



Loose Id

Flirting With
DANGER
SAMARA KING

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Samara King

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Published by
Loose Id LLC
1802 N Carson Street, Suite 212-2924
Carson City NV 89701-1215
www.loose-id.com

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ISBN 978-1-59632-324-7

Available in Adobe PDF, HTML, MobiPocket, and MS Reader

Printed in the United States of America

Editor: Maryam Salim
Cover Artist: April Martinez

Dedication

To Claudia, Kenya, and Melissa

Your support means the world to me!

Prologue

“Oh!” A gasp caught in Arieona “Aries” Roman’s throat as waves of ecstasy crashed down over her, drowning her senses. She rested her head on her arm, trying to be still as the seductive cadence of the man’s deep thrusts against her backside caused delicious shudders to slide down her spine.

Aries was ready to burst. The love she felt in her heart for him almost overwhelmed her. Her eyes filled. She couldn’t remember ever being this happy, so full of life. Until he’d walked into her life.

Quentin De Leon.

“You’re so tight,” he said between clenched teeth.

She smiled, loving the tension building between their slick bodies. It was one of the hottest nights of the summer, yet she couldn’t imagine any place feeling as heated as she was right now. Her fists twisted in the sheets. Sweat licked her brow as Quentin teased her clit with smooth strokes of his fingertips.

“Quentin! Ahhh! Yes!”

She backed her curvy ass against him and gyrated, taking his cock deeper into her moist heat. Her need to feel him within every crevice of her body consumed her like a

madwoman. She craved him and only him. The need to come vibrated through every cell of her body. She came with a force that left her speechless.

Loving him was as natural as breathing.

Quentin didn't stop pumping inside of her slick walls, but slowed his pace, driving into her with infinite tenderness.

He was making her crazy. His insatiable passion made her wonder if she'd be able to keep a man like him satisfied. She felt him shudder and smiled. She loved the feel of his cock but was addicted to the sensation of his seed covering her body like a protective shield. He made her feel safe.

To know that this time tomorrow, she would be his for the rest of her life made her heart fill with joy.

"Aries!" Quentin shouted before leaning against her, bracing himself with his forearms to keep from crushing her with his full weight. He rolled over onto his back and pulled her into his strong arms. He kissed her mouth, licking and nipping her bottom lip. "I've never felt like this."

She grinned, thinking that was quite a compliment for a three-hundred-year-old vampire to divulge such a thing. "You do know how to give a girl quite an ego boost, De Leon."

Quentin chuckled.

"I've never felt this way about anyone either, but then I've never wanted to share my life with a man before or marry one."

He went still. The atmosphere in her bedroom changed, dulling the heat wave between them into an arctic chill.

"What is it?" Aries asked. "You aren't having second thoughts, are you?"

Quentin turned to face her. He stared so long that she began to worry that all the bad thoughts roaming her head were just milliseconds from occurring. "I love you."

Her heart sped up. God, she didn't consider herself a sap but when she heard him say those three little words, she was the happiest woman in the world. Finally, she could say that she knew what love was. He'd taught her. "I love you too."

"There are things that I can't tell you, Aries...about my job."

"Yes, we've talked about this before."

"I know but..." He looked into her eyes. "I've pledged my loyalty to the Scepter and I can't betray them."

Her eyebrows rose. He almost sounded like he was talking about another woman. "I would never ask you to."

"You say that now."

She sat up on the bed, folding her arms across her naked breasts. "Are you telling me that I don't know my own mind?"

"No, I'm saying that time has a way of changing people."

"So not only do I not know my own mind but I'm flighty?"

"Aries, despite my best intentions, there are some factors about my job beyond my control and yours."

"Quentin, if this isn't second thoughts then what is going on?"

He sat up beside her, placing his arm around her waist, pulling her closer. She resisted for a moment before succumbing to his touch. "Before you, I never had a reason to think of the things I had sacrificed in the line of duty. My missions always came first."

"Are you saying that you'd choose your job over me?" Aries asked.

Silence.

"I would never let it come to that." Quentin leaned over to kiss her lips gently. He pulled back to gaze into her eyes. "I love you too much to let you go. Tomorrow I plan to show you just how much."

She smiled, nudging the hard tips of her nipples against him. “All I really want right now is to feel you naked against me.”

Quentin threw back the covers, straddled Aries, and pushed her down on the pillows. “I can’t think of a better way to spend my last day as a free man.”

She smacked him on the arm, grinning. “I could rectify that with some rope.” She leaned forward to kiss his lips. “You wouldn’t be free for long.”

“I love it when you talk dirty.”

* * * * *

“Wow!” Aries looked at her reflection in the full-length mirror. She cleaned up pretty good for a first-time bride. She smiled; her gaze wandered over the ivory organza halter gown. The bubble veil tamed her wayward curls that tumbled down her shoulders. Her bouquet was made of blood-red roses and baby’s breath.

She inhaled, letting the aroma of the flowers seep deep inside of her, hoping to calm the tremors sweeping over her body. Every muscle within her still ached from hours of Quentin’s lovemaking. He’d fucked her so tenderly, she’d almost wept. Again.

Being in love felt so right. So real and intense. Just as she’d always imagined loving the man of your dreams would be. Maybe she was naïve, but she believed in love. Every time she looked into Quentin’s eyes, she fell just a little bit deeper. She wanted their love to grow. Forever.

Her thoughts turned to her father. He would not be attending tonight. He’d threatened that he’d disown her if she married the vampire. Her father’s disdain for the race in general, and for Quentin in particular, hadn’t been the first fallout between father and daughter.

Aries couldn’t help hoping one day her father would understand. Maybe he would eventually forgive her.

She exhaled slowly and decided not even her father's rebuff would stop her from enjoying her day. She didn't care that only the minister, his wife, who also doubled as the organist, and her best friend, Natalie, would be the only attendants at tonight's nuptials. All she wanted was Quentin, to be his wife. Nothing much mattered after that.

She smiled and placed the veil over her face. A sudden knock at the door made her spin around. She was sure it was her girlfriend.

"Nat, I'm just about ready to..." She shrieked. "You're not supposed to be in here."

"Aries, I -- we need to --"

She turned from him, running behind the mirror. "You're not supposed to see the bride before the wedding, Quentin. It's bad luck, even for vampires."

"You might wish that very fate upon me once I say what I have to say."

The defeat she heard in his voice made her peek over the mirror. "What's going on?" She walked around the glass to face him.

He closed the distance between them, lifting up her veil. His fingers brushed her cheek. The sadness in his eyes made her heart ache. "This isn't easy for me."

"What isn't?" The lump in Aries' throat grew. Her stomach churned as she fought to keep her breakfast down. She blinked. "What are you talking about?" Her voice rose with panic.

"We can't do this. We can't -- *I* can't marry you."

She bent over as the room started to spin. She couldn't have heard him right. Surely, he wasn't backing out on their wedding -- on her! "What?!"

"Aries, I love you, but I realized that to marry you would be selfish of me. There's no guarantee that I can be the man you need me to be. The man that could put love ahead of a mission, the people of Astyria, or the Scepter."

She frowned at him and pushed his hand away. "You mean a man that won't put love ahead of *himself*. Damn you!" She jabbed her finger at him. "You coward! If you didn't want

to marry me why didn't you just say so? Why...why did you let us get this far?" Tears streamed down her cheeks.

Quentin reached for her but she sidestepped him. "Arieona, please. I never wanted to...I never wanted this."

"You bastard, you don't have a fucking clue what you want." She wrapped her arms around herself, trying to stop the pain slicing through her heart.

"I want to be a part of your life."

She laughed hysterically and spun around to face him. "Why? So you can keep fucking me without committing to me? Is it that hard for you, Quentin?"

He gritted his teeth. "It's not like that."

Her eyebrows rose. "Oh, isn't it?" She took a step toward him. "Let me do you a favor. I never want to see your sorry ass again. Do you hear me? I don't want to hear how much you care for me or how you wish you didn't have to do this. Your excuses don't mean a damn thing to me." She exhaled. "In fact, just go. Just get the hell out!"

Quentin stood silently, his fists clenched at his side. "This is not the way I wanted it to be." How could he tell her? How could he explain that his allegiance was to his legacy? The elders ruled with a firm hand over immortals; Quentin and other select members of the Seastnans were sworn to protect both worlds.

How could he expect her to accept that there would be secrets, a side of himself that he could not divulge to her in order to keep her safe? Retaliation for his alliance to the Scepter was a constant threat. Deep down, he could not promise to keep her safe, not when love blinded him so easily.

Her angry words brought him back to face the pain on her pretty face. He was about to do the unthinkable and it tore at him.

"It's the way it is," she snapped.

He looked away and then back to her face. "I'm so sorry, *mi amour*."

"Don't -- don't call me that. Just leave."

Aries looked up to see him striding toward the door and slamming it closed seconds after. The sound echoed in her head and vibrated in her heart. She slumped slowly to the floor. She could barely breathe as her caged emotions struck her like lightning.

Natalie barged into the dressing room. "Oh my God! What happened?" She knelt down beside her. "Oh, honey. Please talk to me. Where was Quentin going?"

Aries looked up, unable to stop the deep sobs tearing from her throat. "The bastard left me. He left me!"

Chapter One

Three years later...

"I won't let you do this."

Aries turned to face Natalie. The concern registered but didn't stop her from flinging a pair of jeans into her suitcase. "I don't have a choice."

"People serving life sentences don't have a choice and from what I see, you have plenty of choices, Aries." Nat rolled her eyes. The air of frustration she blew out of her mouth sent her chocolate bangs flying. "You're just too stubborn to listen to reason."

Aries whirled around, her hands on her hips. "Isaias stole from me, my family; I can't just let that slide. When my father died, Roman Jewelry Designs became mine. I'm responsible, and knowing that Isaias stole from me is something I can't let go of."

"A million dollars in jewels is quite a loss."

"No dollar amount could replace the emotional value of my family heirlooms. It's the last piece of my family that I have left, especially the Blood Luna; it was left to me by my mother."

“That’s exactly what he wants -- for you to come after him. Have you thought about what will happen once you meet up with that asshole?”

“Stringing him up by the balls has entered my mind a time or two.” Aries smiled and shook Nat’s shoulder, trying to break the stoic look on her face. “I’m joking. My only intention is to get my property back.” She lied; castrating the part of his anatomy she’d once been so fond of was a better bet.

“The man is ruthless and I doubt very seriously that he will let you string him up with dental floss, let alone a rope. Have you contacted Quentin?”

“No, and I have no intention of doing so.” Aries squinted her eye at her friend. “Promise me that you won’t either.” She paused. “Promise me, Nat.”

“You know I can’t do that.”

“You mean you *won’t* do it. Do I have to gag you?”

“Quentin cares about you. He would want to know what’s going on.”

Aries grunted, zipping up the suitcase and hauling it off her bed to the floor. “Yeah, he cares so damn much that he walked out on me without looking back. I’d say he cares, all right.”

Nat sighed. “You know what I mean.”

“No, I don’t. I can’t wait for Quentin to come to my rescue. You know that’s not my style. Besides, I gave that man every part of me. He made his choice. Now, I’m making mine.”

Her friend sighed and grabbed her in a bear hug. “Call me when you get there. And if you get into any trouble, you’d better let me know and I’ll get you the hell out of Dodge.”

Aries hugged her back. “Stop worrying about me, girlfriend. I’m just going after what’s mine.”

“Maybe, it’s best to let the police handle it.”

“The police came to a dead end in their investigation. Or as one of the detectives said, ‘We’d be fools to go against the Midori clan.’” Aries shook her head. “There are just some things that you can’t let go of.” And making Isaias Martel pay was one of them.

The police investigation had come to a screeching halt when Isaias had left for parts unknown. She’d hired her own investigation team to track him down. It had taken a year for her to find him. She’d followed a string of dead ends until finally she’d hit pay dirt.

Now that her father was gone, Aries would never have a chance to make things right between them. She had no choice but to get back what belonged to her family. Part of her legacy.

Isaias had messed with the wrong woman. He’d purposely come after her -- rather, her jewels -- and she planned on finding out why.

A glance at her watch told her that if she didn’t leave right now she’d miss her flight. She grabbed her keys and smiled at Nat. “I’ll find my jewels and be back home in a week’s time; you’ll see. Thank you for looking after the store while I’m gone.”

“I could think of worse things to do with my time than cuddling up with some bling.”

* * * * *

The war between desire and duty was one Quentin De Leon had battled since the day he’d first met Aries. He watched her from behind the palm trees, mesmerized by her lush curves. The sound of water roared in his ears as he watched Aries step into the outdoor shower area of her hotel room.

Common decency dictated that he make his presence known, only the raging need to fuck her until she cried his name consumed him more and dulled all common sense.

He couldn’t think clearly; a dangerous position for a vampire. Enemies laid in wait for one moment of weakness. She was his one vice. Loyalty to his mission couldn’t stop his lustful thoughts as he watched from the shadows. Seeing her again left him feeling unsteady.

Quentin thought of his homeland, a lush isle off the Southern Coastlands. It was his job to protect the people of Astyria. He was a Seastnan, a royal guard of the Scepter of Seven. He liked to think that the Seastnans acted as the balance between good and evil. But the hollowness in his soul often made him doubt just what difference he could make.

There was growing division between the Vampire Nation and many rebels who would stop at nothing to overthrow the Scepter of Seven, the ruling Elders of the Nation. Every precaution must be taken to ensure their safety. Worrying about Aries's safety would only distract him from his responsibilities, yet he couldn't stop.

Duty was what kept him sane. Being in Aries's arms made him hungry. Quentin shifted, the heaviness of his hardening cock serving as a rigid reminder that he couldn't ignore the attraction between them.

He'd temporarily been reassigned once word of his affair and pending marriage with Aries had been reported. His devotion to the Scepter had forced him to walk away once. Anger surged within him as he thought of Aries being with another man -- his enemy, at that. He closed his eyes, pushing the image away, and reopened them to stare at the woman who'd burned every part of her essence into his being.

Aries's life was in danger. Her safety was the priority, not the past. Though the pain he'd caused her had never left him. Once again, he was put in charge of her safety. As his gaze swept over her body, he doubted any risk he'd face would be as dangerous as the rush he felt around her.

She had the kind of legs Quentin visualized wrapped around his waist as he drove deeper and harder into her creamy pussy. Her rich skin reminded him of the color of coffee mixed with cream. She tasted so damn good. Her facial features were a mixture of her bicultural heritage: African-American and Caucasian. Full lips the color of fresh raspberries; hazel eyes that had more flecks of gold than green, like those of a big cat and just as mysterious.

Aries.

Quentin's gaze followed the trail of her wavy hair that laid in a heavy mass of brown curls against the slick flesh of her back. His eyes settled on her full hips. His hands clenched. He imagined standing behind her, pounding his cock into her slick core until she screamed out in pleasure.

Quentin couldn't help himself. He was a man, after all. A vampire with a lust for a mortal that withstood all reason and defied every rule he had about getting personally involved on a mission. That line had been drawn and broken long ago.

Three years of guilt assailed him. Time seemed to have stood still; the temptation to touch her burned through him. Quentin's body shook; hunger that he'd tried to squelch with his iron-willed control raged fiercely. He'd sworn that he would not taint her life, her vitality with his demons. Yet, he stood hard as a stone, ready and more than willing to fill her mesmerizing heat with his cock.

Her wicked nature and knee-jerk way of handling the world was what had brought him to the islands. The moment Revin had told him of Aries's plan to take on Isaias, he had sworn that not one hair on her beautiful head would be harmed. It mattered not whether she wanted him as her protector. He was here to usher her back to safety before Isaias or a member of his clan found her.

He growled and watched the water slide down her slick skin under the evening skies. She knew he was near, and was teasing and torturing him for his betrayal. Would he always crave the scent of her pussy?

The memory of the sweet flavor of her sex on his tongue was enough to make him explode. Quentin closed his eyes, trying to rein in his passion. He thirsted for Aries. Sweet heavens! He remembered her calling his name into the wee hours of dawn. He could not contain the lust, the need to have her in his arms. He walked closer to the shower.

Aries turned slowly, smiling devilishly up at him; her gaze devoured him but not before a thin shield of ice flashed within those shimmering, hazy-brown depths.

"I was wondering how long it'd take you to break down."

"Hello, Aries." Quentin was oblivious to the drenched T-shirt and jeans molded to his body. He pulled her into his arms, groaning inwardly as her soft curves melded against his hard flesh.

"I don't remembering asking you to join me." She moaned as their bodies pressed intimately against each other's.

"I feel your heat, Aries. You can't hide from me." She was his forbidden angel. "You never could."

"Funny, that's exactly what I thought when you walked out on me. I was tempted to kick your ass."

"I never meant to hurt you."

"Duty has a way of doing that to people." She rolled her eyes, pushing against his chest. "What do you want, De Leon?"

Quentin groaned. Did she have to ask such a tempting question? He'd missed her. The pain in her voice stirred him from his lustful thoughts. It shone intensely in her eyes; the one place he could always find the answers he sought. "I've never forgiven myself."

"Good, nor have I." She looked away. "I didn't think men like you looked back."

Quentin grinned, his gaze traveled lower. "You'd be surprised."

"I don't believe in surprises. Everything happens for a reason."

"I'm here for you, Aries." He pressed her closer, his arms shielding her, drawing her even closer against him. The strong sexual currents shifted, vibrating like electricity. His cock nestled between the wet crevices of her legs. "Didn't you miss me just a little bit?"

Her body sure felt as if it had. He could feel it throbbing. Her lips parted; her eyelids were half-closed. Her heart raced as she pretended to look unfazed. The heat between them would only intensify the more they stayed like this.

She narrowed her eyes. "Hell, NO!"

He grinned. "Thou doth protest too much, my lady." He pressed his cock closer to her slick folds and shuddered when he felt her tremble. "Sure feels like you've missed me."

Quentin knew he should walk away. Yet all he could think about was taking her against the wall of the shower and filling her tight cunt with his cock until there was nothing else but the two of them.

As it should be.

They came from separate worlds yet, he'd never wanted a woman more. Time couldn't quench his thirst for her. He doubted another century could either. Her life was at stake, but all he could think of was picking up from where they'd left off.

"The days of missing you have passed." She bit her lip.

"You mean to tell me that you haven't counted the days that have passed since I've held you like this?" Quentin smirked.

"You haven't lost that cocky asshole trait, I see."

He chuckled, despite the bitterness coating her words. One hand crept upward to the underside of her breasts, testing the weight of her sensitive flesh before pinching her rigid nipple. His gaze met hers as a sexy sigh escaped her lips.

"To answer your question --" She angled her chin upward toward him. "-- the last thing I remember about you, De Leon, was your tight ass walking out of my dressing room at the church. There wasn't much thinking after that point."

"Touché." His gaze traveled the path from her dark, tight areolas to her collarbone and the erratic pattern of her pulse. "I've never forgotten you."

Aries edged closer; her nipples brushed against him. "What haven't you forgotten?"

Her lips were so close. Quentin wanted to taste them. He had no right. On a primitive level, he had always known that Aries was his. Egotistical, he knew, but there was no denying what he felt.

“I’ll start with what I remember,” he said.

His fingers trailed down to the thick curls covering her mound. He cradled her flesh in his palm and watched as she bit down on her bottom lip. He parted her labia and gently stroked the tight bud within. “I remember this.”

Aries arched in his arms. Her thigh brushed against his cock. “And that.” He pinched her clitoris and she gasped out loud.

“Let’s get one thing straight.” She glared at him. “If you’ve come to protect me, De Leon, you might as well turn right around and walk away. I don’t need your help. But if you’ve come to fuck me, then stay awhile longer.”

“We’ll debate about that later,” Quentin growled as she nipped his neck with her teeth. Her hot little hands were on his zipper, hauling the wet denim as fast as she could down his hard thighs. “You never change.”

Aries pulled back. “And you never could take a hint.”

He stepped out of his shoes and quickly shoved the denim from around his ankles. Aries helped him out of his shirt. Once completely naked, he boldly met the hunger in her gaze. He knew all he needed to. Lifting her into his arms, he backed her against the shower wall.

“Let me show you just how well I can take it.”

Quentin’s mouth swept downward. He punished her lips with his need. His fingers gripped her soft hips. The head of his cock teased her damp folds; up and down he massaged her slit with desperate tenderness. He felt her body give over to him. Her pussy was wet. He ached to taste her flavor. The razor-sharp sexual tension edged between them, ripened by pleasure long denied.

He knelt down before her. "I've waited for this." He parted her legs and pressed the tip of his tongue against her clit, taking slow, languid licks, and then swirled softly.

Aries wiggled her hips against him, her breathing labored. "Don't make me wait."

He broke away, chuckling. "You were always so impatient."

"And now you want to complain?" She pulled him forward, not wanting the decadent sensation to stop.

Quentin pressed deeper into her, sampling the sweetness of her pussy and sighed. He'd missed this. Missed tasting her and every little nuance of her body. He sucked and nipped, enjoying the way Aries clung to him, grinding her pelvis against his mouth. Her ardent cries made his cock harden. He pulled away briefly to see the exquisite torture on her face. He smiled greedily. He wasn't done with her yet.

He rose to his feet, wasting no time in sliding into her wet pussy. His balls slapped against her thighs, taking away any further response she had with a long sigh. His dick slid into the tight sheath of her pussy with one thrust. He groaned something in Latin and allowed her body a few seconds to readjust to him.

Quentin gritted his teeth, held his breath, afraid if he exhaled the angel in his arms would disappear into thin air. "What man would complain while being cock-deep inside of you?"

He squeezed his buttocks, stifling the need to thrust as deeply as he could. He swore it would not be the last time he fucked her. No, he intended to brand her sweet little cunt as his again and again.

"Compliments will get you anything," Aries whispered, biting his bottom lip with her teeth.

Quentin wanted to howl to the heavens that this woman was his and only his. Unable to contain himself, he plunged deeper into her moist heat.

"Quentin!" she cried.

His head rolled back as he pumped his cock harder, faster, and deeper within her tight walls. He felt her release, felt it building and rushing forward like the tide. He met her gaze, only to find those hazel depths searching his face.

Aries hungered for him as he did for her. He didn't want to think just where that unspoken truth would lead them.

The rivulets of water sluicing down Aries's honey-brown skin couldn't cool the white-hot orgasm that claimed her body, sending spasms of heat splintering deep within her pussy. Her senses had always kicked into overdrive whenever Quentin was near.

She'd felt him long before he'd materialized in her shower. She couldn't explain how she knew. She just did. The man exuded a powerful masculine aura. Her body instantly went into meltdown whenever he was within shooting distance. She mentally counted just how long it'd been since the last time he'd seen her naked. Three long years ago.

"Holding back on me?" Quentin asked, quietly.

His arms braced her against him like she was a piece of treasure. She had never felt so intertwined with a man before. A dangerous feeling if ever there was one.

Aries gazed at him. "Were you?"

Gawd, the man was fine. More than fine. Illegally well-made. She guessed immortal men had that right. Her heart seized. No matter how much the fantasy of being a part of Quentin's world intrigued her, they could never be truly happy.

The former ache in her chest had healed some after Quentin's departure from her life. Her body contained a fever that could only be sated by his touch. She still missed him. But she'd work on that. He wouldn't hurt her again.

It feels so right, Aries thought, despite the anger she felt over his betrayal. A tear rolled down her cheek. His words brought a heady sense of satisfaction. He wanted her as much as

she wanted him. Their interlude would not go any further than tonight. Tonight was all there was. In the morning she would disappear, find Isaías and her jewels.

Aries silently cursed the hotel manager who'd assured her that the suite's location provided the privacy she'd asked for. She should have known that Quentin could find her anytime -- anywhere. She wanted to be angry that Quentin had taken the liberty of invading her privacy. She *should* worry about his presence and wanted to tell him that he'd had his chance long ago.

She gritted her teeth to keep from screaming. Her climax barreled down relentlessly. Unmercifully. Her breathing came in short hisses, every nerve ending within her body was taut. Her muscles clenched, milking Quentin for every drop of his release as he called out her name. The sound of it made her feel cherished, but she knew better than to believe in forever. That time had passed.

"Just like a man to be so greedy."

Quentin muttered something unintelligible under his breath, widening her, exposing her to his hungry gaze. "So sweet, tempting, and...mine."

He pumped his hips harder against her pelvis. Once. Twice. And then collapsed, against her breasts.

She swore the man's dick had to be dipped in gold. She wanted more of him. She wanted him deep within her again and concluded that these urges were just a form of dormant lust from unfulfilled promises from the past.

Aries moaned softly. "What more do you want from me, De Leon?"

"Everything. I want everything you are. Every inch of you."

She started to protest only to feel his fingers brush against her lips.

"No arguing. Now, we rest." He gently untangled their bodies and cradled her in his arms.

Aries closed her eyes as his arms wrapped around her hips. He held her tightly against his swollen cock and moved them from the slick wall of the bath to the bed. He laid her down gently. His full weight pushed her further into the plush mattress and cool sheets. Thinking with her heart had always been her downfall. This time it would be different. This was sex. A good fuck, nothing more. She didn't want nor need anything else from De Leon.

Chapter Two

Quentin felt the pale break of sunlight through the window blinds.

Fuck!

His senses kicked into overdrive as he felt another presence in the room. His arm swept over the spot where Aries had lain. Nothing. The feeling of alarm only grew stronger. With lightning speed, Quentin sat up in the bed, opening his eyes. He swung his arms outward, his fingers elongated with nails resembling talons. His eyes turned to an illuminating shade of red. He rolled out from under the sheets, poised to strike.

“Make your presence known!”

“You wouldn’t hurt a friend, now would you, old man?” Gideon Maclachlan’s Irish brogue filtered through the suite as his lanky form materialized through a smoky vapor. A lazy smile crossed his lips as he glanced at his old friend.

“Making surprise entrances will get you killed, Mac. What in the hell are you doing here?” Quentin growled, rising from his crouched position and looking at the man who was more like a brother. He reached for his discarded clothes. “Aries is gone.”

“Yes, I can see that. Revin sent me to make sure you didn’t get in over your head.” Mac glanced around, a smirk on his face, his crystal blue eyes sparkling. “Looks like it’s too late for that.”

Quentin sent the other man a look of warning. “I don’t need a watchdog.”

“Exactly what I told him. But you know Revin. Well, I could say I told you so. But I won’t.”

“You did,” Quentin muttered underneath his breath. “I have to find Aries before she gets herself killed.”

Mac’s face turned to stone. “Before you do, there’s something I need to tell you.”

“I don’t have time --”

“Mordecai’s been taken.”

Quentin spun around. “What? How did this happen?” Mordecai was fifth in command in the Scepter. Anger speared through his body.

Twenty hard years of assassinations, kidnappings, and tyranny had plagued the Scepter from renegades who wouldn’t stop until their kind was annihilated and a new regime reigned. Quentin would give his life to make sure that era never resurfaced.

“Was it the Midori clan?”

“We’re positive they are responsible. The suspected traitor was caught trying to escape after leaving a blood-scribbled note about Mordecai. When questioned by the royal guards about his betrayal, he refused to speak.”

“Do we know what the bastard’s connection is to the Midori clan?”

Mac shook his head. “But what other renegade clan would be as brazen? Mordecai was taken from the sanctuary yesterday, just before sunset. A search team has already been assigned.”

Quentin was sickened that one of his clansmen would betray the Elders and their honor. “He must be dealt with.”

“He was...when he was incinerated this morning,” Mac replied grimly. “Right now, we need to find Aries as soon as possible, and get back to Astyria.”

“We?”

Mac grinned. “You didn’t think I’d let you have all the glory, did you?”

* * * * *

Isaias locked the double bolted doors behind him; a wicked smile spread over his lips. He turned to face the woman in the room with him, but couldn’t deny the object that truly held his attention. He’d succeeded in part one of his plans. It had taken over a year to ensure that no one could follow his tracks.

He was one step closer to being Ruler of the Nation. Revenge would be sweet. He grinned. And to think, all he’d had to do was seduce one naïve and rebuffed woman. Thinking of the sex they’d shared made his cock harden. If there was one thing he missed about Arieona, it was her sweet pussy.

Isaias turned to look at Nailah, his on and off again lover. She wasn’t Arieona, but she would do. For now.

“Look at it.” His amber gaze roamed over the vaulted glass case that enclosed a large blood-red diamond. “Do you know what this means?”

“What?” Nailah asked, walking over to the vaulted case; her eyes grew big at the sight of the large rock. “It’s so pretty.”

Isaias gritted his teeth with impatience. He often wondered why he put up with her simplistic nature. “It means as soon as I’ve slaughtered enough of those pretentious, ritualistic Elders, and spilled the Blood of the Dhampir, I will have all their powers and gain the vengeance I seek.”

He’d waited so long for the day he would awaken the Ancient demigod, Furaq. For the day he could destroy the forces that had made him an outcast. They would all pay soon

enough. His hatred made for an addictive elixir. Isaias felt a strong urge to lose himself in mindless fucking.

Nailah frowned. "A Dhampir? I thought that was just myth."

"Myth? My sweet, there is one offspring of a human widow and an Elder that exists."

She turned to her lover, grinning. She pulled him into her arms. "Who?"

Isaias gripped her buttocks in his palms, causing the short skirt to ride up her ass, his fingers pressed into her soft flesh. "Patience. You'll find out when the time is right. And by then, I'll be running the Nation and I'll need a Queen." He walked her over to the lone chair in the room.

Nailah cupped his cock in her hand, massaging his hard dick. "I think I'd like that."

"I thought you would, sweetness."

Isaias turned her around and she automatically bent over. Her ass was hiked up for the perfect position for him to sink his cock into her moist cunt. He stripped her skirt off with his fingers, loving the way the fabric tore into pieces. He stepped between her legs, widening her stance, and separated her nether lips with one finger. And then two. He dipped deeper and teased her pussy until her legs quivered.

He stripped his pants, freed his straining erection, and thrust hard into Nailah's pussy as she braced herself against the back of the chair.

"Yesss! That's it," Isaias yelled.

"Baby...harder," Nailah moaned. "Fuck me."

Isaias grinned, knowing that his lover liked rough sex. He'd give her all she could take, until she cried out. As long as they both got their fill. He rammed his dick into her again and again, driving her over the edge and loving every minute of it. The chair went sliding to the other side of the room from the blunt force of his thrust. "Touch your toes. I want to fuck you deeper."

"Oh! Yes." Nailah did as he told her.

Isaias widened his legs, gripping the sides of her hips and pulling her full-fledged against his cock. He ground his hips against her and Nailah met him with her own twists and turns. “Yesss... Yesss... Yessssss.”

The combination was almost too much for him to bear. The need to come inside of her was overwhelming, but he wasn’t ready. With one hand, he grasped Nailah’s hair, twirling the curly brown strands through his fingers and took his other hand and slapped her ass. Once. Twice. The sound echoed throughout the room, mimicking the heart-pounding pulses his cock served to her soaking cunt.

The bite of his hit brought a harsh groan from her lips. “Mmmmn! Give it to me, baby!”

Isaias complied, striking her buttocks again and again, until her flesh was flushed with heat, her body vibrating with tension. He closed his eyes. It wasn’t Nailah’s name he wanted to shout as his body surrendered to the exquisite pent-up pleasure and shot his cum deep within her womb.

Isaias could see her in his arms, watching her as he fucked her senseless. Her tight cunt welcoming his cock with a vise that threatened to make him come within seconds of being inside of her.

It was Arieona he wanted. And Arieona he would have.

* * * * *

Aries stopped, breathing hard. She could have sworn she’d walked in a circle. She had been walking for God knows how long and was no closer to finding Minotaur Crest, the reported lair of the Midori Clan.

You can go back!

“Sure, if I knew where the hell ‘back’ was.” She pulled the backpack off her shoulder, unclipped it, and uncapped a bottle of water. She’d had to pack lightly so as not to wake

Quentin. But not too lightly, as the Glock pistol at the small of her back reminded her. She'd learned to shoot from her father.

Her body ached, just thinking of the things they'd done last night. And like the traitor her body was, she was only too happy to oblige each time he reached for her.

How many women had her luck? Left at the altar twice! Fiancé number two: Isaias Martel, a damned jewel thief. Fiancé number one: Quentin De Leon -- immortal, lethal, and whose secrets outnumbered Victoria's -- had left her at the altar without one look back...that was, until now!

Aries gritted her teeth. She couldn't believe this! He'd followed her. Nostalgia hit her square in the gut as she recalled the smell of the Cuban cigar on his breath. God, she remembered the rich flavor burning her nostrils as Quentin had held her after a long night of lovemaking. The cliché of a smoke after good sex only seemed right while she'd been with him. It seemed like a lifetime ago. The taste of his body had never left her, even after she'd moved on. Some things never changed. And being with Quentin was one of them. A woman would have to be brain dead to forget a man like him.

A tremor swept down her spine. She'd done a good job of not thinking of their lovemaking up until now. Her pussy tightened, missing him, wanting him. Last night, for one moment, she'd thought about how safe she'd felt in his arms. The feeling had only lasted a second before distrust and the memories of their past had smacked her in the face.

As soon as he'd entered a deep sleep, she'd made her way to the path in the rugged terrain of the Cypress jungle. Aries swatted at a mosquito that had bitten through her cargo pants. "Ouch!" She dropped the backpack. "Shit!" If she didn't get a move on fast enough, she would be making camp in the jungle. She looked down at the map, fighting the urge to launch it into the heavy green bushes. She bent down, stretching her tired muscles.

"That's the best view I've seen all day."

Aries whirled around, reaching for her gun and aimed it at the voice behind her. “Damn it!” She lowered her weapon, grimacing. “Would you please stop following me?”

The bastard had the nerve to smile. “Nice.”

She pretended not to look at his hard muscles straining against his tan T-shirt as she concealed the gun at the small of her back. Quentin’s khaki pants and an army print bandana wrapped around his head completed his attire. Her mouth watered, knowing underneath those clothes was a man with a ten-inch cock that did her body good.

Resist evil!

“Why are you following me?” She dusted her hands off, annoyed with herself for being attracted to him -- still. “I’m not your problem, remember?”

“I’m afraid that’s not true, Aries. When did you get a gun?”

“There are *some* things you don’t know about me, De Leon.” Her mouth tightened into a rigid line. “You’re here to rescue me?”

Quentin walked over to her. “Yes.”

She frowned at him. “I don’t need you. Or your help. Do you get that?”

His eyebrows rose. “So you know your way around the Cypress jungle?”

Aries looked around, seeing nothing but miles of green vegetation, everything looked the same. But she wasn’t about to admit that to Quentin. Damn him!

“As a matter of fact, I do.” She tilted her chin up at him. “So if you’ll excuse me, I’ll be on my way.” She picked up her backpack, turned away from the amused look on his gorgeous face, and mouthed a quick prayer to the heavens above she didn’t happen upon something poisonous.

She took two steps, stopped, and heard him chuckling. She stiffened her spine. There was no way in hell she was going to let him see her sweat. “Have a good life.”

“Uh-huh.”

Aries turned to face him, walking backwards and she saluted him. "I mean it."

Quentin folded his arms across his chest, a half grin tugging on his lips. "Yeah, I know."

She turned back around and stopped dead in her tracks. The need to scream was so great yet, she couldn't work her mouth. "Oooh-my-God!" Her gaze collided with a wild boar. She froze, fighting the need to bolt. She knew doing so would result in a serious injury or death. If only she could reach for the gun. "Quentin, help me!"

"Now? Now you want my help?"

"*Now* is not the time to be an asshole!" Aries said.

"Aries, be still!"

"Hurry up. I don't know how long I can stay like this." Her heart pounded, sweat dotted at her brow. She looked at the beady eyes of the boar, thinking she must look like a good sized lunch. Oh, God, this was not how she wanted to end her life...as a damned pig's lunch!

Just as the boar charged, she screamed and suddenly she felt as if she were being carried. "Quentin?"

Aries melted into Quentin's arms, holding on for dear life.

"Sssh, be quiet," he said softly against her ear. Though she couldn't see him. The boar turned and charged again, missing them and crashing into a tree.

Once it was safe, Quentin materialized and smiled down at her. "You're right; you don't need to be rescued."

She started to reply but closed her eyes as the sky began to spin and she fainted in Quentin's arms.

* * * * *

"Does he suspect anything?"

Mac looked into Isaias's eyes. "No, but they are headed your way. He's too busy with the woman." He watched as anger flashed in the other vampire's gaze. "That doesn't please you?"

"Sharing Arieona will come to an end soon enough for De Leon. She made the perfect bait."

"How so?"

Isaias smiled. "You can never underestimate what a man will do for love or lust."

"And which would your quest to rule the Nation be categorized as?"

"Both. Ah, as a reward for your servitude." He gestured to the knock at the door as Nailah walked in. "You look beautiful," Isaias said, as he unwrapped the robe from her body. His gaze met hers. He kissed her hand. "Have fun, my pet."

"Wait...won't you be joining us?"

"Don't you ever presume to question me. Do you understand?" he hissed in a low voice.

"Y-Yes, Isaias," Nailah stammered.

"De Leon shouldn't be so trusting." Isaias turned from her to the man on the bed.

Mac's blue eyes shone with lust for the woman in front of him. "It's always been a part of his nature."

"Good." Isaias smiled. "I've prepared a little treat for your loyalty to me." He clapped his hands and Nailah turned to the man staring at her with hungry eyes. Isaias left the room, leaving the two together.

* * * * *

"Looks like it's just you and me."

Nailah walked slowly to the handsome man sitting on the bed, waiting for her. She licked her lips as he slowly removed his shirt. Muscles greeted her from every angle as he undressed before her. She wanted to please Isaias, but couldn't help wanting to please

herself. It wasn't like him to get so upset with her. She would make him pay, starting with this sexy stranger. There was something about his eyes that spoke to her. His blond hair made her want to run her hands through the spiky strands. She planned on tasting every inch of him.

This wouldn't be the first time that she'd been with another man, but usually Isaias joined in. Tonight, she would be going solo with the sexy man in front of her.

Nailah took a deep breath. "Are you ready for me?"

The man lifted his hand out to her. "The question is are you ready for me?"

She liked the smoky timbre of his voice; it called to her. She took his hand and easily let him pull her down on the bed. The soft touch of his lips against her neck made her moan and arch her back. Isaias was never this gentle. "Mmm, I think so."

He nipped her ear with his teeth. "Good." His hands palmed her breasts, his fingers pinched her nipples.

"I like that. Oh!" Nailah looked into his eyes. "What do I call you?"

"Mac."

He flipped her on her back. "And what's your name?" His mouth devoured one nipple while his hand crept down her stomach to the tight nub between her legs. He fingered her clit slowly. Nailah arched off the bed, bumping her pelvis against his cock.

She shivered. "Nailah."

"Do you like that?"

"Oh, yes!" She moaned. "More, please!"

Mac smiled. "May I taste you?"

Their gazes met.

She nodded. A silky sigh escaping her lips as he dipped his fingers into her creamy center. She twisted her hips, pumping against him. Her breath caught as Mac's lips replaced

his fingers. His tongue teased her flesh and suckled relentlessly until she went limp in his arms. He nudged her legs further apart and entered her with one smooth thrust.

Nailah whimpered. Who was this man who gently fucked her into oblivion? He buried his cock inside her cunt, rocking her torturously slow to his rhythm. "Mac!"

The hedonistic pleasure skyrocketed through her body, throwing Nailah into a frenzy. His thrusts became more ardent, more passionate and reckless as they pounded against each other.

"Nailah! Ahhh!"

The sweet tension between them exploded with a force that left them both shattered as they clung to each other, limbs entangled in the sheets.

Mac leaned down and kissed her lips. She closed her eyes, wishing the moment would go on forever.

* * * * *

Quentin had just finished preparing Aries's dinner when he felt her gaze on him. "You're awake."

She wet her lips and he tried to calm the stirring of his cock. It never took much with Aries. His body often knew what he wanted before he could react mentally.

"You saved me. Again."

"Look, Aries, if you're about to fight me on --"

She held her hand up. "Actually, I was going to say thank you."

Quentin couldn't help the grin that appeared on his lips. "Now, that's a first."

"And you've just made it be the last damned time."

"*Mi amour*, don't be like that." He crossed the campground he'd made while she'd been out. He saw her eyes darken at his use of his pet name for her. He knelt down beside her. The truth was he wouldn't have known what to do if something had happened to Aries. He

realized that time and distance hadn't done a damn thing to dampen the attraction sizzling between them. He was perhaps more aware of her now than he had been three years ago.

Did she feel it too?

She made him dream about matters that other members of the Scepter would consider a violation of his orders. Many of them thought that his mission to bring Aries home would only prompt temptation and screw with his priorities.

He let his gaze dip lower. The erratic pulse at her neck said she did. They stared at each other, neither saying a word as he leaned closer, their lips brushing. He felt the warmth of her skin, the delicious shudder that swept through her body. He pushed closer, his lips consuming hers. His tongue delved deeper into the sweet recesses of her mouth, taking whatever she had to offer. Her fingers grasped the curled ends of his hair, bringing him closer until he lay fully on top of her. He'd always loved the feel of her soft curves under him. This time was no different. His need to have her -- all of her -- was overwhelming. He wanted to free his cock from his pants and thrust inside of her sweet cunt until she begged him to stop.

She murmured something unintelligible against his lips. For the moment, Quentin was content just holding her. He hadn't realized how much he'd missed the intimacy of just having her in his arms until this morning when he'd awakened to find she was gone. It was amazing how in the blink of an eye things came back to him. It was as if his body had been starving for something and he hadn't known what until he'd had her in his arms again.

Sweet Aries.

Would she ever guess what she did to him? He felt as if he were freefalling back into her, her life, but there was hesitation. He felt it in every muscle of her body.

"I can't do this." As if freed from a spell, Aries broke away from him, pushing him off of her. She rose upward, looking anywhere but in his direction. "*We* can't do this...again."

"Aries, I --"

She turned to face him. "Please don't tell me you're sorry." Her hazel eyes narrowed. "I know just how sorry you are." She stood with her back to him and then spun around to face him. "Do you realize that you are the only man that I have fallen in bed with again after he's hurt me?"

The confession made Quentin cringe. He'd known this moment was bound to happen between them and now that it was here, he wasn't about to run away from her or it. "I never wanted to hurt you."

Aries nodded. "No, you never meant to hurt me, but you did. And because you did, I can't just go back to the way things were."

"I would never try to force you to do that."

She waved her hands wildly in the air, pulled a strand of her wavy hair behind one ear. "You don't have to. That's just it. I never have to *try* anything when it comes you. I've never had to pretend when it came to wanting to have sex with you. Last night was wonderful. But I have no desire to be with you again."

Quentin felt like he'd been sucker punched. He stood, glaring at her. He read the fear, could even understand it, but for her to lie about wanting him. He saw right through it, saw the renewed passion in her eyes. Passion for him. He took a step toward her, but what could he say?

The moment held between them for what seemed to be a lifetime. He squared his shoulders, his face taking on a stone-like expression. "You're right."

Chapter Three

The next morning, Aries found her body knotted up. She grimaced as she tried to rotate her shoulders. What she wouldn't do to feel Quentin's hands on her right now. Her gaze wandered over to where he stood, packing what little gear they'd both brought.

He turned to face her and she quickly looked away, not quick enough that she didn't feel his seductive gaze on her. She burned with heat, the kind that would only go away if she fucked him. Long and slow.

Don't even go there, sister!

Still she found her eyes on him. How could she give in so easily to the very man that hurt her? The man who had sworn to love her and had left her instead. She wanted him. That much she couldn't deny. She had never really stopped wanting him. He was the man who haunted her dreams, caused her body to ache in ways no other man had since their break up.

Aries reminded herself that this journey to the islands wasn't meant for trips down memory lane. No, she had a score to settle and a million dollars in jewels -- *her* jewels -- to recover.

She decided to help pack the rest of her things. The quicker she and Quentin parted ways the better it would be for her libido. What she needed was a diversion.

She didn't need Quentin to escort her home. She'd come here on a mission and she wasn't leaving until she got her jewels.

An idea came to her as she stood and walked over to where Quentin was rolling up a blanket. "I saw a waterfall about a hundred yards from here. I'd like to take a bath."

He looked down at her and for the life of her Aries couldn't get the image of them in the shower out of her mind. All too easily her bath could turn into *their* bath. She looked away. "Well?"

"Are you going to try something?" he asked.

She sighed. "No, I just want to wash away some of this dirt and grime off of my body." His eyes relayed the message that he wouldn't mind taking on the task for her.

"Fine. But I'll walk you over there and I will *not* be leaving you alone, so don't even think about running, Aries." The steel in his voice brooked no argument. "Otherwise, what you come up against might be more than some wild boar."

"Are you talking about yourself, De Leon?" She couldn't resist. She loved baiting him.

He stared at her, his gaze roamed over her and settled on her lips. She recognized that look. It was his "I-want-to-fuck-you-NOW" look she had loved seeing on his face once upon a time. Her pussy tingled. Too bad her body didn't seem to understand it was over.

"You don't want to find out." He turned, walking away from her. "Let's go."

* * * * *

The lush vegetation, wildflowers, and white sand was enough for Aries to forget the danger surrounding them.

Aries felt her senses bask in the natural serenity. She inhaled deeply. “This is amazing.” She turned to look at Quentin, only to find him shucking his pants. Her eyes went wide. “What are you doing?”

His placid cock hung low against his balls. Aries could think of a couple of ways to get it up. She forced her gaze upward.

“Did you expect me to let you go in the water by yourself?”

“Ah, yes!”

He grinned, waving his hands. “Fine, be my guest and let me know how you’ll protect yourself against a snake.”

“Quentin?”

He folded his hands behind his head, a devilish smile on his face. “What? I’m giving you fair warning.”

Aries placed her hands on her hips, giving him a pointed look. “Could you do that with some clothes on?”

“Don’t you like the view?” He walked closer, his cock bobbing against his muscular thighs.

“It’s not the view per se that’s the problem.” Heat pooled between her legs. She wanted him there, easing and rebuilding the tension inside of her until she exploded.

“Then what is?”

She didn’t answer right away and then finally met his gaze. “Once won’t be enough. We both know that; so why tempt ourselves?”

“Maybe it’ll be different this time.”

His words made her heart beat double-time. Different? The steady strum of wanting him to fuck her hadn’t varied. If anything, it was more intense. How could she want this man so much?

Quentin turned, calling over his shoulder. "I'm going to test the water."

Aries bit her tongue, watching as with his every step sinewy muscles and flesh strained against his languid movements. *God, his ass was fabulous!* She angled her head, imagining nipping one of his cheeks. She balled her hands into fists at her side. This was not fair. He was the one who'd left. He was the one who'd made the decision he didn't want to be with her.

Why did Quentin want to get involved now, especially when he claimed he couldn't be years ago?

Several minutes later, he called to her. "Come on in."

Aries hesitated. Was she really going to fall into his seductive trap? The tight clench of her pussy was definitely putting in its vote. What the hell? She wasn't one to be outdone. She stripped bare; all the while Quentin pretended not to be watching. She wasn't a fool. If there was one thing she knew...it was that De Leon had eyes in the back of his head.

Quentin thanked the heavens for the water shielding him from Aries's gaze. That little striptease had been hell on him and his hard cock brushing up against his lower abdomen was the evidence. He'd keep his distance from her and try not to touch her beautifully made body.

He closed his eyes, dipping his head back into the water, willing the images of those curvy hips and full breasts to stop testing his resolve. The need between them was as smoldering as a hot poker. He felt ready to burst. His system was on overload.

He turned and collided with Aries's soft curves; instinctively he wrapped his arms around her to steady her. Big mistake. Their gazes met. Tension bubbled over.

He found the courage to speak. "I never wanted to leave you."

She was quiet for a moment. "Why did you?"

"The vows I made to my job --"

“Were more important than what you felt for me?” The sadness in her eyes touched him to the very core.

“No! Don’t ever say that.” He cupped her face in his hands, searching her face to see if she believed what he was saying.

“What else can I think, Quentin?” She paused, the emotion thick in her voice. “I loved you so much. I thought we would be together forever. I thought it was what you wanted too.”

“You have no idea how much I wanted it -- you.” He closed his eyes, the pain in hers almost too much for him to bear. “*Mi amour*, I loved you.” The muscles in his jaw worked. “I never stopped.”

Tears rolled down her face. Quentin leaned in to kiss them, dipping his tongue against her soft flesh. He pulled back. “Did you love Isaias?”

Aries placed her hands over his. “No.”

He felt the weight lift off his chest that he hadn’t realized he’d been carrying. “Then why would you go to these extremes? Why put your life in danger, Aries? Don’t you realize I wouldn’t know what to do if something happened to you?”

She shook her head, her wavy hair cascading down her back. “How would I?”

Quentin swooped down and captured her lips in a possessive kiss, pressing her against him as if scared she would evaporate into thin air. And thanked the sweet heavens when she kissed him back, her tongue mated with his, pulling him into the mystique of their passion.

“I can’t wait any longer.” He picked her up in his arms, lifted her up until her legs were wrapped around his shoulders.

Quentin parted her nether lips with his tongue, her scent a dizzying aphrodisiac to his senses. He swept his mouth up and down her crease, from her clit to her slit, tasting all of her, wanting to devour her if he could. He licked and teased her cunt.

“Quentin, mmmm... Oh!” Aries gripped him with her legs. Her fingers kneaded his shoulders as he plunged his tongue in and out. Out and in.

Her urgent pleas and hoarse whispers of his name only served as a signal to keep going, faster and then slower, flirting with her sweet release until she craved it as much as he did. He wanted to taste her cum on his tongue, to know that she’d surrendered to him and no other. As he’d done to her so long ago.

“Mmmm... Ah... Mmmmm! Please. Oh, Please. Quentin!” She clung to him as she became a willing captive to his tortuous tongue. She tumbled into a second orgasm.

He slowly lowered her, until they were eye to eye. The acceptance he saw in her face was all he needed to make her his again. He impaled her juicy cunt with one, hot, soul-searing thrust, squeezing his buttocks to keep from coming too quickly. But damn, she felt so good and all he wanted to do was share all he had to give to the woman who had never left his heart.

Quentin’s fingers dug into her shapely hips, grinding and pumping with upward thrusts, each one bringing a sharper passion-infused cry out of Aries’s mouth. He grunted. His head rolled backwards; the cords in his neck strained as he roared his release from the pit of his soul. “Oh! *Mi amour!*” He looked up into her eyes. “Only you. It’s always been you.”

* * * * *

Reign shook his head, spying from the bushes at the couple fucking in the water. He felt his own cock harden and massaged it, thinking he’d love to fuck the black princess. He could see why his boss wanted to possess a beauty such as her.

It’d be a shame to have to kill her in the process if she refused to cooperate.

Reign rubbed the long jagged scar on his right cheek and smiled. Maybe he could take his own sample of her. Isaias would never have to know if he killed her. He took one last look at them before turning around and running in the opposite direction.

* * * * *

“Boss, I have news.”

Isaias looked up from the jewels as Reign walked into his study. He eyed his right hand man with wariness. “Well, what is it?”

Reign’s pasty skin shone with exposure to the heat, and he smelled of it too. “I’ve spotted De Leon and the woman.”

Isaias’s eyes gleamed as he ran a hand through his short, black hair. He glanced at Nailah, who was filing her nails, pretending not to listen. He gestured the other man into the adjacent room and closed the door behind him.

“Tell me everything.”

“About thirty minutes from here, by the waterfall, I saw them...together.”

Isaias repeated, “Together?”

“Yeah, you know boss, together? As in fuck --”

He punched the other man before he could get the word out.

Reign straightened, a frown on his face as he wiped the blood coming from the side of his mouth. “Boss, what the hell?”

Isaias straightened his tie, waving his hand at him. “I’m sorry. It was an impulse. The thought of that man touching the future Queen of the New Nation...” He gritted his teeth, rage seething in his eyes.

“Well, what do you want to do about it?”

“I think I know just the thing to bring Quentin to me. Follow me.”

They entered a small, dark room. Isaias flipped on the light and stared at the shivering man dressed in white. He pulled the gun out of his back pocket. “Scared, old man?” he taunted.

The man mumbled something against the cloth around his mouth.

“Remove his gag.”

Reign did as he was told.

“Who?” Mordecai blinked, trying to adjust to the blinding light. His gray eyes focused on Isaias. He frowned. “You will not succeed.”

Isaias smiled, loading the gun with silver bullets. “I admire your courage, Elder.”

“The Seastnans will hunt you down like the filth you are. You will not destroy the Vampire Nation or the current coven. You will fail. But then you know about rejection, don’t you?”

Reign punched him square in the jaw. “Keep talking, old man.”

Isaias stood directly in front of him. “I’ve been hunting your kind a long time Mordecai, and no one has been able to stop the Midori clan and never will. When I raise Furaq --” He grinned when the Elder’s eyes widened. “That’s right, the blood-lusting Vampire God. All will praise him and abide under our combined rule.”

“Are you mad? Raising Furaq will destroy you.”

“The Scepter of Seven has ruled long enough. Their time has come to an end. Starting now.” Isaias pointed the gun and fired. He turned to Reign, handing him the gun. “Clean up this mess. And make sure you find Mac and tell him the sad news.”

* * * * *

Revin looked out the window at the prospering city of Astyria. His home. The uneasiness he’d felt over the last couple of days had made him restless. Quentin and Mac had not returned, nor had Elder Mordecai been found.

All his life he’d tried to preserve peace between the two races...human and vampire. But in pursuit of that peace, he’d had to make decisions that he was still atoning for. He thought of the battle Quentin was embarking upon.

If he could have made those decisions over again, would he still have made the same choices?

Yes! One had had to be sacrificed for the future good of all.

“You look as if you hold the world on your shoulders.”

The soft female voice brought a smile to his face. Revin turned his stark silver head around to face the love of his life, Jenesis, ruler of the Saber clan. Her golden cat-shaped eyes stared up at him. The blue sarong she wore made her a tempting sight indeed. He pulled her into his arms.

“Good morning, sweetheart.” He bent down to kiss her. He was a tall man, and Jenesis of short stature at five-two. Revin loved cradling his lover in his arms. She claimed to love the feel of the bristle of his beard against her flesh.

She closed her eyes. “Hmm, you’ve still got it after all these years.”

Revin grinned. “You think so?”

She squeezed his ass. “Yeah, I know so. I’d be happy for you to show me, but I sense that you have a burden that is stealing your attention.”

“Mordecai is still missing.” He sighed. “Quentin and Mac have not returned. Members of the Scepter are up in arms.”

“As they should be. And you? How are you dealing with this?”

“I was appointed to endure.” Revin turned back to the window. “Being ruler has never been easy.”

“It’s hard to assure so many when there is so much at risk.”

“I’ve never questioned my responsibilities as Head Elder.”

“And now?” Jenesis wrapped her arm around his waist.

“I’m torn between responsibility to the people of Astyria and standing beside Quentin and Mac. The Midori clan has been slaughtering our people for years. And the blame rests with me.”

“Revin, don’t say such things. You love the people, the Elders, and me. Anyone who knows you, respects you. You’ve dedicated your life to us all.”

He turned to look into her eyes. “That very dedication may have brought trouble to the very ones I’ve tried to protect.”

Jenesis tilted her head at him, her eyebrows arched. “What are you keeping from me?”

He felt the need to divulge the secrets he had kept locked in his soul.

“Elder Revin! A messenger from the Midori clan has left this for you to open.” A male servant rushed into the room, handing him a small package.

He looked at the man savagely. “And you brought it here, to the Sanctuary?”

“With all due respect, Elder, the messenger said if I refused to bring this to you he would kill me on the spot.” The servant passed the package to his leader, fear shining in his eyes.

Revin turned from the man, opening the plain box. Inside was a blood-stained cloth and a folded note.

Jenesis gasped, turning her head from the sight. “W-What is that?”

He didn’t answer as he unwrapped the linen. He felt rage shoot through his body as he glared at the severed finger, Mordecai’s signet ring attached, a symbol of the Scepter.

He set the box down on the table, unfolded the note, read it, and closed his eyes. He turned back around, his gray eyes turning stormy. “You find that messenger and bring him back to me. Now!”

She frowned, walking toward him. “My love, what is it?”

Revin stopped her from moving any closer. His emotions would get the better of him and that he couldn't allow. "They've killed Mordecai. Isaias killed him. And by the heavens, his last breath draws near. I promise."

"Please don't --" Jenesis stopped mid-sentence, the pain in his eyes radiating into her body. She felt all his anguish, passion, and pain.

"The blood that has been shed will be avenged. Isaias and the Midori clan will pay." Revin seethed, clenching his fists at his side.

* * * * *

Pure pleasure sprouted deep within Nailah anytime she was with Mac. He made her forget about Isaias, his cruelty, and the fool she'd been to believe that she could be what he needed.

What about what she needed? What she wanted? Undeniably, Nailah knew the answer to those questions. She looked at the beautiful man standing above her. He could become her addiction.

"You make me believe that good things happen to those that deserve them." She smiled up at him as she kneeled before him.

"And you make me want to be the one to give them to you." Mac grinned.

Nailah massaged his cock in her hands, watching him. "Is that so?"

"Try me."

She opened her mouth wide, taking him in slowly as her tongue teased the head of his dick. He tasted salty and oh so good. She cradled his balls and squeezed them. His finger tangled in her curly hair, pulling her closer against him. Soon he was pumping his hips against her hungry lips. In and out. Faster. Feeding her every inch of his hard cock.

"Yes!" He rocked his hips. "Oh! Nailah." His orgasm came with a delicious shudder. His body went still as his seed shot into her throat.

Nailah continued to lick the large head of his dick. “You taste so good.”

Mac pulled away from her, making her stand with him. His gaze met hers. “I want you.” He led them to the bed and lay down first.

She straddled him, needing no invitation to sheathe his cock with her wet pussy. She eased down over him, pelvis-to-pelvis and paused. He was large. Hard...and all hers.

“Mmm! I want you, too.”

Nailah shuddered, arching her back. Riding Mac’s hard cock stirred her soul with bliss. He gripped her buttocks, grinding her harder against him. Each thrust brought her body closer to the edge, brought her closer to the truth; she was falling for Mac.

“Yes! Sweet, Nailah! Give me all of you.”

For the first time, she let her guard down. Her cries became ardent. She responded to him more than she ever had with any other man. She wanted to please him, give him all that he could handle of her, of the tension in her pussy. She wanted to wring out every moment, every drop of the exquisite pleasure skyrocketing her into abandon. With Mac, she was free and she never wanted to come down.

“Oh! Oh, yessss!” She leaned down to kiss his lips as he thrust upward and Nailah swore he’d touched her soul. She came, her gaze glued to his. Her soul was bare and it had never felt so wonderful to be naked with a man. A real man.

Mac continued to thrust his hard cock deep inside of her slick pussy. The gentle movements made her whimper. He growled out his release and pulled her limp body into his arms.

“I think I’m falling for you.” She felt him smile against her.

“I think that’s a good idea.”

“You do?”

“Yes, especially since I believe I’m doing the same.”

Nailah smiled, a joy she thought she'd never feel exploded in her heart at their new beginning. How could she tell him about what Isaias had done? A man had died at his hands.

Mac must have sensed her unease as he cradled the side of her cheek. "What is it?"

"Isaias has lost his mind. My life is in your hands. You have to know that. If he ever found out that I betrayed him..."

"I will let no harm come to you, Nailah. Tell me."

"Elder Mordecai...he's dead. Isaias murdered him like he was nothing. I-I can still hear the sound of the gunshot."

"What kept you from telling me?" Mac pushed off the bed and grabbed his clothes.

"I-I didn't...I didn't want to lose you," Nailah said, rushing to her feet to turn him to face her. "Have I lost you?"

His face looked as if it were made of stone. He was so quiet she didn't know if he'd even registered what she'd said.

He pulled her roughly into his arms, possessing her lips in a hot kiss. His tongue delved into her mouth, rekindling the heat they had just shared moments before. He broke away, searching her gaze. "No, you have not lost me. But I need you to go back to Isaias. I need you to keep away until this all blows over."

"But --"

"Nailah, do not argue with me. I can't handle anything happening to you too." Mac's voice trembled with emotion. "Go now and do not come back here. I will come for you."

She nodded her head. "I will be waiting."

Chapter Four

Aries swatted at the mosquito and tried to forget what had transpired between her and Quentin. Her body was still on fire from making love with him in the water. She could still hear the lush sounds of the waterfall and feel the powerful blows of his cock stroking her pussy, imprinting his touch on her skin. Tempting her to become his again.

A smile touched her lips and quickly disappeared when he turned to look behind him. “What are you looking at?”

“You,” he said with that tongue-in-cheek grin on his sexy lips. He stopped walking so that she could catch up to him.

“What about me?”

“You look like a lady well satisfied.” He gazed into her eyes.

Aries felt her body heat up as she thought of just how he’d satisfied her. God! Quentin knew her inside and out. He knew how to make her come, how to draw out her orgasms. He knew what she liked. He knew things about her others didn’t. It wasn’t the first time that she’d felt exposed to him.

“You know, maybe I am.” She shrugged.

“Uh-huh.”

They walked in silence for a moment, before Quentin's gaze rested on her again. "I was sorry to hear about your father passing on."

"Thanks. He never seemed to like you."

He snorted. "Your father didn't like vampires. And he certainly didn't want me to marry you."

"You two had something in common then."

Quentin stopped and hauled her into his arms, making her face him. "There was never a time I didn't want to make you mine."

She braced the palms of her hands against his chest. "*You* should have been mine, Quentin."

"Arieona, don't you know I never stopped wanting you?" He looked away from her. "There are things that you don't understand."

"Is this about your duty to the Scepter?"

"No."

She frowned. "Then what are you talking about, De Leon?"

"Your father didn't like vampires for a reason. He had his own secrets."

She pulled out of his embrace; confusion marred her brow. "What are you saying? Secrets? My father didn't keep secrets from me."

"Let's not talk about this." Quentin started to walk away from her. She grabbed him by the forearm. "Some things are better left alone, Aries."

"No! Not until you tell me what the hell is going on."

"I can't. It would only put you in danger."

"Danger? What danger? Would you tell me what the hell you're talking about? Right now!"

"I'm not going to argue with you about this."

“So, now it’s okay to keep secrets from each other, as long as it’s for your benefit.”

“This has nothing to do with *my* benefit, woman. It’s for yours whether you want to believe it or not.” He growled.

She leveled him with a glare, crossing her arms over her chest. “Well, seeing as I have no idea what you’re talking about, I wouldn’t know.”

“Why can’t you just believe that I have your best interests in mind?”

“I’m going to pretend you didn’t say that.” Aries snorted.

“So you still distrust me?” Quentin frowned. “You think that I would lie to you?”

“You know what they say about best intentions.”

“No, but I’m sure you’re going to tell me.”

“If you’re not lying to me right now, then tell me what these secrets are that my father supposedly kept from me,” Aries replied, searching his face.

“I told you, I can’t tell you that.”

“So you can and will keep your promises to your blasted Elders, but not me? Is that right?”

“Don’t make it seem like it was so easy for me.” Quentin sighed.

“Wasn’t it? It should be quite easy seeing as history keeps repeating itself and I’m the fool that keeps --”

The sound of a gunshot ringing through the jungle sent Quentin diving toward Aries. His body covered hers with full force as they fell to the ground.

“I think the Seastnan was trying to warn you about this kind of danger, sweetness.” Reign laughed, marching toward them, pointing a semi-automatic with four armed men behind him. His gaze trained on Quentin as he turned to face the couple, ignoring the luminous glare radiating from the other vampire’s eyes. “Don’t get heroic or I won’t hesitate to put a silver bullet in your skull.”

“W-Who are you?” Aries asked, wincing as one of the armed men yanked her upward to stand on her feet. “Hey!”

“Reign’s the name. You have no idea how happy I am to make your acquaintance.” The stranger’s ravenous stare swept over her from head to toe.

Quentin delivered a direct blow to the other man’s solar plexus. He quickly kicked at the second guard, knocking him off balance. Quentin’s talons sliced into the man, killing him instantly.

“Let her go!” he growled, holding the dead man’s body as a shield and the guard’s gun in his other hand.

“Seems we’ve reached an impasse.” Reign grinned, grabbing Aries from his guard’s hold. He pressed the gun to her temple.

“Seems so,” Quentin said, edging forward.

“Don’t come any closer. I knew you would try to be the brave one. Bad choice.”

Aries twisted in his arms. “Quentin, blow his fucking head off!”

“I wouldn’t try anything, bitch; it might be *your* pretty little head I blow off,” Reign said. “Are you willing to take that gamble? Put down your gun. Now!”

Aries stared at Quentin, willing him to take the shot. To kill this bastard, despite the gun pointed to her head. Her heart was pounding a mile a minute. Perspiration began to bead on her forehead. She didn’t want to die, nor did she want this asshole to get the better of them. Her mind was racing. She tried to read him, to figure out his next move.

“All right. All right.” Quentin shoved the dead guard’s body to the ground and slowly dropped the gun and kicked it over to Reign.

“No! Quentin, what are you doing?” Aries grimaced as Reign’s chokehold on her tightened.

“You have a big mouth. Now, shut the fuck up,” he muttered against her cheek, pressing his flesh against hers in a sexual taunt. “You smell like flowers.”

"Fuck you!" Aries moaned, as he tightened his hold on her again. Her eyes fluttered. She swore she was seeing stars.

"Such a filthy little mouth. I'd be happy to fill it up for you."

The man's threat made Aries go still.

"If you hurt her, I'll kill you!" Quentin gritted his teeth. "Who sent you?"

"Who's talking about hurting her? Now, fucking her, that I could do." Reign laughed. "You'll learn soon enough. My boss will be very happy to see you. He's waited long enough for this meeting." Reign nodded his head to the remaining three guards as they cautiously walked over to Quentin. One guard pushed the butt of the gun into Quentin's gut, sending him to his knees. Another pistol-whipped him over the head.

The sounds of the blows made Aries eyes swell with tears. "Stop! Please stop!"

"What's wrong, love? Don't you love the sound of defeat? Your Seastnan will succumb to the Midori clan. One way or another." Reign whistled to his guards. The men stopped the beating, looking down at the crouched man beneath them.

Reign tossed Aries to the ground and stood over Quentin. He watched as the other man groaned and flopped to his back. "Just to ensure you don't try anything."

Aries screamed as Reign slashed across Quentin's ribs. It was too much. She felt her own lungs burn with fire. Tears blinded her vision as she slumped to the ground. Her last thoughts were of Quentin. He was gone from her again.

* * * * *

"I thought I told you to bring him back alive."

"He's still breathing, isn't he?"

"Barely."

The voices stirred Quentin from the half conscious sleep he'd been in. He felt like his body was torn into pieces. His eyes fluttered open, pain searing his ribcage. "A-Aries?" His

arms were stretched out, his wrists clasped in heavy iron cuffs. His neck was braced in the same weighted iron as were his feet. He tried to move against the bars only to shout out in pain.

“Never have I heard such an exquisite sound.”

Everything within Quentin stilled as he recognized the voice of his enemy.

“What have you done with her?”

Isaias walked closer, punching him in the stomach. “Now, is that any way to say hello? If I were you, I would be less worried about Arieona and more concerned about the plans I have for you.”

“There’s nothing you can do to me.”

Isaias grabbed him by the hair. “I wouldn’t be too sure of myself, Seastnan, especially since you are the one looking like a pig on a skewer. You care for Aries, we both know that, and that is leverage enough.”

Quentin eyed the other man. “As do you.”

“You’ve miscalculated if you think that I won’t use her to make my point.”

“Which is what? I already know how insane you are.”

Isaias shoved Quentin’s head back, making sure he hit the wall. “Such disrespect. I thought we were friends, you and I.” He laughed. “After all, we share the same taste in women. And she is good, isn’t she, Seastnan?”

He flexed toward Isaias, only to be yanked back into place by the bars. “If you harm one hair on her head, I’ll kill you.”

“Passionate outbursts like those will get you nowhere. You needn’t worry about Arieona, she’ll be treated like royalty, and lucky for you, I can’t kill you outright.” He waited until Quentin’s eyes rested back on him. “I need you -- rather, your blood.”

“What of it?”

"You are a Dhampir. Surely you know what your blood is capable of. By tomorrow night, a new reign of power will rule Vampire Nation, starting with Astyria."

"Not as long as I am alive."

Isaias's laughter echoed through the dark room. "You are so dramatic. 'As long as I'm alive.' I can appreciate good theatrics. You and I have more in common than you might realize."

Quentin narrowed his eyes. "I doubt it."

"Haven't you ever wondered about your own family ties, De Leon?" Isaias shrugged. "I know Aries's father's mischievous dealing with our race is what brought you into her life, but you really should have been looking into your own. Perhaps then, the upcoming events won't come as such a surprise."

"Your madness seems to get worse."

"Is that so?" Isaias's voice rose as he paced the room. "Maybe you should have asked Revin why he's always kept you so close. Or why he never talks to you about your family, seeing as he was such good friends with them." He walked closer to Quentin, whispering in his ear. "Haven't you ever felt the burning need to know where you came from?"

Quentin had never thought of his lineage, knowing only that Revin had become like a surrogate father to him once his parents had been murdered by a rival clan. The secretive lure in Isaias's voice made him think that there was indeed something that he did not know. But what? And what did it have to do with his ludicrous plans?

"I know all I need to know."

"Is that so? Well, what you have not known is that all my life I've hated you, wished for the day that I would have the chance to destroy you and yes, even envied you. For too long, I've sat among the outcasts, while you rose to the upper echelon in the Nation. I often wondered what would have happened if not for the prophecy. How different things might have been between you and I."

"You made the mistake of thinking that we are in any way the same. You are a murderer; a leech that sucks the blood from anything that moves. Tainted."

Isaias nodded his head, his eyes gleaming with rage. "Yes, I am all those things. But there is not much difference between you and I." He moved closer. "Would you not do anything for those you hold most dear -- even kill for them? The killer instinct is in us all, even you, Seastnan. I just choose to relish that reality."

"You will not succeed. The Scepter will hunt you down."

"Do you think that I have just put all this together at a whim, De Leon?" Isaias shouted. "No, I've calculated everything, even you, to this exact moment. You see, you and I are linked more than you could ever realize. More like brothers, really."

"We are not brothers."

"Are you sure about that? Look at me. I know you feel it. The connection, the force between good and evil. The link between you and I."

Quentin forced himself to look into Isaias's eyes. He couldn't look away, as if under a spell.

"Yes, you feel it. You were the chosen one. The one the fates decided would rule the royal guards from birth. And I -- well, I was to be the black mark of our people. The curse upon the Scepter."

"I don't feel it." Quentin tried to fight the burning sensation as he looked into Isaias's eyes. The truth sprouted deep into his being as if it'd been in a deep slumber all along, only to reawaken angry and hungry for vengeance.

"Yes, dear brother. That choice was made by our father. The one that made the decision that has brought us to this very moment. The man that I hate more than you. He is the one to blame for the demise of the reigning regime of the Nation." Isaias spat. "Our father refused to acknowledge that you, like I, have a dark streak. Your black blood holds the key to raising Furaq."

“No! I will not --”

“Yes!” Isaias walked to a table, grabbing a syringe. He pushed the applicator; liquid spewed into the air. His face was a mask of contempt, his brown eyes mirrored hatred. “Yes, you will. You have no choice. For you see, dear brother, you are the host that the ancient demigod chose. A shame, I know, but it is the truth. I will use you to get what I want.” He stuck the needle into Quentin’s arm. “After all, we’re blood brothers.”

Quentin felt the room began to spin around him. He closed his eyes as the drugs seeped deeply into his system, making everything in the room seem wildly distorted. “I will not help you --”

“You have no choice,” Isaias said, turning his back to him and whispering something to his guard. He smiled over his shoulder. “Time for a little game. I think you’ll like this, brother. If I remember correctly, Arieona always was good at them.”

* * * * *

Revin gripped Jenesis’s hips as she rode up and down his cock. Her beautiful amber eyes fused with his. He felt her release building and massaged her clit with his thumb. He would never get enough of her. She was his match in every way. He loved her and only her.

“Come for me, Jenesis. Now.”

“Oh, yes! Yes, my love.” She arched her back, grinding against him until she collapsed against him, tired and very sated.

Revin growled, pressing his lips to hers and came long and hard deep into Jenesis’s womb. He cradled her in his arms, feeling as if he could tell her anything. “You were made for me.”

She smiled against his chest. “And you for me, despite what my clan members think of me screwing an Elder.” She chuckled. “Especially one five hundred years older than me.”

“Are you saying that I’m old?”

She moaned, feeling his cock stir deep within her channel. “No, I’d definitely not call you old.”

They lay in silence for a moment, before Jenesis looked up to face him. “What burdens you, my love? I felt it when we made love and a lady does not like to come in second.”

“You will never come in second.” Revin leaned forward to kiss her lips and lay back against the pillows. “I made a decision.”

“Oh?”

“Many years ago, one that Quentin may be paying for right now.”

Jenesis moved to his side, positioning herself into the crook of his arm, her hand splayed across his wide chest. “What kind of decision would Quentin be paying for now?”

“The price for being my son.”

“Your son? But --”

“I know. I made sure that no one would ever know that he was mine. It was too dangerous. I promised his mother, Iriane, before she died.”

“The human widow was your mistress?”

Revin gazed down at her. “Yes. I loved her and out of that love, she bore me two sons.”

Jenesis propped herself up. “Two? But if Quentin is one of your sons --”

“Isaias.”

Her mouth went wide. “Isaias is Quentin’s twin?”

“Yes, he is. From the moment they were born there was a war between good and evil. One son to have a legacy of excellence, the other a legacy of destruction and chaos.”

“What did you do?”

Revin balled his hands into fists. “I did what I had to do, I banished Isaias from Astyria. I gave him to a witch doctor of the Midori clan and raised Quentin as if he were a surrogate son.”

Jenesis cupped his face in her hand. “How hard that must have been for you. To watch your son from a distance and to deny another.”

“It was a choice I never regretted until now. Quentin was chosen.”

“How?”

“He was chosen by the demigod, Furaq. The ancient scion takes a host every twenty years.”

Jenesis’s eyes widened. “And Quentin is the host?”

“Yes. And Isaias knows, has known for years and found a way to strike through a human woman.”

“Arieona Roman, but what does she have to do with all this?”

Revin sighed. “More than she could ever realize.”

* * * * *

“Elder.” Mac bowed.

“Where is Quentin? Where is my son?” Revin asked, later that afternoon as his guard entered the inner sanctum.

Mac straightened, telling the other man all that had unfolded. “I’m afraid Isaias has taken him captive, and Arieona too.”

“No!”

“We must act now, Elder. Isaias has already killed Mordecai and will not hesitate to kill his brother.”

Revin walked to the altar, pulled out his dagger, and turned back to Mac. “You’re right and that’s why I am going with you.”

“That would not be wise,” Jenesis said from the doorway, rushing into the room to stand beside him. “I will not let you go.”

Revin pulled her into his arms, kissed her lips, and broke away. "I cannot let you stop me. My son needs me and I will not fail him again." He turned to Mac. "Thank you for looking after him all this time. You have been a true defender of the Scepter."

"I'd die for Astyria and Quentin."

Revin placed his hand on Mac's shoulder. "My thanks."

He braced the Elder's shoulder respectfully. "Let's go."

Chapter Five

“Your beauty never ceases to amaze me,” Isaias said. His hungry gaze traced every curve of her skin.

Aries fought the urge to vomit. The drugs he’d given her made everything double and hard to focus. She felt hot, like she was on fire. The room was lit with candles, the light blurred right before her eyes. She tried to stand, but lost her balance. She heard Isaias’s laughter floating about the room.

“You bastard! Where are my clothes?”

“You won’t need them for what you’re about to do.”

He must have witnessed the tension in her body because the next thing she knew his hands were on her waist, directing her forward. She tried to struggle. “Get your hands off me!”

“Shut up and get over here. I’m doing you and your lover one last favor.”

“What are you --” Her voice trailed off as her gaze met Quentin’s. He sat on a bed his wrists tied to the posts, his head hung low. The white sheets were tossed to the floor. “Quentin!”

He raised his head. “Aries.”

“Yeah, yeah, save the lover’s reunion bit for a moment.” Isaias turned her to face him. “You never did understand why I came after you, did you?”

She smiled. “Because you’re a fucking weasel of a man and a thief on top of it.”

He yanked her toward him, her breasts crushed against his chest. “Mmm, I forgot how good your skin felt and how wicked your mouth is.” He moved closer as if he was going to kiss her only to feel her shudder. He stopped and laughed. “Don’t worry. I have no intention of touching you -- yet. No, that pleasure will go to my brother one last time.”

“Brother?” Aries questioned. “Quentin isn’t your brother.”

“Oh, but he is, and you know what they say: blood trumps all. You see, it will be my brother’s blood that allows me to become ruler of the Nation and if you’re lucky, you could be my Queen.”

“I’d rather have my eyes gouged out.”

“If you try anything, you’ll get your wish.” Isaias pushed her toward the bed, and before she could get up he inserted the syringe into her arm.

“No!” Aries shouted, feeling the serum explode in her veins. She turned to face Isaias, the smile on his face exaggerated as her vision glazed over. Heat spread through her body, filling her with a delicious urge for sex.

“Make it count, Aries. I want you to fuck Quentin really good; it will be the last taste of you I’ll allow him to have.” He looked to his brother. “I’ll be watching.” He turned to leave and then stopped.

“Aries?”

She turned her head to the devil, fighting the shudders rocking her body.

“Did De Leon ever tell you why he became your protector?”

“Go away.”

Isaias chuckled. "I figured as much. Bad boy, brother. I'm sure that Arieona would have loved to hear that her father slaughtered the vampire who bit her mother, as well as stole the diamond of the creature. Did I forget to mention that he in turn killed your mother too?"

"Don't listen to him," Quentin said. "I will kill you." He strained against the ropes.

"Promises, promises." Isaias closed the door behind him.

"What? What is he talking about?" Aries glanced at Quentin. "Is it true?"

"We have other issues to worry about."

"Damn you, he's telling the truth, isn't he?" Fear trembled in her heart, moisture built at the back of her eyelids. She couldn't believe what she'd heard. It couldn't be true. Her father was not a murderer.

Quentin's handsome face was marred with shadows under his eyes, yet she could see the truth. She felt it singe her blood; anger raced through her veins.

"I wish there was something I could say."

"There is something you *can* say. Say it isn't true." Aries sobbed. "Tell me, you didn't lie to me. That my father didn't murder my mother because she would turn into a vampire. Tell me!" Her body shook as tears streamed down her face; she collapsed against his chest.

"I can't, baby. Aries, look at me. Please."

She faced him. "You lied to me."

"I did it for your own good."

"I never asked you to look after me, De Leon. Never. I didn't want your help." She stared at him. Aries couldn't take her eyes off his lips. She knew it was the drugs working through her, but she couldn't stop wanting Quentin. The need to fuck him was irresistible. She pressed her mouth to his, taking what she wanted. Her tongue swept against his lips, pressing, teasing for the sweetness only he could give.

Quentin broke away, his eyes half-lidded. "You have to fight the drugs. We need to get out of here," he murmured, kissing her back, his tongue lining the seam of her bottom lip.

Aries climbed onto his lap, her hands reached out for his rigid cock. He was as turned on as she was. “Fat chance of that happening, seeing as your brother has us locked up.” The drugs heightened everything. The scent of sex was in the air as she straddled Quentin, layering butterfly kisses around his neck. “Rest assured, when these drugs wear off, I will kick your ass.”

He groaned. “Untie me.”

“No.”

“We don’t have time for games.”

“I like the idea of having you at my mercy, De Leon. There’s something very rewarding about it.” Aries wanted to work him into a frenzy. Her hands touched every sinewy muscle, smiling triumphantly as his flesh trembled from her touch. The realization made her feel powerful. Wicked.

She reached for his hard cock, stroking him from the broad base to the sensitized crown with her fingers. Up and down. Her fingertips massaged the head and marveled at how rigid his dick grew beneath her touch.

“Aries.”

She watched as his head dipped back and he grunted. She smoothed her fingertips over the head of his cock. Pre-cum moistened her flesh, causing her to clench her thighs. How she longed to feel his dick inside of her, stretching her wet pussy as he slipped deep and hard against her walls. “Do you like that?” She leaned forward; the hard tips of her nipples grazed his chest as she ground her hips against him. A soft sigh escaped her lips.

Touching him was not enough. She edged off his lap and kneeled, pushing his legs apart. She looked up into his fierce gaze.

“Do you know what you’re doing to me?” he said between clenched teeth.

“Nothing yet.” She bent down and swept her tongue along the stiff line of his cock, starting at the base and slowly moved up until her mouth pushed the head deep between her

lips. God, he tasted so sinfully good. Salty. Her hand wrapped around his dick as she went from slow licks to a pulsating sucking motion that sent Quentin's hips upward as he strained against the restraints.

"Oh, yes! Fuck!"

His ardent cries forced Aries's body into submission as her pussy grew wet with lust. She used her mouth to deliver intense suction, driving Quentin undeniably over the edge as he pumped his hips harder and faster against the matching movements of her mouth.

"Aries. Ahhh!"

Yes. God! *Yes!* This is what she wanted. To see Quentin De Leon succumb totally and completely to her. That uncontrolled energy surged deep within him as she caressed his heated flesh. Aries felt it consume every ounce of him as his body shuddered against hers and he came in powerful waves. She licked every drop of his essence before steadying herself on his thighs and maneuvered herself upward. She needed him, every hard inch inside of her. Now!

Aries squeezed his balls, wanting to torture him, wanting him to pay for the pain he'd put her through years ago and the torture now. Would she ever rid herself of him?

"We shouldn't be doing this right now."

She lifted herself and slid her pussy onto his cock and wiggled. She sighed, feeling his cock getting harder at her teasing. "No."

"We're being watched," Quentin said.

Aries smiled. "I know." She moved against him sensuously, willing the desire flooding her senses to be enough to dull the ache in her heart. To help her to forget the secrets her father had kept from her.

She rode Quentin long and hard, trying to build up to the bliss that would shield her from the pain. She looked into his eyes; tears rolled from her own. Aries cried out her

release, feeling as if she'd lost part of her soul. She slowly untied Quentin only to feel his arms wrap around her, holding her still against him.

"Would you ever have told me about my father?"

A heartbeat later, he answered. "No."

Aries rose off of him, her head spinning. "I didn't think so."

"We don't have time for this. We have to get out of here."

"Right, same shit, different day." She sat on the edge of the bed, wrapping her arms around herself.

Quentin reached for her, but she dodged him. "I never wanted secrets between us."

"But there are."

He turned her to face him. "What would you have me to do?"

She wiped angrily at the tears. "I wouldn't *have* you do anything, but for once it would be nice to know that your feelings for me outweighed your obligations for your duties."

"Duties? Aries, I couldn't unburden myself with the truth about your family. I didn't want to hurt you."

"I can't trust you."

Quentin sighed. "I'll worry about that once we're out of here and you're safe." He brushed the back of his hand over her cheek. "If something happened to you..."

The emotion in his voice caused her walls to crumble. She moved into his arms, her body a willing captive to the fire he stoked within her. She closed her eyes as his fingers caressed every curve of her face before he brushed his lips against hers. In that moment she felt all the things he hadn't said, all the emotions came tumbling forward, crashing into her own insecurities.

Quentin wrapped her up against his body. He broke away to look in her eyes. "I want to make love to you, Aries. Nothing else in the world may be filled with certainty, but know that I want nothing more than to be inside of you."

"Oh yes." She moaned as he captured her mouth, his teeth dragged across her bottom lip. Her blood raced as she freely gave over to passion. To him.

* * * * *

The next night, Isaias looked up at the full moon. The time was at hand. He felt Nailah's presence before he heard her speak. "How long are you going to stand there watching me?"

She crept out to the balcony beside him, her curious gaze on him. "I don't think you should go through with this ceremony."

He turned to face her. "Could that be because you are worried about what will happen to your new lover?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Of course you do, Nailah. Do you think I'm blind? I've seen how your face lights up when Mac's name is mentioned."

"Isaias, I never meant for this to happen."

"But it did. You betrayed me."

She frowned. "You betrayed me first. You sent me to another man's bed. What did you expect?"

He grabbed her by the forearm, pulling her beside him. "I expected your loyalty."

"I gave you everything I had, Isaias, but it wasn't me you wanted. You wanted her. I saw you, watching her. It's Arieona that you want, yet, you let her sleep with your brother."

"What business is it of yours?"

Nailah tilted her chin defiantly at him. “Maybe watching others is the only way you can truly get off.”

The slap stung her face. “Since you like meddling in my business, I’ll have to put you somewhere until other matters have been dealt with.”

“What are you going to do to Mac?” Nailah yelled, as he hauled her to a small, dark room. She kicked and screamed against him.

“Don’t worry about your little boyfriend. He’ll be taken care of.” Isaias opened the door, tossing her inside. “Did you take me for a fool, bitch? Did you think that I wouldn’t find out about you betraying me with a stranger? I have eyes and ears everywhere. This is my fucking world, Nailah. Don’t you ever forget it.” He quickly locked the door.

“Isaias! Isaias, let me out! You can’t do this. You can’t!”

“I can and I will.”

* * * * *

Isaias entered the chamber room. “Is everything in place?”

Reign nodded.

“Good, let’s get started.” He turned to look at the people in the room, De Leon, Aries, and several guards. He walked to her where she was restrained against the wall. “Soon, love, a whole new government will be in place. Will you be my queen?”

“Never! You might as well kill me now.”

“Such dire actions.”

She rolled her eyes at him. “It would have to be dire to consider being with you.”

“It’s unfortunate you feel that way,” Isaias snapped. “Reign, give me the knife. Maybe you’ll feel differently once Furaq has risen.”

“Probably not,” Aries replied.

“We’ll see about that.” Isaias’s gaze met Quentin’s. “Any last words, brother?” He sliced into Quentin’s arm, collecting the dark blood in a vessel.

“Go to hell, Isaias.”

“You first,” he retorted. “Soon our differences won’t even be an issue. Once you transform into Furaq, life as you know it will cease. Darkness will reign with your every thought and there I will rule, with you at my side.”

Isaias took the vessel to the altar, and poured the deep red blood carefully into a chalice. The black gown he wore whipped around as a slight gust in the air swirled around them. He felt the power surging around him. His time was now and he would take it.

He started to chant in an ancient Vampiric dialect, raising his arms to the heavens. The moon was full and illuminated, breaking free of the last cloud. The sound of thunder crashed above them.

Aries gasped. “Quentin, we have to get out of here.” She turned to look at him, but his eyes were rolling back as if under a spell. “Quentin! Quentin, please. Tune him out.”

Her pleas fell on deaf ears as Isaias yelled out his chant. Holding up the Blood Luna Diamond; the moon’s light reflected off of it, causing a radiant light to beam toward the altar. Isaias held up the chalice in his other hand.

Aries watched in horror as the light completely overshadowed Isaias’s body. “Oh my God! No!” She turned just as Isaias did to his brother. The blinding light made her close her eyes, but not before hearing Quentin scream in a deep guttural voice as the light shot into his chest.

“Quentin! No!”

Her eyes widened as the man she loved morphed right before her eyes. Black hair sprouted over his arms, chest, and face. His eyes turned a wicked shade of red and long talons

tore into the restraints until he was free. Smooth ivory fangs hung down to his chin. Sinewy muscle and tissue bulked into a tall, hairy vampire.

Furaq had been reawakened. His fierce roar echoed in Aries's ears. She was too frightened to move as she watched in horror as the beam of light poured into Furaq until Isaias slumped down to his knees.

Heaven help them all.

"Who dares wake Furaq?" The beast spoke in a low, chalky voice.

"It is I, Isaias of the Midori clan." Isaias looked up to face the creature. "Yes! Yes, my lord, you have risen. Together we will rule the Nation. Together we will conquer all. All you have to do is follow my lead."

The beast roared again at Isaias's words, taking a step toward him.

* * * * *

Revin drew his dagger out of his cloak as he and Mac stood unnoticed in the bushes. "We can't wait here any longer. I've got to help him."

"He's turned. We're too late."

"No, we're not." Revin charged into the chamber room, standing in front of Quentin. "Fight, my son. You must fight him; it's the only way."

"Elder! No!" Mac shouted.

Isaias's eyes widened when he saw his father. He looked up at the beast. "Kill him. He is not loyal to our cause."

"No! Quentin, I know you are in there somewhere. Furaq is not all of you. I know you, your heart, and your loyalty to our people. Do not give in to the rage of the beast," Revin pleaded.

Furaq roared as he stepped closer to him, his talons poised to strike.

“That’s it! Kill him so that we can take over the Nation. Darkness will rule,” Isaias yelled at the beast.

Just as Furaq lunged toward the Elder, Mac ran in front of him, pushing Revin out of harm’s way.

“Ahhh!” Mac screamed as the talons cut into his body.

“My son, fight. Fight with everything you have, your very being.”

As Aries watched in horror, something deep within her snapped. “Quentin, fight for me!”

Furaq turned toward her. He roared. “Aries.” His gaze met hers before he turned to Isaias.

“Kill her! She’s an enemy to our covenant!” he ranted, his eyes wild with hate. “Kill them all... Not me, you dumb beast. Kill them. Do as I say!” Isaias stumbled backwards.

“Your time has come! Furaq obeys no other. You will pay for your insolence.”

The beast raced toward Isaias, clawing at him, tearing his body apart. The blood-chilling screams made Aries turn her face. She reopened her eyes in time to see Furaq toss Isaias’s body aside.

As if physically drained, Furaq slumped down to his knees, ever so slowly morphing back to Quentin. Aries wanted to run to him, but she couldn’t. She pulled at the ropes holding her, squeezing and pulling at them with all her might. Blood dripped down her wrists at the cuts in her flesh.

Revin untied Aries; then they both moved quickly to Quentin’s side.

“He’s collapsed. We must move him,” Revin said, kneeling over his son. He turned to look at Aries. “Ms. Roman.”

“Yes.”

“I’m sorry we had to meet under such drastic circumstances.”

Aries looked back to where Quentin laid. "So am I." He was so still. It scared her. She knelt down beside him, fear clutching her heart.

"I doubt he would have been able to contain the beast as he did if you had not been here. Thank you."

Aries barely heard the man's words as her eyes glazed over with tears.

Chapter Six

The smell of smoke and death clung to the night air. Nailah's ears rang from the deafening blow of Quentin's transformation and Isaias's hollowed screams. She slowly looked up from the ground, moving her arms from over her head.

Mac.

She rose to her feet, and started looking for the man she loved. Her gaze swept over the vegetation as she walked swiftly, calling his name. She hurried, trying not to alert any of Isaias's minions. She'd tricked the guard into thinking she was sick and stabbed him. When she recognized the cloak he'd worn, she ran over to him. "Mac! Mac, can you hear me?"

Nailah fell to her knees, scooping his head up in her arms. He was so still, his white skin pale in comparison to her tanned complexion. Tears slid down her cheeks. "Y-You can't leave me. You promised to come for me."

He stirred, blinking his eyes. "I promised because I meant it."

"Mac!" She kissed his forehead. "I thought --"

"You thought I'd left you, but there will never be a day that I won't be there for you, Nailah. I love you."

"I love you, too."

“Good, because I’m not letting you go.” He tried to get up. “Is Isaias dead?”

Nailah turned to look at the heap of his remains over her shoulder. Her flesh crawled as she thought of the pure evil on his face right before Quentin had killed him. “Yes.”

“Miracles do happen.”

Nailah helped him to stand up. “Yes, they truly do.”

* * * * *

“You look like you’re feeling better.”

Quentin turned to face the voice of his father. Revin. He still could not believe what had unfolded. He couldn’t believe that the man he’d grown up under and idolized was indeed, his father. “Depends on what you think better is.” He was quiet for a moment. “My life feels like a lie.”

Revin walked closer, the black cloak around his neck contrasting against his stark silver hair. “It was for the protection of Astyria. Had people known who you truly were, there would have been more attempts on your life and political chaos would have unfolded. I couldn’t allow it.”

Quentin nodded, knowing full well the compromise of duty and intimate relationships. Hadn’t he made the same decision time and time again with Aries? It didn’t make him feel any better. He turned back to look out the window.

“I loved your mother and she loved you and Isaias. I promised her that I would keep you both safe, but when the prophecy was announced, I couldn’t be the father you needed.”

He realized had he been in the same position, he would have made the same choice. It was what he was bred to be, a protector. A legacy he could no more ignore, than he could his love for Arieona Roman. His soul was heavy as he thought of her, and the lack of forgiveness in her eyes. He’d deliberately kept the knowledge of her father away from her and had lost her forever.

“You love her very much, don’t you?”

Quentin felt a small smile tug on his lips. “More than I ever realized.”

“Then fight for her.”

“I cannot offer her what she wants.”

“Which is?”

“The knowledge that she would come first before the Scepter and the people of Astyria.”

“Why can’t there be both, son?” Revin stood beside him.

“Even if there could, I’m not sure that Aries would ever believe she would come first. There would always be some doubt in her mind.”

“But you can reduce that doubt. Go after her, son. Do you really want to live without her again?”

Quentin couldn’t call what he’d been doing living. He’d merely existed before Aries and after, when he’d left, he’d busied himself without her.

Revin changed the subject. “There is something else that I would like to talk to you about.”

“And that is?”

“With Mordecai’s death, the Scepter is short an Elder.”

“Who will you choose to take his place?”

“I was thinking of asking you to do the honor.”

“Me?” He folded his arms over his chest. “But what would the other Elders say?”

“I’m head Elder; my judgment will not be questioned.” Revin grinned. “What do you say?”

Quentin had never thought of being an Elder. He'd never questioned an appointment before. But for once in his life, he didn't feel the passion to immediately jump in with both feet. Not this time. Something was different. Everything felt different.

A knock at the door brought the men's heads around.

"Sorry to intrude. I just wanted to let Elder Revin know that arrangements have been made for the return to Astyria," Mac said.

Quentin walked over to him. The two men stared at each other. "I believe I owe you thanks." He extended his hand.

"That's what friends are for." Mac shook hands. "You know my loyalty to you and the people of Astyria was never in question."

"I do and we are indebted to you."

Mac smiled. "So what now?"

"Well, Revin is trying to make me an Elder." Quentin turned to his father.

"An offer I hope you don't refuse."

"Nothing has been determined yet."

Mac smiled. "Well in that case, you should know that Arieona is preparing to leave the island today."

Quentin felt everything within him respond. "I have to go."

"But we still need to discuss --"

"Later."

"I guess you can't stop a man in love." Mac looked to the Elder.

"You should try telling him that." Revin chuckled.

"I think he'll find out soon enough."

* * * * *

Aries couldn't help feeling relieved that she was leaving the island today. Her mind had been scrambled since the night of the ritual. She hadn't slept in over two days. She folded a shirt and tossed it into her suitcase. Her whole world had been rocked. Her family life had been a lie.

Her father, a murderer, and her mother bitten by Furaq. The truth was hard to swallow. The pain would take a long time to get over. She had no idea why she was so anxious to get back home, especially when the true test lay with deciding what she was going to do with Roman Jewelry Designs.

Her hands shook. She didn't care if she ever touched another jewel in her life.

"Were you trying to leave without saying goodbye?"

Her gaze met Quentin's. Her mouth watered. The black pants and white crisp shirt displayed his sexy masculine form. His dark hair was brushed back. His gaze skimmed over her with the same intensity shooting wild sparks through her body. "I doubt you would notice the difference." She went back to folding her clothes.

"You'd be surprised."

Aries looked up, placing her hands on her hips. "This seems to be an ongoing trend with us."

"What is?" He walked closer into the room, stopping just inches from her.

"Saying goodbye."

"Does it have to be goodbye?"

She was quiet before answering. "I think it's for the best, don't you?"

"Aries, I walked away before. I don't want to repeat history. I want --"

"You want what?" Her heart lurched in her throat as they stared at each other. She knew without him voicing it that he loved her. "Me?"

"I always have," he said quietly. "You know that."

“Yes, I know.” Aries bit down on her lip, fighting the instinctive urge to fly into his arms, to forget all reason, all the secrets and pain of the past and indulge in the pleasure of now. All she had to do was walk over to him, tell him that she wanted to start over again. Yet, the words wouldn’t come.

“Why do I feel there’s a ‘but’ somewhere in there?”

She chuckled. “Because there always has been when it comes to you and me. I wish I could just wrap myself in your arms and believe that everything is going to be okay.”

Quentin angled his head toward her. “It could be. We could be together.”

“Being together will not change what has happened. The lies that have been told.”

“You know why I had to keep secrets from you, Aries.”

“And you know why I can’t just forget that you did.”

“Do I?” Quentin closed the distance between them. He reached out to cup her cheek in his hand. “Because all I can see is a woman running scared from me.”

“And I won’t deny that. But I barely know myself right now, let alone you.”

“So you plan to walk away and never look back.”

“No, Quentin. I could never erase what happened here in the islands. That’s just it. It’s all a part of me. I just have to learn where it all fits.”

He removed his hand. “I hope that in time you will forgive me. I only wanted to keep you safe.”

“I know you did. I guess you and your father have something in common then.”

He nodded. “Do you? Because I refuse to apologize for whatever measure I had to take.”

“Yes and I never thought you would. I just --” She felt the emotion building at the back of her throat. “I can’t do this right now. I need time, for me. Please understand.”

“I do, *mi amour*. I do.” Quentin pulled her into his arms, holding onto her tightly.

Aries held him back, inhaling his scent, wishing things could be different. Maybe in another lifetime, maybe then, she'd be able to deal with the ache in her heart that would surely tear her apart.

The truth was, a lifetime wouldn't be long enough to forget about Quentin and the love they'd shared. She would just have to act like it was.

* * * * *

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Natalie asked several weeks later.

Aries smiled, sipping her vanilla chai tea. "Yes. I feel like everything I've known about my father was a lie. A lie I don't want to be a part of any more."

Natalie placed her hand on top of hers. "I know none of this has been easy on you, but selling the store was a big decision."

Aries placed a wayward curl behind her ear. "A decision I've thought a lot about since I've been back. I'm ready for a change. A new start would do me good."

"Does that change include getting back together with Quentin?"

"Nat!"

She batted her baby brown eyes at her. "Well? Does it? You haven't been divulging much info on the subject in question. So what's the deal?"

Aries shrugged. "There is no deal. Things are the way they should be."

"The way they should be or the way you made them be because you refused to forgive him?"

"I do not want to be having this conversation," she said, directing her attention to the café's menu.

"But we are, so talk to me."

She exhaled loudly. "Okay. How could I possibly go back to a man who will always put duty three steps in front of any relationship or future we could have?"

“You don’t know that he would do that.”

“Why wouldn’t he?” Aries frowned. “History has a way of repeating itself.”

“So that’s it?” Nat shook her head. “You’re just going to walk away?”

“Why, is it a crime? He did it, so can I.”

“So now you’re getting even?”

“No.” Aries closed her eyes and then reopened them. “It’s not about getting even; it’s about not waiting for something that may never work. It’s about not getting my hopes up so that I’m not disillusioned when it doesn’t work out.”

“How can you be so sure that things wouldn’t be different this time? More importantly, are you willing to take that sort of gamble? Are you willing to walk away from Quentin? To live the rest of your life without him?”

Aries started to speak and stopped. The thought of not having him in her life made her stomach twist into knots. She knew that there would never be another man to take his place. She’d tried that once and where had that gotten her?

“All I’m saying is sometimes what we think we can’t have is often what we deserve. Don’t sell yourself short, sweetie.”

Aries knew her friend meant well, yet she hadn’t the slightest idea how to deal with the broken heart she’d carried around since her return from the islands. How was she to live without De Leon? He initiated a hunger within her that would not go away.

“Damn him!”

Nat looked up. “What?”

“Oh, nothing. Just trying to decide what I want.” In every sense of the word.

Chapter Seven

Three Months Later

“Well, I did it.” Aries placed the roses down on top of the double gravesite of her parents. Her gaze crossed over the headstone that read “Roman.” She felt the emotions she’d sworn she wouldn’t feel swell up in her chest.

“I sold the business. I don’t know if you’ll ever understand why, but I’m happy.” She swallowed. “I feel like you lied to me, Dad. In your own way, I suppose you thought you were protecting me from Mom. Seems to be a lot of people doing things like that for me in my life, but I’m taking charge of my own life and I think I’m going to do just fine.”

“I think so too.”

Aries whirled around to face Quentin. “What are you doing here?”

He stepped closer, his gaze intent on her. “How long did you think I’d stay away?”

“You gave no indication that you would or wouldn’t.”

“My mistake.” His sensual lips curved into a seductive smile. He pulled her into his arms. “I’ll correct that right now.” His mouth covered hers, overpowering her senses.

Aries melted into his arms. No matter how much she'd sworn she wouldn't be drawn into them. She found him hard and ready. She broke away, knowing this was not the place to get it on with Quentin.

"What are you doing here?"

"I lost something that I want back."

"And what would that be?"

"You. I lost you and I want you back."

"What?" Aries felt her throat constrict. "But what about your duties? The Scepter?"

"I let myself get so caught up in the Scepter, hoping it would take my mind off of you and the life that we could have together. I can't live that way again. I've taken leave of absence."

"You did what?"

"I'm taking time off. No work and lots of play."

A smile appeared on her lips. "Are you telling me that you've made me your top priority?"

"Yes. Would you like that?"

She batted her eyes up at him. "Maybe, but why? Why would you do that?"

"Because I refuse to live without you." Quentin picked her up in his arms. "From now on, the only duty I have is to please you, Aries. I'm done walking away. Say you want me too."

This was the moment. There wouldn't be another like it. After all they'd been through, she knew of no other danger that could outweigh what she felt for Quentin and the hazard of ignoring the fire that burned deeply within her for him. She had been protected from her past, but she wanted to live and live passionately for her future. A future with the man she loved.

She wrapped her arms around his neck. “God, yes. Yes, I want you.”

He grinned. “How about we take this to your place?”

Aries nibbled on his neck, inhaled deeply, loving that she was back in his arms. And soon her body would be engulfed by his body, his hard cock. “Hurry.”

“You never were patient, *mi amour*.”

She laughed. “And you never could take a hint.”

 THE END 

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