his expectation clear.

Jessie shuddered, then thought of Bellita and all the other young lives she'd stolen. Rushing to Natalie's other side, Jessie sank the blade hilt deep into her chest. Natalie shrieked and bucked, twisting wildly.

"Help hold her." Faelon knelt beside her and tried to brush her hands aside.

"You hold her," Jessie insisted. "I'll do it." And she did. With frightening efficiency, Jessie removed Natalie's heart. The skill must have been part of the blood bond. Her hands moved of their own volition.

Faelon wiped his face with his sleeve, unshed tears shining in his eyes. "Thank you," he said and then cleared his throat, continuing in a much stronger tone. "To my knowledge no vampire has ever recovered from such a wound, but we will burn her body just in case."

"To your knowledge is right," Etoro mocked. "And you don't know nearly as much as you think."

Jessie threw the knife, imbedding it in Etoro's shoulder. *Damn, that was cool!* More blood bond skills, no doubt.

"I have no authority to punish you," Faelon snarled. "Your fate is for the council to decide." Etoro was bound securely in rope Faelon must have manifested.

"Do you know what he's talking about?" Rafe remained on his knees beside Natalie's body. Had Etoro's taunt given him pause or had the fight exhausted him?

"He will be interrogated by the council." Faelon looked at Jessie. "If you decide to make the transformation real, I'll recommend you for the position." She smiled, but his expression remained serious. "You are ideally suited for the job."

Four burly guards burst through the front door and Antonelli threw herself into Faelon's arms, ending the conversation.

Rafe took Jessie by the hand and led her away from the bloody foyer. "Wait! Where's Dalton?" Without missing a step, they crossed to Etoro, who was still seated against the wall. Emulating the tone Faelon had used, she looked into Etoro's defiant eyes. "*Is Dalton still alive?*"

He pressed his lips together and closed his eyes.

"*You will answer my questions or the pressure squeezing your balls will gradually increase.*" She paused for a second to watch him squirm. "Is Dalton harmed?"

"No!" He gasped and twisted his hips. "He's a little beat up, but alive. Now, make it stop."

"Where is he?"

"Red Lion Lodge. Stop, make it stop!"

She deactivated the compulsion.

Rafe whistled long and low. "Damn. You are good at that."

"I'll send a car for your friend." Amusement sparkled in Faelon's eyes. He stood with his arm around Antonelli's waist, her head rested on his shoulder. "Do you want him to know where you are?"

"I'll call him later. Just let him know I'm fine."

Faelon nodded and escorted Antonelli down the hall. Natalie's body was gone and the guards picked up Etoro, carrying him across the foyer. Jessie glanced at the blood stain that hadn't yet been scrubbed away.

“Can we go take a shower?”

“We don’t have to stay here,” Rafe said, his gaze filled with concern. “I’ll take you home.”

“After last night and what just happened here, I think you better sleep for a while.”

“As long as you’re willing to help me recuperate, I’m up for anything.”

She pulled him against her and smiled into his eyes. “Why, yes you are.”

Epilogue

"I suspect you'll be spending more time here than at the band house," Jessie whispered. She was stretched out on her back with Rafe cradled between her thighs. His hands covered her breasts and his lips explored her belly.

He raised his head, his features utterly expressionless. "Why would I do that?"

She laughed. "Because your descent ends there unless you admit that you're addicted to me."

They'd hardly left this bed in four days. Since returning from Italy, they'd spent every moment together, exploring each other's bodies and minds with ravenous enthusiasm.

"You think so?"

Silken cords coiled about her wrists, pulling her arms up and out. "That's not fair. My powers are all but gone."

He slipped his hands beneath her bottom and rocked back onto his knees. "You have all the power you need. I look into your eyes and I can think of nothing but your happiness. I touch your warm, soft skin and I have to taste you. I taste you and I have to have more, always more."

She tugged against the cords as he draped her legs over his shoulders. He loved binding her and she loved being bound. Despite her pleas and hoarse demands, he took his time when she was helpless, setting a slow, titillating pace that drove her out of her mind.

Working his way down along her inner thighs, he alternated between kisses, licks and bites until she arched and groaned with each combination. The abilities afforded her by the three-way blood bond might have faded, but their alliance was still active. She felt his rising desire, his excitement in her response.

Intoxicating indeed. As if his skilled touch wasn't potent enough, knowing how well she pleased him sent her senses reeling.

"I'll never tire of your silky skin." He parted her folds with his thumbs and pushed his tongue into her pussy. Circling his tongue inside her, he touched and tasted, caressing her. "Your taste is exquisite." He chuckled. "I guess I am addicted to you."

He let her come almost immediately, which told her in no uncertain terms how much he wanted her. With her legs still hooked over his shoulders, he gazed into her eyes. "Am I lost in this addiction alone?"

"No," she whispered. "I need you every bit as much as you need me."

He smiled, that lazy, wicked smile that melted her bones and made her heart pound. Lifting her hips off the bed, he drove his cock into her snug passage. They sighed together, savoring the penetration, then he moved with strong, even strokes.

"Let my legs down." She panted. "I want to move."

"And I want this to last more than a nanosecond."

Steadying her hips, he rocked in and out, in and out. She opened her mind, feeling his pleasure as well as her own. They completed each other, giving and taking with equal fervor. She arched her back and he suckled her breasts. She tightened her inner muscles and he thrust faster. Words were unnecessary. They let their bodies communicate while their hearts reveled in the wonder of sharing.

He covered her mouth with his. She greeted his tongue with an affectionate curl of her own. He tasted of spiced wine and passion, her passion. She canted her hips, feeling the heated slide of his body in hers.

I'm addicted to your heat and the firm grip of your pussy as you come.

As if by command, her body exploded in orgasm, squeezing his cock in rippling waves. He thrust deep and echoed her release with his own.

After a long, breathless minute of utter bliss, he shifted her legs to his waist and released her hands with a mental command. His mouth lingered on hers, kissing and nibbling. She combed her fingers through his hair and enjoyed the fullness of his shaft inside her.

He suddenly groaned and rested his forehead against her shoulder.

"What's the matter?" She pushed against him, but he wouldn't lift his head.

"I have to go to work tomorrow."

She laughed. "Poor baby."

"And you better have a drink with Dalton." He rolled to her side, his head propped up on his hand. "I think he's half convinced I'm holding you hostage."

"Wasn't I tied up just a minute ago?"

"You enjoy being tied up and we both know it."

"Only with you, always with you." Licking her lips she rolled to her side as well.

"I know you spoke with Faelon earlier. What did the council decide to do with Etoro?"

"He was ruled beyond redemption."

"Which means?"

"His life was forfeit."

"I guess I should be relieved, but in honesty I feel nothing. I'm glad he was apprehended, but it doesn't bring his victims back." Rafe nodded, tucking her hair behind her ear. "Did they learn what he was babbling about? Has a vampire survived the removal of their heart?"

"According to Etoro, Natalie rescued Kyrel from the assassin and spirited him away to 'a place where no one can harm him.' Etoro admitted he didn't actually see this miracle, but Faelon said he was surprisingly convincing."

"So, Etoro bought into her delusions." Jessie shrugged one shoulder. "There hasn't been another attack since the ambush. Isn't that what matters?"

"Not to me." He pulled her into his arms. "I'm glad the attacks have stopped, but what matters most to me is right here."

The End... for now

Coming Soon

A Taste of Midnight

Brenna Skyler, Mistress Air, chose ambition over love. To become an Elemental, the most exalted position among the Unseleighe Sidhe, Brenna had to end her scandalous affair with Phillip Noir, a vampire. She has never stopped loving him, but she was convinced she made the right decision -- until now.

A vampire is preying on Dark Elf females. He captures them, rapes them, and infects them with his blood, creating appalling hybrids unlike anything the Unseleighe Sidhe have ever encountered before. It takes a vampire to track a vampire, so the High Council turns to Mistress Air.

Phillip is thrilled when Brenna comes crawling back to him. He's not used to playing the jilted lover. Good enough to screw, but not good enough to be Brenna's mate, he'd been nursing a long overdue need to settle old scores. And now she needs his help. He doesn't mind destroying a rogue vampire -- it's the right thing to do -- but Brenna needs a lesson in humility. She'll pay for her callous rejection. If only he can remember he's not still in love with her...

Aubrey Ross

Multi-award winning author Aubrey Ross writes an eclectic assortment of erotic fiction. From sinister power struggles between demonic clans, to adventurous Mystic Keepers, her books are filled with passion and imagination. Release your inhibitions and let her stories take you where only dreamers dare to soar.

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