



Soul Mates:
Bound By Blood
Jourdan Lane

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by Jourdan Lane

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Chapter One

There he was again, out on the dance floor, losing himself to the pounding rhythm. He wasn't dancing; he was becoming one with the music. His head was rolled back, face turned toward the ceiling as if in supplication to some higher power. It was as if there was an invisible, impenetrable wall around him. People danced around him, oblivious to his presence, yet somehow managing to keep out of his personal space.

For a brief moment, standing in the middle of the dance floor, he looked like a god himself: a god drawing on the energy from his people. A small smile graced his full lips, and he raked his hands through his short, dark hair. He shook his head, as if clearing away his thoughts, and started to dance again.

Every time he moved, his black leather pants hugged tightly to him, accentuating his ass and muscular thighs in ways that made my mouth water and my dick hard. Tonight wasn't the first night I'd seen him, but it was the first time I'd seen him alone. I didn't know his name; wasn't sure I cared. All I knew was that he was sexy as fuck, he could dance like no one I'd ever seen before, and he'd never been to the bar for a drink.

I'd have remembered that. Him. His drink of preference.

I watched him for a long while, wishing like hell for once that I could be on the dance floor rather than behind the bar. I glanced at my watch; ten minutes until closing. As I looked back to the dance floor, I couldn't help but smile. Oh, yeah.

My rule on one-night stands could be broken for just one hour—with *him*.

A customer appeared before me, blocking my view of the dance floor, smiling as he called out his order. I barely resisted the urge to glare at him, and when he made his drink order, I had to clench my teeth so I didn't tell him to fuck off. Fifteen minutes left until last call and he wanted a damned Fuzzy Navel. Just my luck, the last drink I'd made before I started watching hot-hunk-on-the-dance-floor had been with orange juice and I was out. Not wanting to make a trip back to the storage room for juice to make one measly drink, I turned to Jack—the other bartender and my best friend—asking him to toss me one out of his cooler. He looked at the clock, shook his head, then sent a small metal can flying at my head.

I plucked it out of the air easily and began mixing the drink, still trying to keep my eye on the dance floor. I had to look away for about half a second in order to grab the Peach Schnapps, and when I turned back around, I lost sight of my target on the dance floor. I hurriedly finished mixing the drink, taking the customer's money and giving him change, and watched as he turned away without adding anything to the tip jar. Bastard.

As soon as the customer slipped back into the crowd, I turned my eyes back to the dance floor, searching desperately for that tall, dark-haired stranger. Just as I was about to give up, I found him. Without taking my eyes off him for even a second, I removed the small black apron from

around my waist and tossed it across the counter. "Hey, Jack?"

"What's up, Petey?" he called out from behind me.

I shook my head, ignoring the nickname he used to get me riled up. "Shut me down. I'm gonna dance."

Jack laughed and pressed against my back, sliding his hands around to my crotch. "Oo! Somebody out there's getting you hard."

I groaned as he squeezed me through my jeans. "Christ, Jack, let me go!"

He chuckled and nipped my neck before pushing me away from him. "Go on, pretty boy; I'll take care of your side."

"Love you, man," I laughed and exited the door leading from the bar to the club.

It seemed to take forever to get onto the dance floor. Someone was constantly trying to walk right through me, or regulars were trying to stop me to talk. When I finally made it onto the floor, I stopped in my tracks, unable to move. *He* was only about four feet away, seeming lost in his own little world.

I hoped like hell he didn't mind me invading it.

I moved toward him, brushing his shoulder with mine lightly as I got even with him. His eyes were closed, and I had a sudden attack of insecurity. As I started to slink away, he brought his arm up, hand resting low against my belly. It was only then that he opened his eyes and looked at me for the first time.

I struggled to meet his pale blue eyes as they leveled on me. Something in the way he looked at me made me feel

raw, exposed. I didn't get to concentrate on that for long, however, because he was soon sliding up behind me. The music changed to something a little more bump and grind, and I could have sworn that he growled in my ear when he spoke.

"Dance with me?"

He didn't wait for an answer. His hands went to my hips, forcing me to either move, or move away. I found myself sliding my hands down over his, pushing back against him for contact. Maybe it had been too long since I'd gotten laid, but the longer we danced, the more right it felt. There were no odd moments, no awkward movements; only he and I, dancing, one with each other and one with the music. The song changed and I felt a soft kiss against my neck before the heat that had been at my back was suddenly gone. I turned to face him, to see why he'd moved away—but he was gone.

I searched the dance floor frantically, my eyes going from face to face, none of them *his*. There was absolutely no way that he could have just disappeared on a floor full of people. But he had. Disappointment welled up inside of me and I sighed heavily, making my way off the dance floor.

When I reached the bar, I turned and gave one last look, hoping that maybe I'd missed him somewhere. Someone hugged me from behind and it only took a matter of seconds for me to realize that it was Jack.

"Find him?" he asked, kissing me on the side of the head.

I nodded. "Yep. Found him, danced with him; you didn't see us?"

"Nope. Got busy, then Mike called. Was your boy hot? Where's he at?"

"Oh, he was definitely hot," I said, trying to keep the disappointment out of my voice. "But I don't have a clue where he went. I lost him."

"And that, dear Petey, is why you *can't* get laid." He laughed, turning me around and planting a sloppy kiss against my lips. "You lose them before you can get them home. Better luck next time."

I shoved him away from me. "Stop fucking calling me Petey!"

He feigned a hurt expression, then smiled. "Ready to go? I'll give you a lift."

I turned, giving the club one last look before nodding my head. "Yeah, let's go."

* * * *

Hot, sweaty, and tired, I swiped my towel over the stainless steel counter. Despite the constant thump of the energy-laden techno-beat playing throughout the club, I was damn near dead on my feet. And I stank. I'd spilled more alcohol on me in one night than I had in my entire first week bartending. The club was packed for a Tuesday night, and it seemed that all of the patrons had finally managed to work their way back onto the dance floor. No doubt due to the fact that eight out of twelve of our Go-Go boys were in white thongs, wandering through the crowd.

Nothing got the crowd onto the dance floor faster than the prospect of bumping and grinding with some of the hottest,

most irresistible dancers in Houston. That's what Rave was famous for, actually. While most clubs had their no-touch rules and Go-Go boys dancing on bars, boxes, or in cages, Rave's nearly naked Go-Go boys liked to roam the crowd and get to know the patrons. Sometimes quite intimately.

The only other place in town that had us beat was The Den—which I always thought was short for "The Den of Iniquity." You had to be a brave soul to even step foot in the door. The Den was owned—and run—by vampires. I'd been in there once and nearly pissed my pants over some of the things that I'd seen. It seemed that there were absolutely no boundaries. Nothing was taboo. I hadn't been able to get out fast enough, and the dreams that haunted me for the next couple of weeks had kept me on edge.

Of course, vampires frequented our club, too, but they were always careful not to attract too much attention. They seemed to respect the fact that we had set boundaries, and they were leery of crossing them. Crossing them meant trouble, mostly from the authorities, and, likely, from their leader or Master, or whatever you called a head vamp. A chill crept up my spine as memories of The Den flashed through my mind, and I turned toward the dance floor, needing something to ease my thoughts.

I watched the crowd move and sway for a bit before deciding I needed to sit. I'd had about all I could take. I'd been working for eleven nights in a row now, and this atmosphere was getting to be too much for me to handle. Just as I was about to perch myself on the stool to ease my aching feet, I noticed someone approaching the bar, throwing

half of his body to within inches of me. I didn't have to look at his face to know who it was. I knew the voice as well as I knew his smell.

"Back off, Carl, you know the rule," I said, placing my hand on his chest and pushing him back across the bar. I pointed to the long red line that was drawn along the length of the bar, forcing a smile as I read the words. "Don't ... cross ... the red ... line."

"Aw, c'mon, Peter," Carl whined. "That don't apply to everybody."

"When I'm on shift, it applies to everyone," I said, trying to keep it polite. Carl was probably an okay guy, but he was definitely not my type. He was a user, a big-time user, and it was all we could do to keep him hydrated while he was in the club.

Darren—owner of the club and my boss—would never go so far as to ban him, but he vowed that he wasn't going to have anyone dropping to the floor from X or Special K or whatever the drug of the fucking night was. Darren was big on handing out free water to those who looked like they needed it. Sometimes Darren was just too nice.

Carl actually glared at me for a moment and then smirked. "You just need to get fucked is all; you can be my bitch..."

"Okay." Jack stepped in, signaling for one of the bouncers. "You're out of here for the night, buddy."

I watched as Glen, the absolutely hottest bouncer we had, walked up, grabbed a defiant Carl, and ushered him to the door. Jack turned to look at me. "You okay, babe?"

I nodded, glancing at my watch as I moved to sit on the stool. "I could've handled him, Jack. You know I'm used to it."

"Yeah, well, I don't like anyone talking to you like that." He shrugged. "If you're just going to sit there and take it ... someone's got to stick up for you."

"Whatever," I grumbled, pulling my long, unruly hair back into an elastic band. I was too fucking tired to argue.

"Aw, shit," Jack said as he reached for something on the shelf. "We're out of Midori."

"Vodka, too," I offered. "But it's your turn to go fetch."

Jack rolled his eyes, tossing his towel in my direction, laughing as I reached for it and missed. "Don't let some asshole make you his bitch while I'm gone."

"Regardless of what you believe—half the time—I can take care of myself."

"You just keep on believing that, baby." He grinned, turning and walking toward the storage room.

"Fuck you," I grumbled, picking the towel up from the floor and throwing it at his head.

A loud voice blurted out from behind me. "How 'bout me?" I rolled my eyes before turning around to meet the latest patron to hit on me. At last count, this was the seventeenth person—for just the night—to hit on me, make some lewd remark about fucking me, or tell me how hot my ass was. This shit was getting old.

"How 'bout not," I said, trying to maintain my smile. "Besides me or my ass, what can I get for you?"

"A beer," the twenty-something guy answered.

I gave him a beer in exchange for his money, but as I went to hand him his change, he smiled saying, "Keep it," before turning and disappearing into the crowd.

One of my regular customers, Nathan, who liked to sit at the bar for most of the night rather than joining the throng of dancers on the dance floor, tapped his shot glass on the counter. "Hey, Peter! Get me another round of tequila and a beer. Please?"

"You got it." I exchanged his shot glass for a new one and slid the dirty one across the counter toward the sink. I grabbed his bottle of beer from the ice cooler below as I filled his shot glass. "Where ya been, Nathan? Haven't seen you in a few weeks."

"Been out of town for work," Nathan said, leaning forward so he wouldn't have to yell as the volume of the music increased. "Have I missed anything?"

I shook my head. "Not too much. The wet T-shirt contest was last weekend. It was better than it has been in recent years."

A grin started across his face. "You know what the best night here ever was?"

I held my hand up in warning. "Don't even say it, Nate."

His eyes twinkled with mischief. "I have to say, those dancers aren't the only ones who look hot in white thongs. The bartenders aren't so bad themselves."

"You want me to cut you off for the night," I teased. That had only been a few months ago. Darren had put Jack, me, and a few extra bartenders, into white thongs and bow ties in an effort to get more traffic. Oddly enough, it had worked.

"Just callin' them as I see them." Nathan shrugged. He looked at his watch as he downed his shot. "Get me my tab, will ya? I need to be getting home."

"Work again?"

He nodded. "Got an early flight. More business in New York this week."

I turned and grabbed Nathan's tab from the register and handed it to him. As he fished out his credit card, I noticed that most of the dancers had climbed back up onto their boxes. I sighed, knowing that the DJ was about to crank the music up. I wasn't going to get that five-minute smoke break I'd needed for a while.

After taking care of Nathan's tab, he left, slipping a tip into my tip jar when he didn't think I was looking. I glanced toward the storage room and could see Jack loading cases of beer and liquor onto a dolly. He didn't make it back before the bar rush came. Twenty minutes later, he was back, unloading the dolly; I was pushing past him determined to have my smoke break.

I made my way to the back of the bar, past the back room—that didn't exist if anyone asked, mind you—and exited through the rear entrance door. South Texas in September isn't as bad as the summer time, but it is far from being cool. The temperature could be in the upper eighties to low nineties, even at night, and the humidity was horrid.

'Round October, late November is when you could get the slightest inkling that summer was passing. There were years, however, that I could remember Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays wearing shorts and a muscle shirt because it was so

damned hot. There were times that I longed to live somewhere where there were actually four seasons in a year. In the South, I liked to say that there were only two: hot and hotter.

I pulled the cigarette box and lighter from my jeans, lighting up as I sat down on an old wooden crate. The beat of the music raged on, and I let out a deep sigh as I looked at my watch. Half past one ... still an hour to go before last call. I sat back, stretching my legs, letting my thoughts go back to three weeks before, when I'd danced out on the floor with a beautiful stranger. I still wondered what the hell had happened to him that night. I'd been all set to ask him the next time I saw him, but he hadn't been back.

The sound of laughter nearby pulled me out of my thoughts, and I looked up to see two guys, holding hands, heading for the rear door entrance. Before I could tell them that they needed to use the front, the dark-haired one turned and smiled, his eyes flashing a deep red glow before fading back to a pale green color.

"How are you tonight ... Peter?" he asked, his voice low and husky.

What was it about vampires now that they thought they had to be so blatant about showing off their red eyes and fangs? I certainly didn't remember seeing that shit as a kid. No, the vampires in the kiddie-books had looked so normal. I guess the reason for that was that they didn't want kids running and screaming when they came across a vampire in the grocery store.

I gave the most genuine smile I could manage, trying not to show that I was nervous. "Doing fine," I said, ignoring the fact that the guy—vampire—had known my name. "How are you guys?"

The blond one smirked. "Full."

I took a drag from my cigarette, nodding quickly. "That's ... um, good. I guess."

The dark-haired vampire looked at me again, his eyes casting an appreciative glance over me. "But we could make room for another ... if you're interested."

"Um, thanks, but I've got to get back to the bar," I stammered, getting up quickly. "Have a good night."

I ground my cigarette out and quickly walked to the door. As I opened it, I had an overwhelming urge to look back behind me. The dark-haired vampire smiled, licking his lips.

"Til we meet again ... Peter."

My name was nothing but a whisper over his lips, and I shuddered hard, not wanting to think of what he meant. I didn't wait for them at the door as I walked in, and I practically ran back to my place behind the bar. I was out of breath when I made it to the sink and began washing my hands.

"What's wrong?" Jack asked, appearing beside me. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Vampires," I hissed. "Fucking hate that shit."

"You just need to spend a little time with one, or some, and realize they're just as human as you are."

"No." I shook my head adamantly. "No fucking way."

"And your reasoning for all of this was? Remind me."

I rolled my eyes as I grabbed a towel to dry my hands. "They scare the absolute piss out of me, okay? Some things I just *do not* want to know."

Jack gave a slight chuckle. "Used to scare me, too, Petey, but those days are long past."

I shoved the towel against his chest. "Don't call me Petey."

He leaned in and placed a gentle kiss against my lips before pulling away. "I won't let the big, bad vampires get you, honey."

"Asshole," I grumbled, turning away to tend to the next customer.

The next hour went rather smoothly, and I was thankful. We actually had most of the bar shut down about fifteen minutes before last call. My eyes went to the dance floor, and I instantly caught sight of the couple I'd met out back.

Before I could look away, the blond one winked at me and then tilted his head to the side. I watched in rapt fascination—and horror—as the dark-haired one sank his fangs into the blond's neck. The blond's eyes rolled back into his head for a moment, but he blinked and refocused on me.

Words whispered through my mind. "Join us."

My cock stirred, unbidden, at his words, and I fought to look away, but no matter how hard I tried, my gaze seemed locked with the blond's. I could almost feel myself physically being pulled over the counter and drawn toward the dance floor.

Suddenly, the blond looked away, flinching, and whatever hold he had on me was instantly broken. I stumbled back into Jack, who was giving me an odd look.

"Peter?" Jack asked. "Did you hear a word I just said?"

I shook my head, looking back out onto the dance floor, trying to find the vampire couple. After a bit of searching, I finally found them. The blond cowered, but the dark-haired vampire was looking toward the bar—only not at me. I followed his gaze, hoping to find out what could actually scare a vampire, but Jack put his hand on my shoulder, shaking me gently.

"Peter! What's up with you?"

I shook him off, knowing that if I kept freaking out about vampires that Jack and I would be fighting. I didn't know why, but Jack was more sympathetic to vampires than I thought anyone should ever be. "I'm just tired, Jack. We ready to shut down?"

Jack rolled his eyes. "Well, now, that's what I was just askin' you."

I shrugged. "Shut it down."

A voice, sounding like pure sex, drifted through my mind. "Not yet, Peter."

A familiar voice.

My heart caught in my throat as I turned around. There he was, the most hauntingly beautiful man I believe ever existed: the man who had made me abandon the bar for the first time in longer than I could remember.

His startling, pale blue eyes studied me as I took in the sight of him again: dark brown hair and flawless, angular features with full and oh-so-kissable lips. He was about my height, maybe an inch taller than my six-one, broad-

shouldered, and was quite possibly, what I'd define as perfection.

One hour with him. The words drifted through my mind again. I'd had that. It wasn't enough.

"Hi," I said, swallowing hard.

He smiled. "Good evening, Peter."

Panic went through me, and I wondered if he had actually given me his name that night. I'd been so caught up in the feel of him, with dancing with him that, hell, I might not have heard it.

"I didn't," he said quietly, crossing his arms and leaning against the bar.

"What?" I asked cautiously.

"Give you my name."

His eyes shifted, pupils becoming elongated slits, and a faint red glow began to seep into the pale blue of his irises. He blinked hard and when he looked at me again, his eyes had returned to normal. Kiss. My. Ass. Mr. Sex-On-Two-Legs wasn't human.

"Seems there's more than your name that you forgot to give me," I growled, my stomach in knots.

"Didn't think it would be that much of a problem." He leaned over the bar and reached out, dragging his index finger across my lips. "I mean, the attraction *is* mutual."

"Was..."

He pulled his finger away, putting it to his own lips, sucking the tip of it into his mouth. "No, still is; I can taste it on you."

I cleared my throat, fighting to find my voice. "Who are you?"

"Who do you want me to be?"

Just like a vampire. Tease and never say what they actually meant. Everything was always wrapped in riddles and innuendo. He turned his head to look at the vampire couple on the dance floor and this time both vampires cringed, the dark-haired one taking the blond by the arm and leading him through the mass of gyrating bodies. When he looked at me again, he gave me a measured smile. "They're harmless, Peter; sometimes they forget their place."

I tried to feign indifference. "They aren't bothering me."

"Is that so?" He grinned. "Shall I free them to pursue you?"

Aggravation over this new revelation had me growing brave. "Look, do you want a drink or not? We're closing."

He studied me for a moment and then finally sighed. "Why are you so afraid of me?"

"I'm not," I argued, trying for more conviction in my voice than I really felt.

"Liar," he whispered, his voice sending a trail of warmth over my body. "Let me walk you home."

I shook my head quickly. "I don't think so."

His tongue snaked out, wetting his lips slowly as he raised an eyebrow at me. "Perhaps another time?"

Much to my dismay, my cock stirred in my jeans. He was still the one who had made me feel so fucking alive on the dance floor. The one whose touch I had craved. The one I had searched for when he just disappeared on me. It pissed me

off that I was turned on and scared as fuck at the same time. I looked away quickly, trying to find Jack, but he was back in the storage room.

"Perhaps not." I stepped forward to pull down the metal doors that closed the bar off from the rest of the club.

He grabbed my wrist, looking at me intently. "I am Lucien."

"And *I* ... am tired," I growled, meeting his eyes, glaring. "Hands off."

"Say my name," he insisted, his grip tightening around my wrist. "Just once."

"Good night, *Lucien*," I said quickly, reaching up with my other hand to pull the grating down, pulling my wrist away from him as he was startled by the clanging sound of the metal.

Releasing one of the doors released them all and as soon as the door slammed shut, I shoved the padlock into it, snapping it shut. I leaned against the bar, clutching my wrist in relief.

"We will meet again." The words breezed through my mind.

"Yeah, and fuck you!" I said loudly, startling Jack as he emerged from the storage room.

"What the hell did I do now? Damn it, Peter, you've been acting like a scared little girl all night. What's up?"

I shook my head, sighing. "Really, Jack, I'm just tired. Let's get this wrapped up and get the fuck home."

"Oh." Jack paused as he turned the water on in the sink, letting it get hot. "Mike's picking me up and we're heading over to The Den for a bit. You wanna come with?"

"No fucking way!"

"Just for a little while, Petey," Jack begged. "Come on; maybe the second time will be better than the first and you'll see..."

"No!"

"You're such a spoilsport."

"I know," I said. "And don't..."

"Call you Petey," Jack said, finishing my sentence. "It's your turn to lock up, right?"

I nodded.

"Mike's out back. Mind if I head out?"

I stared at him with a blank expression. I knew that if Mike was out back, there'd be no way of getting any more work out of Jack. "Go on," I said. "I just need to drain the coolers and wipe down the counters anyway. Have fun."

He stepped over quickly, kissing me on the lips as he reached for his keys. "You're the best."

I didn't answer as I watched him maneuver the door behind the counter that led back into the club. As much as I wanted to be mad at him for leaving the way he did some nights, I just couldn't. If I had someone in my life, someone to go home to at night, I'd probably be the same damned way.

I walked over to the big cooler, reached for the drain plug, and stopped cold. I'd forgotten that by letting Jack off early, I'd just lost my ride home. Cabs were rare at this hour so my

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only option was to walk home ... with a vampire named Lucien promising that we'd meet again roaming the streets. Somehow, I didn't think my little can of Mace would do me much good if he decided to get personal. Fuck!

Chapter Two

My apartment was only about ten blocks from Rave. It was something Darren had found for me shortly after I started working for him, a one-bedroom studio apartment on the third floor of an aging building. While the building seemed rather run-down on the exterior, the apartments inside were pretty damned nice. Hardwood floors and new kitchen appliances were things that the owners had shelled out the bucks for only a year ago, and they were promising a new bathroom within the next couple of months. One of the best features, I thought, was the fact that it had controlled access; you either needed to have the security code to get inside, or someone had to buzz in. It had quickly become home to me, my safe haven.

After leaving the club, I'd had this paranoid feeling that there'd be a gang of vampires waiting for me outside. But when there wasn't anything but the occasional straggler, my fears had lessened greatly. Everything was fine up until I was about two blocks away from my apartment. I could have sworn that I heard footsteps behind me, yet when I turned around, there was no one there. I hurried my pace along, knowing that with all of the cash I had on me, I was a prime target for a mugging—or worse.

A few seconds later, I heard the steps again, and this time, when I turned, I caught sight of movement in the shadows. Even through the still, humid night, a sudden cool breeze swept over the street. Wordless whispers echoed around me, and my building suddenly seemed so far away. I quickened

my step even more, resisting the urge to run. That was about the only warning from Jack that I could remember at this point: never run from vampires, that only excites them.

I soon reached my building and as I punched in the code for the door, I felt something brush against my back. I turned around quickly, but there was nothing there. With my back against the wall, facing the street, I slipped into the door and slammed it closed. There was a thump against the door, followed by a deep laugh that both chilled me to the bone and pissed me off.

Fucking vampires! What the fuck I'd done to garner the lion's share of attention from them tonight, I didn't know. I only hoped that whatever fascination they had with me would be gone by the time I had to go back to work. I ascended the stairs to my apartment, knowing I was totally and completely safe. Vampires couldn't come in where they weren't invited, and they sure as fuck weren't invited in here.

* * * *

I sat up straight in bed, hardly able to breathe. I was sweating, trembling, shaking from a dream that I couldn't remember. I was covered in gooseflesh and I had to piss. After crawling out of bed, I stumbled into the bathroom and turned on the light, squinting at the harsh, unnatural light. My heart was beating furiously as I stood letting my stream fall into the toilet below. Every few seconds I'd get a cold chill and my body would shake as if it remembered something that my brain just couldn't comprehend.

I flushed and turned to walk out of the bathroom, reaching over to turn off the light. As soon as my hand hit the switch, throwing the room back into darkness, a fear like I'd never known before came over me. It hit so hard and strong that I had to reach out for the wall to stop myself from falling to the floor. Suddenly, a hand covered my mouth and an arm came around my chest, trapping me between my assailant and the wall.

"What the..." I started, my shout silenced as my throat was suddenly constricted. I fought, trying to get a punch or a kick to land, but the only thing fighting seemed to do was make me tired. Whoever held me either had help that I couldn't see or feel—or he was a strong motherfucker. I made another attempt, but failed to make any progress.

"Stop fighting," my attacker hissed. "You fight and I'm not going to be nice. Understand?"

That voice. I paused, trying to bring to mind why it was so goddamned familiar.

"That's it, Peter," he purred against the back of my neck. "Just relax."

Lucien. The vampire from the club.

I was suddenly as pissed as I was scared. I tried to speak, to tell him to get the fuck off me—to get the fuck out of my apartment—but when I opened my mouth, nothing came out. Teeth nipped the skin of my neck and I attempted to jerk away, but a hand came up to grip my jaw, tilting my head at a painful angle. I swallowed hard, waiting for the pain to come, but instead of the pain, soft, butterfly kisses glided

across my skin. I shivered against him, much to my chagrin, and he buried his face against my neck, inhaling deeply.

He made a sound similar to a huff, and he eased his grip on my jaw, letting his hand travel across my chest. "So beautiful," he whispered. "If only I could smell you ... taste you."

I wasn't sure what he meant by that, but I clenched my jaw as his hand moved even lower, fingers stroking the line of hair from my navel toward my dick. "Don't fucking touch me," I spat out, surprising myself with my own voice.

Lucien's hand stopped, and he gave a soft laugh that raised the hair on the back of my neck. "It seems that *you* are not in control of this situation."

Fear moved a step ahead of anger as I realized the truth of his words; to my horror, my body began to tremble. His fingers moved down to my balls, rolling them in the palm of his hand as he licked a long line from just below my ear across my shoulder. My cock throbbed and I cursed it inwardly for having any kind of reaction. His hand wrapped around my painfully hard shaft and began stroking.

"You can't really be here," I whispered, shaking my head. "You're not real."

"I assure you that I am, indeed, real." He growled, tightening his hand.

"Then what *are* you?" I was struggling to keep the hitch out of my voice. I knew he was a vampire, but if he was here with me, he had to be more.

"I could be your worst nightmare." He nipped hard at my neck and I cried out. "Or I can be the one to make all your dreams come true. That, my love, is up to you."

His hand left my cock and began moving up my chest, letting the nail of his thumb scrape over my right nipple. To my horror, I moved into his touch instead of away from it. "That's it," he moaned. "Show me how much you want it."

I hated the way my body was betraying me. "I don't want it!"

Lucien growled again, and this time I felt something sharp rest against the bend of my neck. "I think you want it very much; you just haven't realized it yet. I can help you with that."

"Just ... just let me go."

"You disappoint me, Peter," he said angrily. "There's so much I could give you if you would only let go."

I tried to muster enough control to sound like I wasn't trembling like a scared puppy. "Get out!"

He sighed heavily, and his grip on me eased. "I'll come for you again, Peter. Next time, I will not be so ... gentle."

His arms tightened around me again, and I felt as if an electric current was running through my body. Heat surrounded my cock and there was a stroking sensation against my prostate. A few moments later, I was screaming out in both pain and pleasure; my body went taut as he sank his fangs into my neck. I came hard and almost fell to the floor when the feeling of being held was suddenly gone. I sagged against the wall, frozen in fear, unsure of whether or

not I could move. I finally managed to slide my hand along the wall and flip the light switch on.

I brought my fingers to my neck tentatively and when they came away wet and sticky, I forced myself to look down. The sight of blood made the trembling begin again. Whatever the hell had just happened—I hadn't been dreaming. I pushed myself away from the wall and looked down to see come splattered against it, running in a thick line toward the floor.

"Goddamn you, Lucien!"

I jerked a wad of tissue from the roll and cleaned the wall before walking into the main part of the bathroom. I stopped in front of the mirror. My eyes were still wide in shock, whites showing around the hazel. I turned my head to try to find the source of the bleeding and pushed away my long, brown hair. Just in the bend of my neck were two deep grooves and two long scrapes. The blood had run in small rivulets and was now drying against my skin. How the fuck had this happened? I knew that vampires couldn't come in uninvited, but sure as I lived and fucking breathed—this one had.

For two days, I locked myself in my apartment. The lights never went off and the curtains and blinds stayed open. I'd called in sick to work, more than willing to leave Darren pissed and shorthanded rather than step foot outside. I didn't know what I was going to do about work after that. But I had two days to figure it out.

* * * *

The third day after the incident, I walked to Rave at four in the afternoon ... two hours early for work. I knew that during

the day I wouldn't have a problem, but the thought of getting back home at two or three in the morning still didn't sit well. When I walked up to the bar, I was surprised to see Darren sitting on a stool behind the counter, reading the newspaper and nursing a glass of Scotch.

"Damn, Peter, you still sick?"

"No, why?"

"You look like shit." He eyed me closely. "Something going on with you?"

"No, just having a hard time sleeping here lately."

"Hey, if you don't feel like it, go on home and I'll work your shift again." He shrugged, turning the page of the newspaper. "It won't kill me."

"Actually, I think working will help," I said, trying to sound more genuine and confident than I really felt.

He folded his newspaper. "Well, if you change your mind, just call my cell. Blake's up in the box working his mix for tonight, but other than that, the place is empty." He stood and walked toward the door. "I mean it, Peter, call if you need me."

I nodded and stared at the bar for a while before I finally headed for the storage room. I loaded what I thought we'd need for the night onto the small dolly, and just as I was about to close the door—I felt it. That odd, disconcerting feeling of someone, of something else, being in the room with me. I couldn't see anyone, but knew that didn't make a shit's worth of difference. Fear washed over me—feeling similar to hundreds of ants crawling over my skin—and I could do

nothing but stand motionless with my hand hovering over the doorknob.

After a few minutes the feeling passed, as if whatever had been with me had just disappeared. I let out a heavy sigh as I left the storage room and set off to begin restocking the bar. I'd almost finished when Jack walked in the door.

He grinned as he walked up. "And just where..." His words trailed off as he got closer. "What happened to you, Peter?"

I threw my hands in the air in exasperation. "Why the fuck do I feel like I've got the grim-fucking-reaper standing behind me. Do I look that bad?"

Jack's eyes widened. "Well, no, not really. You just look like you've seen one too many parties in the last few days. But, since I know you, I know that's not it. What's that on your neck?"

I pulled away as he reached for me. The marks left the few nights before had lightened up considerably, but they were still visible. "Is that your way of saying I'm boring as hell?"

He bit his lip nervously. "No, that's not what I'm saying. I just..."

"Forget about it, Jack." I didn't want to get him all worked up. "Come on and help me get this done before people start pouring in. I hate starting the night out with an incomplete bar."

"No, what you like is to get everything set so you can have a drink before people start pouring in."

I grinned. "Yeah, that, too."

"Better get a few more cases of water from the storage room. It's Friday night and you know what that means."

I rolled my eyes. "Lots of candy."

"Uh-huh, and lots of water."

"I hate Friday nights," I grumbled. "I always feel like I've got to be watching everyone's drinks. Something happens that shouldn't, and I feel like I've failed."

"You and me both, buddy. But, like Darren says; he doesn't condone it, but he can't stop it either." He shrugged. "Not without fucking up his income at least."

I grabbed a towel and the cleaner and began wiping down the bar and Jack headed to the storage room. "Can I ask you a serious question?" I asked a while later when he came back with the cases of water.

He began stocking and organizing things for his end of the counter. He folded an empty box as he turned to look at me. "You know you can."

"Have you ever, um...." I hesitated, trying to word my question so he wouldn't laugh. Knowing Jack the way I did, I knew that if I slipped a word up at all, he'd be laughing his ass off and I'd never get a straight answer. I finally just tossed my towel in the sink in resignation. "Just forget it; it's nothing."

He eyed me for a moment, stepping closer. "What's up, man?"

"I'm so not in the mood to be laughed at."

"I won't laugh, I promise." He reached out and ran the pad of his thumb across my bottom lip. "If I do, you can punch me."

I gave him a half-assed smile. "Have you ever had any situations with vampires that weren't so good?"

He took a deep breath, blowing it out slowly. "What happened?"

"No, that's not what's supposed to come next." I reached for a glass and poured myself a few ounces of Scotch, then looked at him pointedly. "I asked you a question; you're just supposed to answer it. You ever fucked one?"

He raised his eyebrows at that. "A few ... why?"

"Can they just waltz into your apartment? Without an invitation?"

"No." He shook his head resolutely. "Can't happen."

"You sure?" I downed my Scotch in one gulp.

Jack frowned at me. "If there was a vampire in your apartment—uninvited—then it wasn't real."

I grabbed the neck of my shirt, pulling it down to expose the healing scrape and bite. "Does that look like something *real* didn't cause it?"

"Maybe you did it in your sleep and didn't realize it." He shrugged. "I'm sure that when I mentioned going to The Den the other night, it brought a few vampire phobias back for you."

I was getting irritated at his flippant responses. "I was fully awake when it happened, Jack."

He looked at the bite suspiciously. "And did you know this vampire from somewhere?"

I nodded.

He hesitated for a moment. "Since when do *you* know vampires?"

"Since one of them saw me here and then ended up in my bedroom," I grumbled. "Just fucking forget it."

"What was his name?"

"Whose?"

"The vampire's name, Peter." He rolled his eyes, reaching for my glass. "No more Scotch for you."

"His name is Lucien." Jack did a double take, and I eyed him cautiously. "Does that name mean something to you?"

"No, no," he said, attempting to achieve a neutral expression on his face. "Just surprised you have a name, that's all."

I frowned at him, knowing he was lying. "Don't lie to me, Jack."

"Lucien is the Master vampire here." Jack turned his attention to the case of water he was unloading; I hated that I couldn't see his face. "Best thing for you to do? Tell him you're not interested."

"I'm pretty sure he knew that when this happened."

His head turned slightly toward me. "And you're sure his name was Lucien?"

"Sure as I live and fucking breathe, Jack. Why?"

He shrugged and continued unloading the case of water. "Was it sexual?"

"Uh, yeah, it was most definitely that." I rolled my eyes. "Damn it, Jack, would you stop unloading that shit for five minutes to talk to me?"

His back stiffened, but he didn't make any move to stop what he was doing. "Do yourself a favor, Peter. Meet with him; tell him face to face that you aren't interested. As much as I adore vampires, you don't need to be fucking around with that one."

"It was never my intent to fuck around with him in the first place."

He turned suddenly, his face serious as he closed the distance between us. "Good. Be sure you remember that."

"What aren't you telling me?"

He ignored my question and pulled my shirt away from my neck, examining the wound. "You know, it looks like a bite, but then again it doesn't. It's just a surface wound, really. Nothing to write home about."

"Yeah?"

He let go of my shirt and smoothed my shirt. "Yeah."

"How do you know so much about this Lucien?"

"There's only one Lucien in this town, and he's also the owner of The Den. Just like any bar, if you go there long enough, you get to know the people who run the place."

My eyes widened in shock and I shook my head, reaching for the bar to steady myself. "What? You can't be serious..."

"Why's it so hard for you to believe that the owner of The Den is also the Master vampire?"

"It's not that I don't believe it. I just ... can't believe I never made the connection."

Jack patted me on the shoulder and gave a weak smile. "He's not one to fuck with, but he'll honor your wishes if you just tell him to leave you alone."

Right.

How hard could that be?

* * * *

Jack leaned against the brick wall of my building as I punched in the security code, grinning like a Cheshire cat. Leave it to Jack to think walking me home equaled getting laid. The door clicked open and he grabbed it, holding it open for me. I stopped as he closed the door and he bumped into me, his body flush against mine. "Is this why you walked me home?"

"No," he whispered, sliding his arms around my waist. "But as long as we're here..."

I skimmed my hands over his. "Where's Mike? He out of town or is he on his way?"

"He's out of town. I told him if he couldn't get me at the house, then to call here. What do you say, Peter? Fuck, shower, sleep; sounds like a good plan to me."

It'd been so long since I'd been with him that it sounded like a hell of a good plan to me, too. Even though Jack and Mike had been together for so long, Jack and I were still fuck-buddies. Mike never had a problem with it and joined us more often than not. That, and the occasional one-night stands I picked up in the bar, had been good enough for me for quite a while. I'd never wanted any kind of relationship entanglements, but lately, I was starting to wish for something more.

"I've got to start dating."

"Someone that doesn't mind sharing?" He purred, nuzzling into my neck.

"That'd be all right." I shrugged. "But I think the chances of that are pretty slim."

"Come on." He urged me to the stairs. "I'll blow you and you can tell me all about it."

I grimaced. "I need something more than a talk-while-I-blow-you session."

He laughed as we made the landing, "Okay, then ... talk after we fuck?"

"Yeah..."

We made it to the door of my apartment, and as I unlocked it, Jack stroked me through my jeans. "Picked up any strays lately?"

I opened the door, pausing before I went in. "What do you mean?"

"I know your policy on one-night stands. It's not that you don't believe in them, as you want everyone to believe, it's that you only fuck out-of-towners that are pretty much guaranteed not to show up again."

"Mike has a big mouth," I grumbled.

"Hey, I know why you do it. There's nothing worse than a customer that's infatuated with the bartender." He shut the door and started pulling my shirt up over my head. "So? Anything good?"

"A hot young thing a couple of weeks ago." I chuckled. "He'd been flirting with me all night, and when I went on break, he asked if he could hang around after closing. A few minutes after you left and I had the windows down, I had him on his knees, swallowing my cock. Fucked him in the storage room while the cleaning crew buffed the floors."

He looked at me wide-eyed. "So that's what was on the case of vodka! Eww!"

I grinned, working his jeans open. "Hey, he was my last one-night stand. Cut me some slack."

A while later, we lay in bed, trying to recover. Jack was dozing, sprawled out on his belly beside me, relaxed, not at all uptight like he had been for the entire shift at the bar. Something was up with him; I just didn't have a clue what. Tonight had been intense and all about the physical, but it had left me anxious rather than relieved.

It probably didn't help any that every time I'd closed my eyes while fucking Jack—I saw Lucien. Not just images of Lucien, but images of the two of us fucking and our bodies tangled together in a sweaty, bloody heap. The blood should have bothered me. Hell, the fact that it was Lucien should have bothered me. But it hadn't. I'd held on to the images as if they were a lifeline, afraid that if I let them go, I'd never get them back. For the life of me, I couldn't imagine why—especially after what Lucien had done.

I finally rolled over, snuggling up to Jack, laying my head on his shoulder. I was determined to push these feelings away. When the phone rang an hour later, I was still awake. I grabbed the handset and answered, happy that it was Mike. He had me put the phone to Jack's ear and I laughed as Jack started humping against the bed.

I took a shower as they talked, and while standing under the stream of water, I broke into tears. I didn't know what the fuck was wrong with me, but I felt as if I'd lost something very important.

Chapter Three

Jack turned, handing me a bottle of vodka from the box he was unloading. "Mike wanted to know if everything was okay with you last night."

Mike was too damned observant. "Yeah?"

He nodded, setting the empty box aside and grabbing a box filled with cans of orange and cranberry juice. "Need juice?"

"Just some cranberry." I stepped over to grab a handful of cans.

"He said you sounded upset. Was something wrong?"

"No, I was just tired, I guess. I mean, I worked all evening, then fucked you twice."

Jack smiled. "If there was something wrong, though, you'd tell me. Right?"

I slid my arms around him and kissed him on the forehead. "You and Mike are my best friends, Jack. If there was something to be told, it'd be to one of you. And when one of you knows..."

"Both of us know."

We finished stocking the bar in relative silence. The first half of the night was so slow, I found myself staring off into the crowd; it was almost an obsession, searching for the one person who'd make me breathe a sigh of relief when I found him. I caught sight of a tall, dark-haired man weaving his way through the crowd and my heart stopped, but when he finally turned to where I could see his face, disappointment coursed through me.

As much as I hated to admit it, Lucien had wormed his way into my head and I couldn't get him out. I didn't realize I'd been so caught up in my search on the dance floor until Jack came up behind me, tucking his hands into the back pockets of my jeans. "Who you looking for, Petey?"

It scared the shit out of me and I damn near had to peel myself off the ceiling. Jack backed away hesitantly. "Damn, you don't have to get all bent out of shape."

I cupped the back of his neck, bringing him in for a kiss. "I'm sorry, Jack. I was just off in another world and you scared me."

"Dude, what's going on?"

I gave him a weak smile. "For one thing? I need a smoke break. Mind if I take off for a while?"

He gestured to the door. "Go on, I'll be fine. But you'd damned well better be in a better humor when you get back. Don't make me sic Mikey on your ass."

Last time I'd heard Jack call him that, Mike had tortured the fuck out of him with a huge-ass butt plug; made him wear it while he worked an entire shift. "You better watch your mouth, fuckwit. Mike hears you call him that and you're gonna pay."

"I know." Jack grinned. "He should be here by the time we close. You need a ride?"

I started to say yes, but shook my head instead. "Nah, I'll be all right."

"You sure?"

I nodded. "I'll be back in a while. If you need me, send the big lug out back."

"There is something so totally wrong about you calling our hottest bouncer a big lug," he said in exasperation. A customer walked up to the bar and Jack turned his attention to her. I turned and walked through the crowd, ignoring all of the gropes I got just walking from one side of the club to the other. It was a relief when I finally walked out the back door. I took a deep breath, inhaling the rank, musty smell of the alley. No matter how dirty it was, it still seemed like the air was cleaner than that in the club.

Sitting on an old wooden crate was the blond vampire from a few nights back. I started to turn back and go inside, but he looked up at me, smiling. "Peter? Is that right?"

"Yeah," I said, my voice sounding incredibly soft.

"I thought so." He reached over and grabbed an old crate, placing it beside him. "Come on, I won't bite."

It took everything I had in me to walk over to the crate and sit down. I pulled out a cigarette and I nearly fell off the damned crate when he offered me a light. "Sorry," I mumbled.

"Scared?"

I nodded.

He held his hand out toward me. "My name's Eric."

I forced my hand out to shake his. "And you know mine."

He withdrew his hand slowly. "Listen, I'm sorry about the other night. Sometimes my partner and I can get a little carried away. We both get a little ... horny."

I shook my head, amazed that he sounded so fucking human.

"What?" Eric asked.

"It's just that, well, you just sound so ... human. If I hadn't seen your friend's eyes shift like they did the other night, and his fangs, I would have never known that you weren't."

"And that, my friend, is what some vampires would call my weakness. I'm still really fond of my human side." He ground out his cigarette before flicking the butt away and standing. "I'm quite certain we'll meet again, Peter. Until then ... take care."

I had no more blinked than he was just gone—disappeared before my very eyes. Instead of freaking out, I laughed. "Damned vampire tricks."

Twenty minutes later I was back at the bar serving drinks and fending off flirting men. I then spent the next few hours trying to reassure Jack that everything was fine. It would have been easier to do the latter had I actually believed that everything was fine myself. About thirty minutes before we shut down, Mike showed up, parking himself on a stool at the far corner of Jack's side of the bar.

"Hey, Peter! Come over here for a minute when you get a chance," Mike called out.

I nodded absently, pouring a couple of shots of tequila for the two hot guys in front of me. When I was finished, I walked over to stand in front of Mike. "Hey, Mike. Missed you last night."

"I hear you were pretty intense," He searched my face, looking for answers that I certainly wanted to keep hidden.

Images of the night before flashed in my mind and I looked away, afraid he could know what I was thinking. "It's

been a while since I've been with either one of you. Had to get it out of my system, I guess." It was a lie, but I wasn't prepared to either tell him the truth, or deal with it, myself.

He eyed me suspiciously, but didn't voice his concerns. "I hope you know that you can always come to us if there's a problem."

I smiled. "After nearly ten years of friendship? I think I've realized that by now."

"Sometimes it just needs to be said."

I nodded. "So, did your trip go okay?"

"Actually, it was so short I haven't had time to think about it yet." He looked up as Jack walked over to join us. "Hey, baby!"

Jack leaned over the bar and practically devoured Mike in a kiss. I left them to their hellos and started shutting down my end of the bar and filling a sink full of hot, soapy water. As I was washing glasses, I turned my attention to the crowd on the dance floor once again. I scanned the faces absently, but soon settled my gaze on a familiar face. My breath caught as Lucien's pale blue eyes met mine from only a few feet away.

He smiled warmly and I became nervous, looking away. When I looked back, he was gone. The glass I was holding slipped out of my hand and shattered on the floor at my feet. "Shit!"

I bent to clean it up, picking up the large pieces and putting them into the trash. I cut my finger on the last piece and instinctively stuck it into my mouth, trying to staunch the flow of blood. Jack was suddenly beside me, helping me clean up the rest of the glass. "Is it deep?"

I shook my head, examining the cut on the pad of my right index finger even as I tried to look up over the bar. "I don't think so, but it's bleeding like a son of a bitch."

"Cool water," he offered. "That should help."

I stood and turned the faucet on, watching as the blood ran down the drain of the stainless steel sink. A wave of nausea passed through me and I shivered, as if the temperature in the room had dropped about twenty degrees. The room seemed to close in on me a little, and suddenly I needed out of the club—needed to be at home. I turned to Jack.

"Can you shut it down? Don't worry about cleaning up my side; I'll come in early tomorrow to get it done."

"Let Mike give you a ride home, baby." He sounded worried. "You don't look so hot."

I shook my head. "No, I just need some air. Do you mind?"

Jack pulled me into his arms, hugging me tightly. "Of course I don't mind. Call me if you need anything, okay?"

Just his touch was enough to send my stomach roiling. I pulled away and grabbed the majority of paper bills out of my tip jar, cramming it all down into the pockets of my jeans. I had a few second thoughts about having all of that cash on me, but figured that if I got mugged, at least they'd be more likely to take the money and run. Or I could use my Mace and run while they were incapacitated. At least, I hoped.

I waded through the dwindling crowd, and the moment I walked out the front door, I felt more at ease. I hadn't left this early in months. The walk home was uneventful, but when I neared my building a shiver went through my entire

body. I shook it off as just being paranoid, but when I noticed the tall figure leaning against the wall, waiting, I stopped in my tracks. "Damn!"

The person against the wall raised his head and looked at me, and recognition laced with fear settled over me. He held his hand out, gesturing for me to come closer. "It's okay, Peter. I only want to talk."

"Fuck you!" I growled, forcing myself to walk up to the door. Lucien was blocking my way to the keypad and I glared at him angrily. "You're in the way."

He glanced down at my hand, frowning. "You're bleeding."

"What?" I looked down at my hand and saw that my finger was bleeding again. There were drops of blood on the concrete below creating a small puddle. The cut must have been deeper than I'd initially thought. I remembered how I'd managed to get the cut in the first place and glared at him even more. "Were you in the club tonight?"

"Briefly, but I didn't want to upset you."

A police car drove past, slowing in front of the building. Lucien ducked his head. "Can we go inside, please?"

"I am not letting you inside of my fucking apartment again, you prick."

"Excuse me, sir," the officer on the passenger side of the car yelled out. "Everything okay?"

"Not in the apartment," Lucien whispered. "Just inside the building."

I eyed Lucien for a moment, teeth clenched. "Move." He shifted slightly giving me access to the keypad. I turned

toward the officer, smiling. "We're fine; just talking. We'll take it inside."

The officer looked from me to Lucien and finally nodded, saying something to his partner, behind the wheel. I quickly punched the code into the keypad and opened the door for Lucien. He whispered a thank you as he walked past me. Once the door closed, I looked out the window, watching as the patrol car moved on. I turned my gaze to Lucien. "What's the big deal about the cops?"

"Just a precaution. The police and other law enforcement agencies know me because of my position, most officers know me on sight alone. Regardless of what they say in public, most of them are not so friendly to my kind. I don't want any trouble."

"Yeah? Well I don't either. So get out." I started for the stairs, but Lucien blocked my way.

I pushed against his chest but he grabbed my hands, pushing me back until I bumped into the wall. He grasped my jaw with one hand and turned my head to the side, pulling the neck of my shirt away from my skin. "Mon Dieu," he whispered. "How can it be?"

"You ought to fucking know," I spat out. "You're the one who did it."

"I swear to you on my life's blood, Peter, I didn't know what was happening at the time."

"Bullshit! I don't know how you got into my apartment, but..."

"I was never *in* your apartment!" he growled, grabbing me by the arm and pulling me up the stairs with him. We reached my door and he pushed me against it. "Open it."

"No!"

"Open it, Peter!"

I slid my key into the lock and opened the door. Before I could walk in, however, Lucien stepped in front of me. My jaw dropped as he attempted to walk in but met some sort of invisible barrier. He turned to me, looking satisfied with having proven his point. "I cannot go into your apartment without an invitation, Peter. I was not physically here."

"But..."

"It was all a dream," he said softly. "Somehow we linked and the dream became one ... more real."

My hand went to my neck, rubbing at the mark. "I don't understand."

The door across the hall opened and old Mrs. Taylor peeked out, frowning at us. "It's one in the morning, Peter. Is everything all right?"

"We have to talk about this, Peter," Lucien whispered. "Please..."

"Yes, ma'am," I said, "Everything's fine. We'll get out of the hall. Sorry to have bothered you."

She nodded, huffed, and stared at us until I finally grabbed Lucien's shirt and pulled him toward the door.

"Come on," I said, trying not to let my anger seep through. I didn't want Lucien in my apartment, but damn, if I pissed her off I was as good as homeless—and I still wanted to know about this dream shit Lucien was trying to pass off as an

excuse. Lucien flinched as I pulled him through the door as if he wasn't going to make it all the way through. But he did and I closed it and turned toward him, glaring. "You make one wrong move and it's revoked. Got it?"

Lucien's eyes went to my hand and he frowned. "You're still bleeding."

I looked at my finger, shaking my head. "It'll stop ... eventually."

He stepped forward, grabbing me by the wrist. I tried to pull away, but couldn't break his tightening grip. "Just walk, Peter; I promise that you are completely safe."

He led me into my bedroom and I swallowed hard. "What are you doing?"

"We're going to take care of that finger."

"I don't need you to do that."

"Maybe not, but I am here and I would like to help."

When we reached the bathroom, I faltered, bracing myself against the doorframe. "I can't."

He tugged hard on my wrist and I practically fell into the bathroom. He then picked me up beneath the arms and sat me on the bathroom counter. I watched as he made himself at home, going through my cabinets and drawers looking for a cloth and Band-Aids. It seemed as though he knew right where everything was, and instead of scaring the hell out of me, it made me smile. Then I chastised myself for smiling at this ... this monster ... in front of me.

He turned and took my hand, examining it closely. "This is very deep. You actually need a few stitches."

"It's just a little cut," I argued.

"I can take you..."

"No!"

Lucien frowned at me, sighing as he grabbed something from the counter. When he pulled his hand back, I saw that he had my razor. Before I could say anything, he slid it across his thumb. Blood welled instantly and I tried to move away from him. "Be still," he commanded.

I was suddenly immobile and no matter how I tried to move, it was impossible. I wanted to strike out and deck him, but my arm wouldn't budge. He smiled, caressing my cheek with his other hand. "It'll only take a moment, Peter."

I glared at him, wishing that he could hear me calling him asshole. He smiled and winked. "Now just how many assholes would do something like this for you?"

He took my hand and placed his bleeding thumb over my finger, rubbing the cuts together. I winced at the pain and the thought of all of the diseases that could be transmitted through blood. Images like the ones I'd had while fucking Jack flashed through my mind and I stared wide-eyed at the blood. The blood. And Lucien and I in a bloody, sweaty heap. Oh, fuck me. Was I hard?

Lucien looked up at me suddenly. "What are you doing?"

My body came back to life so suddenly that I fell back a little. "You asshole! Don't you *ever* do that to me again!"

Lucien held tightly to my finger, staring at me intently. "Is that how you see us?"

The cut on my finger began to throb and Lucien pulled away slowly, holding gently to my wrist. "What's happening?" I asked.

"It's healing," Lucien said as he released me. He searched my face. "You are all over the place, Peter. Why are your thoughts so scattered?"

"If I knew, I'd be getting rid of them," I grumbled, shifting so that he wouldn't notice the bulge in my jeans. "Now tell me about this *dream*."

He reached for me, hesitated, then dropped his hands. "Will you take off your shirt? Please?"

"Why?"

"I want to look at the marks on your neck again in this light."

I reluctantly started unbuttoning my shirt, my hands fumbling as I tried to keep my bloody finger away from the fabric. Lucien's hands pushed mine away gently. "Let me."

He began unbuttoning my shirt and every time his knuckles brushed my chest, my breathing became faster. By the time he slid my shirt back over my shoulders, I could care less whether he knew I was hard or not. I took in his beautiful, perfect features as he turned to toss my shirt into the hamper. I just wanted to run my fingers through his dark brown hair and to stare into those pale blue eyes.

My breath caught as he leaned in, examining my neck. He turned my head gently to the side, and as his warm fingers brushed against my skin, I shuddered.

"It's healing." He sounded so concerned, so genuine. "Does it hurt?"

I shook my head. "It's been irritating, but it hasn't hurt."

Lucien pulled back a little and I leaned forward, unable to resist the urge to touch his face. He met my gaze cautiously as my fingers trailed down his cheek. "Peter..."

Touching him sent an electric surge through my body, and I couldn't resist pressing my lips to his. As much as I suddenly wanted to taste him, I wanted the contact more. *This* was what I had wanted that night on the dance floor but had never gotten. He moaned in encouragement, but didn't make any effort to deepen the kiss. It was oddly touching that he seemed to be so cautious. When I pulled away, he sighed and began to move away.

I caught his arm. "Don't."

"You don't want this..."

"I know that I want you to kiss me."

"Yeah?"

I tried to nod, or answer and say yes, but everything seemed to stand still as he moved toward me with a heated look in his eyes. When he bent his head, though, he didn't go for a kiss on the lips. His mouth went right to my neck where the marks were. I tried to shrug away, but he stilled me gently with his hands. Panic coursed through me but when I felt soft, lingering kisses against my skin, I melted against him.

It was only then that he kissed me; soft, chaste kisses at first, and then his tongue teased at my bottom lip, seeking invitation. I opened for him after a few moments, relishing his warmth. Soon, the kiss went from being sweet and exploratory to something hunger-driven. Lucien's fingers

moved down my chest, trailing in the light dusting of hair on my belly as he moved to the closure of my jeans.

As much as I wanted his touch, I wasn't ready for anything like that. I caught his hand just as he got the button undone. "No."

He let out a huff of disappointment, but pulled away. Taking my hand, he examined my finger, then showed it to me. "There you go; all better."

I stared at my finger, shocked to see the cut completely healed. "How the hell did you do that?"

"Trade secret, I'm afraid." He smiled warmly, bringing my hand up to kiss my palm. "You ready to talk about that dream?"

I eyed him for a moment. "Are you working vampire trickery on me?"

He shook his head. "Only for the finger; nothing else."

"Then why the fuck am I not pissed at you anymore? I should be pissed as hell for what you..."

"For what I did?"

I nodded.

"Peter, my love, all I did was dream of being with you. I had no idea we were connected in any way. I do not understand how the fault lies with me."

"You're the vampire, Lucien. It's up to you to control yourself and your ... *abilities*."

He pursed his lips. "My abilities? Let me tell you something, Peter. The last dream I had was when I was human, so please believe me when I when I say that I didn't know what was going on or how to stop it."

"You really didn't know?"

"I swear on all that is holy, I didn't know."

"Can you even swear on all that's holy?"

Lucien remained serious. "I have no more control over my dreams than you or anyone else. I cannot promise that it won't happen again, Peter. All I can do is let you know that I'm working on finding out the cause."

"You'd better work quickly."

Lucien slid a hand up to cup my neck. "I'm sorry, Peter. This is certainly not how I wished to let you know I was interested."

"No," I said, my voice rasping. "You prefer stalking and intimidating."

He bent and pressed his lips against my ear. "I much prefer seduction, my love."

I shivered, turning my head toward him as he pulled away. "You should go."

"And you should get some sleep." He smiled, before backing away and disappearing through the bathroom door.

I followed him to the front door and before he opened it, he paused, scenting the air. "If only it was your scent and your scent alone."

"What are you talking about?"

"You came last night. Your scent is most exquisite, but it's infected with another. I did not think you were attached."

I suddenly felt nauseated. "I'm not."

He turned, looking at me pointedly. "Then I want to see you again."

I shook my head. "I don't think I'm ready for that."

"Then I shall wait until you are. I will see you at the club."
He opened the door and walked out.

Before he could get too far, I stepped out into the hall after him. "Lucien?"

He stopped, but didn't turn around. "Yes?"

"Thank you."

"You are most welcome, Peter. Goodnight."

I watched until he disappeared down the stairs, then went back into my apartment. Soon I was in bed, trying desperately to go to sleep ... and failing miserably. I tried to ignore the hard-on I'd had since Lucien and I had kissed earlier, but was pretty much failing at that, too. I gave in and stroked myself off to thoughts of Lucien: his voice, his touch, his kiss. It was only after I came, crying out his name, that sleep finally claimed me.

So much for telling him I wasn't interested.

Chapter Four

It was late and I was more than tired. I was fucking exhausted. Darren had put out fliers advertising our nearly naked Go-Go boys and dollar mixed drinks until closing. We'd had way more business than usual and Jack and I did well just to stay a little behind all night. The only break I got was a piss-break, and when I came back, there was a line of people waiting for drinks.

When last call was put out, there was a final surge at the bar and closing time ended up being nearly forty-five minutes later than usual. Jack and I busted our asses to get everything cleaned, and he offered me a ride, but I declined, knowing that I needed a little time to wind down before I hit the sack.

The night was still, sticky and humid. Streetlights began to cast an eerie glow as a layer of fog settled over the ground. The streets were deserted, not even a stray dog or cat in sight. A few blocks from my apartment, I thought I heard footsteps behind me. I turned and looked, but there was no one there.

I started walking again, heard the footsteps again, and stopped abruptly. They didn't. One step too many fell before they stopped and I turned, catching only the slightest glimpse of movement in the shadows against the wall.

Too many acquaintances had been robbed and mugged on their way home from working in the bars. With as much cash as we carried, we were prime targets. My heart was in my

throat as I started walking again, hearing the steps behind me but being unable to see anyone.

I slid my hand into the front right pocket of my jeans, discreetly, grabbing hold of the can of Mace. The edges of the can were rippled, so that even if I couldn't see it, I knew I was holding it right. I slid my hand out, thumbing the flip-top safety cap, and hoped like hell this shit worked like it was supposed to. I could defend myself, sure, but if whoever this was attacked me and had a gun? I was shit out of luck.

I picked up my pace, damn near running. One block from my apartment, I started wondering if I had enough lead on him in order to punch in the access code. And that was where I made my mistake. I looked back.

I didn't see anything of the person lunging toward me but his hands, and only then because they were coming right toward my face. I blocked them from hitting me, pressing the button on the can in my hands. My eyes and nose burned at the smell, but the can was quickly swatted out of my hand, skittering across the ground. I was thrown back against the brick wall of a building, the impact knocking the air from my lungs. I struggled to take a breath, wide eyed, looking right into the face of my attacker.

A tall, stocky man had me pinned at the shoulders, snarling at me like some wild animal. His face was dirty, hair long and straggled, and his eyes—his eyes were wide and wild, like he was high and pissed.

"All alone out here tonight," he growled. "Not a good thing when there are hungry wolves about."

I finally managed to catch my breath. "I'll give you all the cash I have..."

"I don't want your fucking money," he laughed, the sound of it wicked, sending chills over my entire body. "I just want you. Fresh meat."

"I ... I don't...." I stammered, not knowing what the fuck he was talking about.

There was movement behind the man who pinned me, and I clenched my jaw, swallowing even harder at the thought of two attackers instead of just one. But the man who had me pinned was suddenly pulled away. I stumbled as I tried to regain my footing, and when I finally stood again, I saw that it was Lucien holding the man by the throat, pinning him against the brick wall.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Lucien asked the man.

"Hunting," the man snarled.

"Wrong ... fucking.... answer!" Lucien yelled, slamming the man's head against the wall with every word.

Sure, the man had attacked me, but this was a little extreme. "Lucien, for God's sake ... don't kill him!" I called out.

He looked back at me, shaking his head. "He was going to eat you, Peter. Do you *really* want me to show him mercy?"

"Damn it, Lucien! He just wanted my money!"

"Nikolas!" Lucien yelled out. "Time to play!"

A man landed beside me, seemingly out of thin air, the concrete sidewalk cracking as he made impact. He looked up at me from where he knelt, winking before he stood. As he

rose up, his body began to shift and it was then that I realized what was happening.

The man with Lucien was the same sort of fucked-up vampire I'd seen a year ago at the Den.

"Oh, shit..." I whispered, just before I turned to run.

"No, Peter! Do ... not ... run!" Lucien yelled out. "I can control one, but not the other if you make yourself out to be the prey. Again."

I stopped dead in my tracks and turned back, almost terrified of what I would see when I did. What I did see, however, confused me. A fully-shifted werewolf—*not* a vampire, a fucking animal—was standing behind Lucien as if waiting for permission to move. As if Lucien was its Master.

Lucien let go of the other man's throat as the man began to shift as well, then stepped back, momentarily placing his hand on Nikolas' furry shoulder. "Play, but behead him when you are done."

Lucien turned and started for me. When he reached me, he slid an arm around my shoulders, urging me to walk with him. "Come, let me walk you home."

I turned to look behind me, but Lucien put his hand up, shielding my view. "Don't look, Peter. It's better that way."

I nodded and kept on walking. When we reached my apartment building, Lucien stood beside me as I entered the access code, moving his hand soothingly up and down my back. The light flashed green and I looked at him. "Good thing you came along when you did, I guess."

"Nothing would have happened to you, Peter."

"Yeah? You seem so sure of that. What were you doing, following me?"

"Not really," he shrugged. "We were following the rogue wolf. He just happened to be following you."

"Mighty big fucking coincidence," I grumbled.

"And sometimes, Peter, coincidence is just that—coincidence. We've been after this one for a while. It just so happened that I was in the area—in a meeting—when I got the word from Nikolas that the rogue had been spotted."

"So, what was I? Bait?"

"I would never use you as bait," Lucien said softly, sounding truly horrified at my suggestion. "Please do not think that I am such a monster."

"Lucien, I..."

He held up a hand before I could go on. "It's okay. Even I think I'm a monster at times."

I heard a roar pierce the quiet stillness of the night, and swallowed hard. I didn't think the rogue werewolf would be coming after me again, but I still didn't feel very comforted by that knowledge ... especially when he was still alive and close.

"Would you stay while I take a shower?"

Lucien raised a brow. "In the shower with you, or outside of it?"

"Don't push it," I grumbled. "I just ... I knew vampires were real, but werewolves? That's got me freaked, just a little."

"I'll stay until the threat is over," Lucien said quietly, opening the door and walking inside. "Better the monster you know than the one that you don't."

"Stop saying that."

Lucien remained silent as we went upstairs. I unlocked the door to my apartment, and as soon as he followed me in, he walked over to stand at the window of the living room. "Go take your shower, Peter."

I stared at his back for a moment, admiring him from a distance. How I wished I could just let go and give him what he wanted. His presence, though, was oddly comforting; especially considering everything that had happened since I'd met him. A hell of a lot more comforting than being attacked by a werewolf. Again.

I left Lucien to stand gazing out the window and went to the bathroom. As I stripped, images of that first time I'd danced with Lucien flashed into my head. My body reacted, much to my chagrin, but I refused to jerk off to memories of Lucien when Lucien was standing in my living room. I showered quickly and wrapped the towel around my hips before walking out of the bathroom.

The moment I stepped into the bedroom, I knew I was alone. I walked to the window where I had left him, running my fingers along the windowsill where he'd been leaning. He'd left the blinds cracked open and I peered out, looking down onto the street below. Movement near an electric pole caught my eye, and it only took seconds for me to realize that it was Lucien.

He glanced up, looking directly at my window, before turning and walking down the sidewalk. I watched until I couldn't see him anymore before heading to the bedroom. There was a piece of paper on the bed, torn from the notepad on my nightstand. I picked it up, not recognizing the flowing script.

It is finished. You are safe. Sleep well, Peter.

Love, Lucien.

I started to crumple up the sheet of paper, but instead opened the drawer on my nightstand and shoved the paper inside. I lay back on the bed, shaking my head as I closed my eyes. There had been monsters out tonight, no doubt, but deep down—I knew that Lucien wasn't one of them.

* * * *

I lay in bed, naked, covered in sweat—all of it my own; legs spread with two fingers up my ass and one hand fisted around my cock. My nipples were hard and standing at attention, and I wished like hell that I either had an extra hand or that I could bend my head just enough so I could tongue them myself. Fuck! I just wanted to come.

It had all started with me jerking off in the shower; something simple, quick. But time after time, I'd get so close and just lose the sensation completely. After the water turned cold, I'd gone straight to bed, searching for the lube. I fisted my cock hard and fast, pulling at my nipples. Soon, that just wasn't enough.

I just *had* to throw my old, unused dildo out with the trash. How was I to know three days ago that I'd be craving something up my ass now?

The phone rang and I glanced at the clock, unwilling to move. I let the machine pick up and heard Lucien's voice fill the room. I wasn't going to answer, but when I heard something about dreams and tonight, I got up, swiping my hand over the top sheet before picking up the handset beside me. "It's three in the morning, Lucien. What do you want?"

"Screening your calls?"

"Not exactly," I said in frustration. "I was ... busy."

"Need help?" he asked, his voice sounding a little huskier than before. "I'm sure I could help you."

My cock twitched and I couldn't resist giving it another stroke. To my surprise, it responded, and I stroked it again. Oh. It hadn't felt that good since I'd started in the shower. Another stroke and I realized that Lucien had gone silent. I didn't stop, but I finally remembered to speak.

"It's a little ... personal."

"Personal just happens to be my specialty," he purred.

"Lucien..." I felt my belly tighten as I began to stroke faster. "What do you want?"

"You know what I want, Peter."

"Yeah, yeah ... but why did you call?"

He said something in French that I couldn't even come close to understanding. But damn, if that didn't push me even further to the edge. "I called..."

"Yeah?" I bit at my lip, writhing on the bed, willing myself not to breathe too heavily and give away what I'd been doing.

My balls drew up tight and I tightened my hand. With the next stroke, I lost control, moaning as I came. So much for keeping it secret.

As my cock spewed come all over my belly, Lucien sighed. "I wish I could be there to run my tongue through the come on your belly."

I licked at my dry lips. "Why ... did you call?"

Lucien cleared his throat. "I called to let you know that I was going to try to do some investigating, if you will, into our little problem."

"Problem?" I asked, then chastised myself. "Oh, the dreams!"

"Yes, the dreams." He chuckled. "Shall I call back when you're feeling a little more ... *together*?"

I plucked a few tissues out of the box on the nightstand, wiping myself clean. "No, I'm fine. So why are you calling to tell me this now? Are you telling me that it's been nearly three weeks and you haven't even looked into it yet?"

"Oh, no, on the contrary, I have been doing quite a bit of research."

"And that involves sitting at the bar watching me damn near every night, drinking your weight in Scotch?"

"No, that I do just because I can." He sounded amused. "Do I bother you?"

"No. Sometimes it gets a little distracting, like when you start giving me that intense stare as you run your tongue over your fangs."

"Does it scare you?"

"Umm ... no," I said, hoping like hell he wouldn't go there.

"Turn you on?"

So much for not going there. If I lied, he'd know it anyway. Stretching the truth a little, however, might work. "Sometimes."

Lucien sighed in exasperation. "Why must we dance around like this, Peter? At least have dinner with me."

"Dinner with you? And what does that entail? Watching you drain someone?"

"No. It entails you and me sitting in a restaurant, drinking wine, talking, and you eating a fabulous meal."

"Fabulous?"

"Peter..."

There was a hint of warning in his voice. "You're a pushy bastard."

"I will let you sleep on it," he said curtly. "I need to go, Peter. If I plan to get to the bottom of these dreams, I must do so before dawn draws any closer."

I didn't know why I felt so damned guilty at his complete change of attitude. Over the past few weeks, I'd noticed that when he was upset about something, his words would sound more formal. "Lucien, I..."

"No. Make no promises now that you have no desire in keeping later. Sleep on it, Peter."

The line went dead and I pressed the button on the phone, tossing it across the bed. That I had no desire in keeping? So much for him being able to read my damned mind. Hell, maybe that didn't work so well over the phone. If it had, he'd have known that I was interested, but that I didn't have a single day off for the next week.

I got up and got a warm wet cloth, cleaning myself up. A few minutes later I was back in bed, staring up at the ceiling, trying to go to sleep. Thoughts of Lucien prevented that, though, and two hours later I was still awake, heading into the kitchen for something with a high alcohol content. When I opened the bedroom door, I nearly jumped out of my skin. Lucien was standing only a few feet away with his back to me.

"What the *fuck*?"

He turned to face me, seeming very disoriented. "I ... I think I've figured it out."

I raised an eyebrow. "Yeah?"

He closed his eyes, breathing deeply. "How I did it before is a mystery because this shit is hard to control."

"Maybe you're trying too hard."

"Perhaps," he agreed. "I know you don't like me to touch you, but..."

"It's not that, Lucien," I said in defense. "Do you physically have to be here to read my fucking mind?"

"Let's not argue about it now, please? I need to touch you, Peter." I started to move toward him but he held his hand up, signaling me to stop. "No, let me come to you."

I stopped, waiting as he seemed to glide across the floor to close the distance between us. He reached out and caressed my cheek, hesitantly at first, but he soon smiled, trailing his thumb over my lips. "This ... is very, very cool."

I was amazed at how real his touch felt. Of course, it had felt real the first time, too, but this kind of encounter was highly preferable to the other. I couldn't help but laugh at the

way he seemed almost childlike in his new discovery. "I'm glad you think it's so cool. Care to let me in on the secret?"

"Ever heard of astral projection?"

I nodded. "But that doesn't explain this. With astral projection, I shouldn't be able to see you ... *feel* you."

"Typically, no; but this seems to be one of my powers. So it's more like astral projection with a little Lucien added in. We all have different abilities, but they don't always manifest when we're turned. Sometimes it takes a growth in power or a few years—or a few hundred, in my case—to make themselves known. It's very new to me, Peter, so don't ask me to elaborate too much, because I just don't have a grasp on it yet."

"Is it something you're planning on doing again?"

His fingers moved lightly down my throat, and his gaze became more heated when I shivered. "That depends; would a visit be welcomed?"

"If you learned how to behave ... maybe."

"Oh, I can be good, Peter; very, very good." He winked, then looked behind him before turning back to me.

I took a step toward him but he backed away, his entire body seeming to flicker before my eyes. "What's wrong?"

He shook his head. "This is just disorienting, and I feel like I'm about to lose control of it entirely. As much as I want to stay, it's just not possible. I'll see you at the club tonight."

"Okay," I said, realizing I was alone again in the room.

Of course Lucien would see me at the club. He'd been there every night for the past three weeks, sitting on a stool in the far corner. When he wasn't downing half a bottle of

Scotch a night and teasing me about my drink mixing techniques, he was watching the dance floor with a forlorn look in his eyes. I'd finally garnered up enough courage to ask him what it was about everyone dancing that bothered him, and he had sighed, turning his attention back to his drink.

It was only when I gave up on getting an answer and turned away that he had said, "Most of them are only happy because of whatever drug they've taken. But some of them? They dance with their lovers as if it were the very first time, truly happy to be here together. Those are the ones that I watch, wondering if it's right or wrong to be so jealous of people so fucking happy."

His words had touched something deep in me, making my heart ache for him. He'd left a short time after that, bidding me goodnight, and as he walked away, I took note of the slump in his shoulders. I think that was the night I'd stopped being both afraid of him and afraid of the thought of something more with him.

* * * *

Three days later, I was working the bar when Lucien slid onto his favorite stool in the far corner. He smiled and gave a slight nod of his head. I poured his usual Scotch and slid it down the counter, meeting those beautiful, pale blue eyes. "Give me just a minute."

He grinned. "Take your time. I am more than content in watching you as you work."

I felt the blush in my ears and cheeks, and was thankfully rescued by two customers approaching the bar. As I mixed

their drinks and took their money, I could feel Lucien's gaze, watching every move I made. I wondered how in hell I managed not to fuck up. Damn, but that man could just look at me a certain way and have me lose my train of thought.

Something loud clanged in the sink beside me and Jack cursed, muttering under his breath as he retrieved the metal pitcher and rinsed it off. He grabbed a towel and moved away, and I filled a few more drink orders before filling my sink with hot, soapy water. I shook my head as I washed and rinsed glasses, not looking forward to the rest of the shift.

Not when Jack was like this. Pissy. Just like every fucking night for the past few weeks.

Jack blocked my way as I reached for more clean towels. "Move it! I'm not in the mood for whatever this is."

He shook his head, jaw clenched. "You were supposed to tell him you weren't interested weeks ago. What the fuck is holding you back?"

"Maybe I am interested in him, Jack! Have you ever thought of that? Maybe I want to get to know him—want to..." I broke off, before I really started yelling and drawing attention, but kept my eyes trained on Jack. "You know what? I don't need your fucking approval."

Jack bristled. "Yeah? Who are you going to run to when it blows up in your face?"

"Last time I checked, I was still capable of making my own goddamned decisions. If I fuck up, then it's me that fucked up. Don't worry; this falls apart? You won't be the one I come running to. Now either get out of my fucking way, or hand me some towels!"

He grabbed a handful of towels and shoved them against my chest. "He'll never be completely yours, Peter. His people will always come before you."

I jerked the towels out of his hand and paused. "If this is the way you're trying to show how much a friend you are? You're failing miserably."

"Fuck you!" he snapped, moving to tend to some customers on his side of the bar.

Yeah. Fuck you. I rolled my eyes and steeled myself for the worst kind of grin when I turned to face Lucien. No doubt, hearing my declaration would have him nice and gloating. But when I turned around, he wasn't in his spot. I searched the dance floor furtively, but came up with nothing. When I grabbed Lucien's empty glass of Scotch, I noticed the cocktail napkin folded in half with my name on it.

I set the glass down and read the words written across the inside.

"I'll be waiting for you out back. One hour. Lucien."

One hour. I glanced up at the clock and realized that would be when I normally took my smoke break. He knew me too damned well. The next hour passed so slowly that I was beginning to wonder if all the damned clocks in the world suddenly had some sort of conspiracy against me.

Jack kept his distance for the entire time, but when I told him I was going for my smoke break, he pulled me back, wrapping his arms around me. "I'm sorry, Peter. I just don't want you to get hurt."

"And sometimes, Jack? I've just got to do things my own way. If I get hurt—I get hurt. But I've got to do what makes me happy. Can you understand that?"

He nodded. "I understand. But..."

I pushed him away, looking him in the eyes. "No buts. I'm going on break and I'll be back in a little while. Okay?"

"Yeah, okay."

I walked out and damn near ran through the club trying to get to the back door. Just before slamming through the back exit, I stopped for a moment, trying to calm myself. I put my hands on the door a minute later and pushed it open. Lucien was sitting on an old crate, legs stretched out in front of him, ankles crossed. I walked out and jumped as the door slammed shut behind me.

Lucien turned his head and smiled as I walked toward him. "I'm glad you decided to come."

I smiled, shaking my head. "It's the usual time that I take my break, Lucien."

"Ah, I knew that," he said. "I only hoped you might agree that you came out here to meet me."

I met his eyes, sighing heavily. "Actually, I did."

He chuckled, but there was no trace of humor. "Most of the time you're just wishing I'd go away. Now you're actually coming to me?"

"You either suck at mind-reading, or you just stop when you find something you don't want to know."

"I shouldn't have to read your mind."

"No, you shouldn't," I agreed.

He stood, holding his hand out toward me. "Come with me, Peter. I want to show you something."

I looked at his hand, then frowned at him. "I can't. I still have to go back to work."

"We're only going up, not away."

"Up?" I asked, swallowing hard as he took my hand. Damn, I'd never felt anything so right in my entire life.

His arms wrapped tightly around me and he pressed his lips to my ear. "You scared of heights?"

"A little."

"Then close your eyes," he whispered. "But know that I've got you, Peter. I won't let you fall."

I slid my arms around his waist and a few moments later, we were in the air. As much as I hated heights, I couldn't resist opening my eyes. The lights of the city were bright and welcoming; belying all of the horrid things that I knew took place below them every night. I'd seen pictures of Houston at night in postcards, all lit up and pretty, but none of them could come close to seeing it like this. I spared a glance up at Lucien, but he seemed caught up in his own thoughts.

Lucien finally looked down at me. "Bend your knees a little. I don't want to jar you as we come down."

I did as he said, and then we landed on solid ground. When I looked around, I realized we were on a rooftop.

"Where are we?"

"The roof of the club. Have you not seen it before?"

I shook my head. "No."

He pointed to something behind me. "There's a door right over there. The stairwell is in very bad condition, though. Maybe one of these days Darren will get it fixed."

"Yeah, then he'd not only have to worry about a back room, but about people fucking up here, too."

Lucien considered that for a moment. "I suppose."

I shoved my hands in the pockets of my jeans, walking over to stand near the wall. It came up about three feet—enough that I wasn't worried about falling over. I looked down, amazed at how far down two stories seemed. I shuddered to myself and turned away, bumping right into Lucien.

"The city is beautiful from the top, no?"

I nodded, biting at the inside of my lip. "Why do you do that?"

"What?"

"Sometimes you go uber-formal, and other times it's like your French and English are trying to blend together."

"Would it surprise you to know that I do it when I'm nervous?"

"Nervous? You?"

"Oui." He slid his hand hesitantly over my chest. "I've only one chance to get this right."

"Did you hear what went on between me and Jack?"

Lucien nodded slightly. "I did."

"Everything?"

"Maybe you could tell *me* what you told him. Are you interested?"

I nodded slowly. "But I'm interested in more than just sex. I don't do one-night stands."

"Not anymore, you mean?"

I rolled my eyes. "One-night stands were for people passing through that I didn't ever want to see again."

"Does that mean that you want to see me again?"

I couldn't imagine *not* seeing him again. "Yes."

"Why? What's changed?"

"Before you were just this incredibly hot vampire that had invaded my dreams, scaring the piss out of me. But I've gotten past that."

"Past what? The fact that I'm a vampire?"

I nodded.

Lucien sighed in frustration. "I am both man and vampire. I am not one without the other."

"This isn't coming out right," I huffed. "I know you're both, believe me, and—I can't believe I'm saying this—I don't have a problem with that. But I don't see you as the vampire, Lucien. I see you as the man, Lucien, who also happens to be a vampire; the man, Lucien, who hides more human emotion than most humans ever show."

"I'm still very much that vampire who scared the piss out of you, who needs blood to survive, and who can be, at times, more animal than human."

I nodded. "I know. And it should scare me, but I realize that it's just another part of you—a part of you I'd still like to get to know."

"And Jack? What will you tell him?"

I shrugged. "It's none of his business."

"He's only trying to be a friend to you."

"I know. He's just not doing a very good job of it at the moment. So, what about what Jack said? Will your people always come first?"

Lucien turned his head to look out over the city, and when I thought he wasn't going to answer, he brought his gaze back to me. "Not always, Peter."

I knew that staying up here any longer was going to lead to more, and there certainly wasn't time for that. "I need to get back to work."

His hands rested on my hips, pulling my body into his. The look in his eyes was heated, but his touch gentle. He pulled me into a kiss, and before he could pull away, my tongue probed at his lips. He moaned and opened for me, and my tongue delved into his warm mouth. He tasted of mint and something infinitely darker ... and vaguely metallic. As I explored his mouth, his hands explored my body.

The kiss grew more frantic, as did his touch, and before I knew it, my back was against a wall and Lucien was on his knees with my cock in his mouth. I threaded my fingers through his hair, watching in awe as he swallowed me completely, then pulled off, swirling his tongue around the head. To say that he was talented would have been a huge understatement.

His fangs nicked me and I tensed. It hadn't hurt, but it sure as hell reminded me that he wasn't human. I went to push him away but he nuzzled against my belly, trailing soft kisses down the line of hair from my belly button to my pubes. "Relax, Peter. It was an accident."

Before I could even say that it was okay, or for him to keep going—or stop—my cock was sliding in and out of his warm mouth again. One hand went up my shirt, pulling at my nipples and the other cupped my balls, rolling them gently.

My bottom lip caught between my teeth as I tried to hold back my thrusts, just letting him work me. One of his fingers slid inside his mouth with my cock. When he pulled it out, he pressed it to my hole. The only action my ass had seen in years was my own fingers. Not even Jack or Mike had gotten my ass.

I opened my eyes and looked down at him, trying to relax. His finger slid inside me, and my eyes rolled back in my head, my knees sagging. "Ooh..."

He moaned out his approval, and it sent shockwaves through my body. I thrust instinctively and he urged me on, finger fucking my ass as wonderfully as he sucked my cock. I soon had my fingers fisted in his hair, bucking my hips urgently as the beginnings of an orgasm started. "Ungh.... gonna come!" I grunted in warning.

His movements didn't stop, and my entire body began to shake as I came, my ass clamping tight around Lucien's finger. Lucien stood, supporting my body with his. He bent his head, giving a mischievous smile as he pressed his lips to mine. My tongue sought out his, and I soon realized why he looked so mischievous.

"Nasty," I laughed, pulling away for half a second.

He wiggled his tongue in invitation and I kissed him again, sharing the taste of my own come. He swallowed most of it after a few seconds, and his hands curled around my neck,

thumbs brushing gently up and down the length of my throat. When he broke the kiss, he rested his forehead against mine. "I need to get you back before someone thinks you've been abducted ... or worse."

"What about you, Lucien?"

"I'm good." He grinned. "Very, very good."

"Not the least bit modest, huh?"

"Oh, no, Peter; I meant that I'm good and I need to go home now and change. Do you realize how hard it is to get come stains out of leather?"

"My fault?"

He brushed his lips against mine. "Yes, for being so damned good. Fix your jeans."

I tucked myself in, buttoning and zipping my jeans, and Lucien wrapped his arms around me again. "Off we go."

Coming down from the building was nothing like going up. It was fast, making me hold onto him tighter, and the landing was hard. I made an "oomph" sound as we stumbled across the concrete.

"Sorry." He didn't sound remorseful; just amused. "I'm feeling just a little too relaxed."

I laughed and turned for the door. When he didn't follow, I stopped. "Not coming in?"

He shook his head. "No. It's getting late and I'll leave you to work without me hassling you for a change."

"See you tonight, then?"

He shook his head again as he closed the distance between us. "How about I stay out of the way for a little bit, let this thing with Jack pass, and give you some space?"

I frowned at him. "What? You got me so you're going to just disappear? I should have known."

"No! It's nothing like that!"

"Then what?"

"I just meant stay away from the club for a little while—not you. But I *have* been severely neglecting some things that need my attention. Just let me get caught up with some of the shit at my club, and I'll be back to sitting there bugging you again. A week, at most."

Just the thought of The Den was enough to give me goose bumps, but I nodded anyway. "Okay."

He leaned in and kissed me on the forehead. "And I'm serious about letting this thing with Jack pass, Peter. He's just worried about you and that you're making a mistake."

"You know, even if I am, it's my mistake to make."

"You just have to try to explain that to him until he accepts it as fact." Lucien smiled. "Can I walk you home after your next shift?"

"Tomorrow night? I thought you were staying away?"

"Only while you're working. I'll be here after your shift ... tomorrow night."

I pulled away from him and smiled, punching those hard pecs I'd been clinging to earlier. "And don't be late, either."

"I promise; I won't be late. Have a good night, Peter."

I turned and walked back to the door, and by the time I opened it and turned around, Lucien was gone. It was only after the door slammed shut that I realized I never got my cigarette. I closed my eyes, resting my head against the door, remembering what I did get. *Being interested* in Lucien—was

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by Jourdan Lane

putting it lightly.

Chapter Five

Believe it or not, when the club shuts down at night, people seem to just disappear. One moment the dance floor can be packed with people, and the next the only signs of life are the drunken, drugged-out stragglers trying to find the door. By the time I normally leave, the cleaning crew is coming in and it's the crew supervisor that bids me goodnight. Jack will close, but getting him to do it isn't an easy task. Most times, I assume he's already at home with his ass in the air, getting royally fucked while I ... am still locking up.

Jack stayed longer than normal, though, during closing time that next night, making me nervous as hell that Lucien would show up before he was gone. Jack and I had talked throughout the night, but he refused to see Lucien as anything less than a mistake, and I couldn't help being excited at the prospect of getting to know him more. Eventually Jack left, but Lucien was still nowhere in sight. I went ahead and took the money to the office and locked it all into the safe. As I turned the dial and gave the latch one last test, making sure it was locked, Lucien's voice filled the room. "I thought he'd never leave."

I jumped and turned around, whacking him hard on the chest when I realized he was right behind me. "Damn it, Lucien! Make a little noise, would you?"

He tried to hide a smile, but failed. "Sorry."

I glared at him for a moment, but couldn't seem to keep it up. "You made it."

He nodded. "Actually, I've been here for about half an hour, waiting for Jack to leave."

I studied him curiously. "Really? Normally I know when you're around."

"I was shielding." He shrugged. "Lots of people seem to know when I'm around ... Jack included."

I frowned at that. "And here I thought I had some sixth sense where you're concerned."

He curled his hands at the nape of my neck and lifted my head with his thumbs beneath my chin, bringing my gaze up to meet his. His pale blue eyes held me captive, showing nothing but tenderness. "I know you do," he whispered, "Because I have never been more in tune with another person as I am with you."

I nodded slightly, knowing I felt the same way, but still couldn't bring myself to say it. He bent his head, brushing his lips against mine, never breaking eye contact. My heart fluttered as if thousands of tiny butterflies had settled in my chest, and I couldn't help but chuckle at the feeling. Lucien's hands slid around my shoulders, pulling me close, and as I moved to deepen the kiss, he finally closed his eyes, making a sound somewhere between a sigh and a moan.

How long the kiss lasted, I couldn't say. It felt like an eternity, yet it felt like it had lasted only seconds. When he pulled away, I had to hold onto him to steady myself. He held onto me just as tightly, the expression on his face unsure. I thought he was going to speak, but instead he pulled me into his arms and hugged me tightly. My body sank against his,

and we stood in the middle of the office, just holding each other.

Lucien finally pulled away, holding me at arm's length. "We need to go. It's getting late."

"Too late?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No, but I would like to have a nice, leisurely walk to your apartment."

At that, he slid an arm around my shoulders, escorting me out of the office. We'd made it about five feet down the corridor before I realized that I hadn't locked the door on the way out. "Wait! I need to lock the door."

Lucien stopped, stepped back, and gestured toward the door. I rolled my eyes at him, trying to suppress a grin. "Better stop that. You doing that makes it look like you're at my service."

"Oh, but I am, Peter. I am."

"Stop it with the uber-sexy voice, or I'm walking myself home," I threatened.

"You would do such a thing?"

No. Not really. But he didn't have to know that. "Don't push it."

He laughed then, a deep, rich laugh that I instantly wanted to hear again. "As you wish, my love."

We walked through the club and I waved goodbye to the cleaning crew. When we reached the front door of the club, I paused before I pushed it open. "Lucien?"

"What is it? Did you forget something else?"

I turned my head to look at him and smiled. "You have a beautiful laugh."

He opened his mouth to speak, and then closed it again as if he didn't know what to say. After we walked out and the door had slammed shut behind us, he finally said, "Thank you, Peter."

We walked along the sidewalk, keeping our distance at first, but soon Lucien reached for my hand, locking our fingers together. I raised a brow at him, and he chuckled. "Is that too clichéd? Holding hands as we walk?"

I shrugged. "No. It just doesn't fit with the bad boy image I've had of you."

"That is not good," he said in a teasing voice. "You're not supposed to see through that yet."

I smiled, squeezing his hand. "But I like what I'm seeing, Lucien."

"So did you grow up here?" he asked after we'd walked in silence for a bit.

I nodded. "Grew up here, left for a while, but managed to find my way back."

"And where is your family?"

"Gone. Never knew my father. He left before I was born. My mother was a drug-addict and OD'd when I was nineteen."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Peter," Lucien said sincerely. "That must have been difficult for you."

I shrugged. "It wasn't like she'd been an actual mother for a long time. For all intents and purposes, I lost my mother years before when she picked up a needle for the first time."

"Do you have any other family? Grandparents, aunts, cousins?"

"I have grandparents, but I haven't seen them since the funeral. They're very ... religious, and don't have much use for me. What about you?"

Lucien's shoulder lifted in a shrug. "I had a good life."

He didn't seem to want to go on, but I certainly wanted to know more. "That's it? You had a good life?"

"It was long ago, Peter."

"But I want to know more," I huffed, knowing I sounded like a child, but not really giving a damn. "It's only fair."

There were a few minutes of silence before Lucien finally cleared his throat. "I didn't see much of my father growing up. He was in the service of a noble lord as a knight."

"A knight?" I questioned, wide-eyed. "That must have been cool!"

He nodded. "In a way, yes; but he was always away fighting for one cause or another. He died when I was eight. The lord took my mother and me in, treating us as members of the house ... like family. I was educated, just as the lord's sons were, and by the time I was sixteen I was a knight in training."

He pulled his hand from mine, shoving them into the pockets of his jeans. "I got lucky. Since I was essentially a member of the lord's family, I got the same training as his sons, which was of course, by the best knights in the countryside. It wasn't long before I saw my first battle."

"When were you born, Lucien?" I asked when he didn't offer any more.

"1578. I'm no longer sure of the exact date; September, maybe; there was a horrible storm the night I was born. My

mother always said it meant I'd be strong, that I'd have the power of nature behind me."

"I believe your mother was right." I mentally added up the numbers, disbelieving the first number I came to, adding them up again and getting the same. I stopped in my tracks, looking up at Lucien. "So, you're 427 years old?"

"Something like that. I know that I was thirty-four when I..." He seemed a lot tenser than he had before.

"Are you okay talking about this? You seem upset."

"I have never told anyone of my past before, Peter. Besides my Master, who was there when I died, you are the first."

I caught Lucien's arm, bringing him to a stop, searching his face. "If you don't feel okay in telling me, then don't. But I like learning more about you, Lucien."

He looked away, staring at something over my shoulder for the longest time. He finally sighed and looked back to me. "Perhaps we can continue this conversation another time. It's not that telling you bothers me, but there are just memories that I don't care to revisit right now."

"Okay," I said, taking one of his hands and giving a tug for him to keep walking with me.

"That's it? Just okay?"

"Just okay," I said.

After we had walked a few feet, he tightened his grip in my hand. "Thank you," he said in an almost whisper.

"I do have *one* more question, though."

"What's that?"

"Tell me your last name?" I asked. "I mean, not that it matters or anything, I'd just like to know."

"It's Delacroix."

Damn, not only was *he* sexy, he had to have a sexy name to go with it. I was unable to stop the smile that tugged at my lips. "It fits."

"Yeah? How's that?"

"Sexy name for a sexy man."

The conversation soon resumed, but shifted to much lighter, more mundane topics. Lucien teased me about my love of tea, then laughed, saying that he was rather fond of it himself. We seemed to have so much in common, not only tea, but in likes and dislikes in music, and a ton of other things. When we reached my apartment building, I was disappointed.

Lucien leaned against the brick wall as I punched in the security code. "Are you working tonight?"

I nodded. "Yeah; why?"

"I'd like to walk you home again."

The lock on the door clicked open and the green light lit up. Lucien opened the door, but made no move to go inside. He let me walk in, then stood in the open doorway. I grabbed his shirt and pulled him in. "Come here, I've got something to show you."

"To show me?" he asked, shaking his head in confusion.

As soon as the door closed behind him, I pushed him back against it. My arms slid around his neck and I grinned. "Yeah ... this."

I pressed my lips against his, sinking against him when his arms went around my waist to pull me close. He turned us suddenly, slamming me back into the door. His tongue probed at my lips and I opened to him instantly, craving the taste of him. The kiss grew more insistent, and Lucien reached down and grabbed me in the middle of each thigh and spread my legs, wrapping them around his hips. As he ground against me, I could feel his hard cock pressing through the denim of my jeans.

I writhed against him as he dry-humped against me, uncaring that every time he thrust, it slammed my shoulders back into the door. I was so hard that every rub of the fabric against my cock was a mix between pleasure and pain. His hands moved to my ass, squeezing and pulling me tight against him. He made a low growling sound, and I soon realized that I had my fingers threaded tightly in his hair as I licked at his fangs.

He pulled away from me a few moments later, breaking the kiss. "I have to go, Peter. If I stay..."

I nodded, knowing exactly what he was thinking. I was both disappointed and relieved. As much as my body screamed that I needed him, I just wasn't quite ready. "Okay."

He smiled. "Will you think of me when you jerk off?"

I rolled my eyes. "I can't tell you how romantic that sounds."

He studied me intently. "Will you?"

"Yes..." He slid one arm around my back and let go of my legs, letting me slide down against him as I landed on my

feet. The friction caused my breath to hitch, and he leaned in, pressing his lips against my ear. "Let my gift help you, Peter. That would please me *very* much."

"Gift?"

"Just for you, mon amour," he whispered, pulling away and moving me from in front of the door. "I will see you tonight."

He was out the door in a blur, leaving me hard and confused, unsteady on my feet. Somehow, I made it up the stairs to my apartment. I stripped off as soon as I had the front door locked, leaving a trail of clothes from the living room to the bedroom. I headed straight for the shower but when I passed through the bedroom, something red caught my eye from the bed. I didn't own anything red.

As I moved closer, I realized that the red was a ribbon tied around an oddly-sized box—not big, but not small either. I picked up the box, surprised at its weight, and sat down on the edge of the bed. The ribbon slid off easily, and removing the lid revealed a black satin pouch. I ran my fingers over the material, feeling something hard and firm beneath it. As I lifted it out of the box, I realized what was inside.

I untied the string at the end and slid the material down to reveal a long, thick, flesh-colored dildo. With balls. And a suction cup.

Oh. Fuck.

The box tumbled out of my hand and something hit my foot. I looked down to see a bottle of lube and a small card. I picked the card up, reading the words.

Enjoy, Peter.

Thinking of you.

Lucien.

I swallowed hard—ignoring the irritation that was trying to well up at Lucien being in my apartment—being incredibly touched and turned on at the same time. Of course, a lot of that was that my body was still feeling the effects of Lucien. Damn, but that man could make me lose my mind. Oh, sure, my body craved his touch, but my head was telling me to slow the fuck down.

My body and mind have never agreed on things like that, though. I didn't think this time would be any different.

I gathered up the box, dildo, lube, and the card, putting them on the nightstand. Shower first, play later. My cock and my ass both twitched and I looked back at the dildo. "Oh, what the hell!" I mumbled to myself, grabbing the towel I'd used when I showered before work and laying it over the bed.

I lay there, eyes closed, stroking my half-hard dick to images of Lucien, his eyes, his smile ... that beautiful laugh. But before long, I was hard, remembering his touch, his scent—leather and something I couldn't quite pinpoint—the way he held me close and kissed me. His taste. God, his taste.

I licked at my lips, remembering how his tongue had teased them only a short time ago. Precome oozed from my slit, running down my fingers, easing the friction of my hand. With my other hand, I reached for the lube and popped the cap. Instead of pouring it into my hand, I just held it over my cock, hissing when the cool liquid made contact with my heated flesh. I gave the bottle a gentle squeeze and as more

lube covered me, I slicked my hand down my cock and moved to my balls, covering them with the slick fluid.

I rolled them in my hand, tugging and pulling at them. I dropped the bottle of lube beside me and wrapped the hand that'd been holding the lube around my dick. Soon, I was writhing on the bed, stroking my cock and roughly rolling my balls. The lube was running down into the crack of my ass, making me needy. I couldn't remember the last time I'd wanted to be fucked. I slipped a finger down to my hole, swirling it around the tight ring of muscle. As it slid into me, I moaned.

I finger-fucked myself, first with one finger, then with two, but I wanted more. So much more. Instead of working in that third finger, I grabbed the dildo off the stand and found the bottle of lube again, slicking it all up.

It was awkward at first, being so damned slick, but I was not only determined, I was horny. I lined the head of the fake cock up at my hole and began sliding it in. I had to pause for a moment after the flared ridge slid past my ring. Damn. This toy was about twice as thick as my last one. It took a little while, but it finally slid home, filling and stretching me so fucking beautifully.

Closing my eyes again, I remembered how Lucien had humped against me, using the door as leverage, how I could feel his cock hard and pressing against me, and how that growling of his had me leaking.

The constant rubbing against my prostate had me moaning and my cock steadily leaking precome. I knew that with just a little more, I could blow without touching my cock at all. I

sped up my movements, fucking myself hard and fast, imagining that it was Lucien slamming his cock into me. My belly tightened low and my balls drew up close. I let out a litany of 'fuck me's' and 'fuck my ass's', twisting and pulling at my nipples to heighten the sensation. The only thing that would have made it better would have been a tongue shoved down my throat.

One last thrust and I came, covering my belly and chest with come. "Fuck, yeah!" I moaned, falling back onto a pillow. I licked at my dry lips after a moment and blew out a sigh of contentment. I rubbed the come over my belly absently, trying to gather up enough energy to stumble to the shower.

The phone rang a bit later and my eyes flew open. I hadn't gone to sleep, but I was damned close to it. I searched blindly for the phone on the table and finally found it.

"Hello?" I said, my voice not sounding like my own.

Lucien's voice was low and husky. "Tell me what you look like right at this moment."

"Naked; legs spread just a little; dildo half up my ass; come on my belly and chest; and a lazy 'I just got fucked' look on my face," I said, stunned at how casually I'd said it.

I heard his breath hitch followed by a long moan, and what sounded like a sob on the other end of the phone. "Ooh ... Peter..."

I smiled as I realized that he'd just come. "And how are you, sexy man?"

"Mmm ... good now." He chuckled lazily. "I'd hoped to catch you before you came."

"Didn't miss me by much."

"Oh, I don't know. I miss you a hell of a lot right now."

A warm sensation went through my entire body and I smiled. "You're a sentimental bastard, aren't you?"

"Shh, don't tell anyone," he whispered.

I laughed, wanting to have him beside me to snuggle up to. "Truthfully? I miss you, too."

He was silent for a few moments. "So you're not mad that I took liberties with my access to your apartment."

I thought on it for a minute. I remembered the slight irritation trying to build at first, but I was touched more than anything that he'd go to the trouble. "Let's just say that I was touched and that my irritation faded *really* quickly. Thank you, Lucien."

"You are quite welcome." There was a slight pause. "Sleep well today, Peter. I will see you tonight."

"Goodnight," I said as I hung up the phone. I cleaned up, but couldn't bring myself to actually take a shower. I got back in bed and pulled the sheet over me, sinking down into the cool, soft comfort of my bed. I wanted to savor this fresh-fucked feeling and to pretend that it was Lucien who had put it there.

Chapter Six

I shifted uncomfortably as I sat at the foot of the stairs. No matter how much I tried, I couldn't ignore Lucien's heated glare. Every hair on my body stood on end and my skin was just crawling, alive with energy that wasn't mine. Things had been great between us at dinner—just as they had for the past three and a half weeks—but on the walk home, everything had changed. He'd asked me to go with him to The Den, but despite how far we'd come, I just couldn't shake my fear of that place.

And, damn, Lucien pissed was proving to be just a little more than uncomfortable. I shuddered and wiped my hands up and down my arms, trying to make the sensations stop. "Would you stop it already?"

Lucien growled and started past me up the stairs. "Upstairs, now!"

"We can talk here."

"I *will not* talk about this where others can hear it, Peter! This is between you and me, not everyone in your fucking building."

When I started to refuse again, he yanked me up by the shirt and gripped my arm tightly, practically dragging me up the stairs. Several times I tried to jerk away from him, but his grip only got tighter. Any tighter and he was going to crush the bone in my fucking arm.

As soon as we made it into my apartment, Lucien let me go so suddenly that I stumbled. He opened his mouth to say something but turned away instead, shaking his head.

"I'm sorry, Lucien," I said softly. "I just..."

"You just what?" he growled. "Managed to forget who and what I am? Is that what I've done by accommodating you?"

"What the fuck do you mean by that?"

"I mean," he hissed, stepping up uncomfortably close, looking me in the eyes, "I have been side-stepping your fears, trying like hell not to do anything to make you uncomfortable. But that is about to end. Come with me tonight, Peter. Let me show you..."

"I can't," I interrupted. "I just ... can't."

Lucien scowled. "Can't trust me enough to protect you? To hold your hand and walk you through this?"

"I do trust you," I said in defense, fighting not to look away.

"I'll give you that," he said.. "You do trust me—on your turf. You trust me in the bar; you trust me here—somewhat—although you still freak out when I get a little too close and you're not expecting it."

"That's not fair," I said.

"Fair." He chuckled bitterly. "Since when are *you* worried about being fair?"

"Lucien, I don't want to fight about this!"

"Of course you don't! In order to fight about it, you actually have to face it."

"Fuck you," I growled.

"Fuck me?" His voice rose as he turned to me. "Time after time I have put your needs and desires ahead of mine. I have given in to every request you have ever voiced without question. I have given more of myself to you in the past

couple of months than I have ever given anyone else. So still fuck me, huh?"

"I never asked anything of you..."

"Walk me home, Lucien. Will you call tonight, Lucien? Come to the club, Lucien. Let's have dinner. Stay with me a while." He stepped close, his voice getting quiet, his eyes burning right through me. "I can't, Lucien. Not tonight, Lucien. It's too fast, Lucien. Never mind the one-night-fucking stands you've had—and Jack. Do I have to be human for you to fuck me?"

I slapped him hard across the face, shoving him away. "Get out!"

"If I leave, I'm not coming back. Or ... is that what you want?"

At my silence, he walked past me, heading for the door. Something inside of me wanted to beg him not to leave—to stay and talk this out—but his words had cut deep. Even if they had been true, hearing them had left me feeling raw and exposed. The door slammed closed and I jumped; the sound horribly final.

* * * *

I stared at the cigarette between my fingers, watching the damned thing burn down—just as I had with the previous three. Business was slow tonight and I'd left the bar to Jack. He was more than capable, and it meant that I didn't have to deal with him constantly trying to set me up with one customer or the next. But here I sat, unable to just go home.

Being alone gave me too much time to think and my thoughts always seemed to turn to Lucien.

The back door of the club opened and I looked up to find Eric, the vampire I'd spoken with a couple of times in passing.

"You don't mind if I smoke out here, do you?"

"No." I shook my head, shrugging. "But there's no smoking ban in the club."

"Oh, I know." He smiled. "I just ... it's hard to be around so many people sometimes. It gets tiring having to turn everything down to a level I can handle. Sometimes I just need to get away."

I remembered Lucien mentioning how intense things could be at times, and the memory of that night—the way he'd pulled me close as we'd walked—and it made my chest ache. I turned my head away and threw the cigarette to the ground, crushing it with the heel of my boot. It hurt too much to think of what I'd lost.

Eric put his hand on my shoulder and squeezed gently. "It's not too late, Peter."

"What's not?"

He pulled me around to face him, but I just couldn't look him in the eyes. The look of sympathy he held was just too much. "Whatever it is that's keeping the two of you apart, it *can* be overcome."

I shook my head. "Apparently you don't know everything."

"No," he agreed, "I do not know everything. Lucien does not share his personal issues with the entire coven. I just believe that if what the two of you have is real and genuine, then it shouldn't be left to just wither away and die."

"It's not that simple."

He pulled his hand away and took a cigarette out of his pack, lighting it up. "And why not? Do you not love him?"

I shrugged and lit up another cigarette myself, this time actually taking a drag. "I'm not sure that love has anything to do with it at this point."

"You're fooling yourself, Peter. Deny your feelings all you wish, but it doesn't change the truth. You love him, and until you admit it to yourself, you will never, ever be able to make things right."

I looked at him again. "My problem is with vampires and ... well, creatures in general."

"Any specific creatures besides vampires?"

"You mean there are others?"

"You mean that you didn't already know that there were?"
At my shocked look, he continued. "Werewolves..."

"Now I *do* know about those."

"There are other were-creatures," he said casually.
"Though, around here, if they're not werewolves, they're more than likely just passing through. But the list of other *creatures* could go on and on, if you wanted to start making lists: elves, immortals, demons, angels..."

"Shit, I'm not sure I want to know all of that."

"Maybe it's time that you reconsider that."

I sat back, taking another drag on the cigarette. "I don't want to get into all that right now; what started all of *this* was that Lucien wanted me to go to the club with him."

"The Den?"

I nodded. "And I just couldn't do it."

"He would never let anything happen to you."

It was a knowledge that went soul deep, and as much as I wanted to deny it, I couldn't. "I know," I whispered, "but I couldn't get my head and my heart to agree."

Eric slid an arm around my shoulders and pulled me close. He rested his chin on my shoulder, speaking softly. "We are not monsters, Peter. Sure, there are bad seeds—just as there are humans who are evil and corrupt—but we're more human than I think you want yourself to believe."

"But..."

He cut me off before I could voice my fears about some of the things that I'd seen. "Does Lucien know *why* you refused him?"

I shrugged. "I think he does, but we've never actually talked about it."

"Then maybe you should talk about it with him." He pulled away, dusting a bit of cigarette ash from his jeans. "Let him know how you feel and that it's not just him. He deserves that, at least. Don't you think?"

"It's been over a month and he hasn't returned any of my calls."

"Then go to him. Show him that you're trying and that you want to work through this. I think it's time for you to stop thinking, stop remembering, and just move forward."

I knew he was right. And I wanted ... oh, God, how I needed to work this out. Lucien and I had something—something worth fighting for—even if it meant going back to the very place that had put the fear of vampires in me to begin with. Was I really ready to take that chance, though? If

I went to him, he would see it as a sign that I had accepted him for what he was, that I'd accepted his world, and that I'd overcome my fear of something I still didn't really understand.

I wanted to understand, but I also knew that my road to understanding was a one-way street. Once I went down it, there would be no turning back. But was I ready for that? Did Lucien mean enough to me to risk my mortality?

It was then that I knew without a doubt. Yes. He was. Even though there was a risk in being with Lucien, I wasn't willing to risk a life without him.

Eric stood and put his hand on my shoulder again. "I need to go."

I caught his hand before he could pull away. "Are you going to The Den?"

He nodded.

"Mind if I tag along?"

* * * *

Eric got out of the cab and I paid the driver before I followed. A shiver went through my body as I looked at the building a few feet away. It'd been so long since I'd stood in this very spot, nervous about coming to the club for the first time. A knot formed in my stomach and I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath. I could do this.

"Peter? You okay?" Eric asked.

I opened my eyes and looked at him, unsure myself, but nodding. "I'm all right. I just need a few minutes."

"I have a meeting in..."

I suddenly felt bad for taking up as much of his time as I had. "Hey, you've been more than helpful. Thanks, really."

"You sure?"

I nodded, blowing out a deep breath again. "Yeah, I'm sure. Go on, maybe I'll catch you around sometime."

Eric smiled. "Does this mean you're changing your mind about vampires?"

"Some of them ... maybe."

He nodded. "Sometimes the hardest things for us to face ... have to be faced in stages. Catch you later, Peter."

"Later," I said.

He didn't disappear on me like he had the first time; he walked to the door and smiled back at me before going inside. I smiled back and when the door closed behind him, I swallowed hard. My heart was in my throat as I forced myself to walk across the parking lot.

The door to the club was heavy and wooden, not like I remembered it before. As I pulled it open, I took a deep breath and walked in. But it wasn't into the club itself. Not yet. It was some sort of entry room with another door on the far wall. There was a bouncer on each side of it—one of them a tall, muscular blond, and the other tall and slender with long black hair and a nasty looking scar over his right eye—and neither one of them looked friendly. Things had definitely changed since my last visit.

"ID," one of them said, though I didn't know which, because neither one of them had opened their mouths.

I pulled my wallet out and showed them both my card. "I'm ... looking for Lucien."

"Lucien sees no one," the blond snarled as he grasped the large iron handle on the door. "You start causing trouble and you're out of here. Got it?"

"Right. No trouble." I nodded just to get past him and get inside. "Cover charge?"

"No cover tonight," the dark-haired man answered, nodding for the blond to open the door.

I closed my wallet and shoved it back in my pocket as I walked through the open door. Music suddenly filled the air. It was loud, but not on the verge of being too loud, as it often was at Rave. The door closed behind me and I made it a point to head straight to the bar. Every couple I passed on the way was in some state of either fucking or feeding—or a mixture of both. There was a scent of spice in the air, but beneath that, it smelled vaguely metallic.

Strange hands caressed me as I moved through the crowd. Men and women both leaned in as if scenting me as I walked by them. Some of the looks I received were kind; most of them were not. I found the bar, but before I could make it there, a man stepped directly in front of me, blocking my path.

He was almost exactly my height and build, with long black hair pulled back into an elastic band. The red silk shirt he was wearing made his amber eyes seem extraordinarily bright. He smiled, and I wasn't sure if it was in kindness ... or something else.

"You are not a regular patron."

"No," I said. "But I'm looking for someone."

He raised an eyebrow, closing the distance between us until he was only a few inches away. "Perhaps I can be of service?" He was either flirting or trying to be intimidating—or both. I was getting fed up. "Lucien Delacroix. I'd like to see him ... now."

The man shrugged. "Lucien doesn't see visitors without an appointment."

"He'll see me," I said with more confidence than I really felt. After all this time, would he deny me instead?

He eyed me and then seemed to come to a decision. "One moment."

I watched as he turned and headed toward a stairwell against the wall. He leaned in and spoke to another man who looked at me and then shook his head adamantly. The man in the red shirt started back in my direction, but I met him halfway.

"I'm sorry, sir; Lucien isn't receiving visitors. I can arrange for an appointment..."

I pushed past him and made my way to the stairs. Two men stood before me, blocking my way. "This area is restricted," one of them said, grasping me by the elbow.

"And you can kiss my ass!" I yelled as I jerked away from him. "I'm not leaving here until I see Lucien!"

The other man started to grab for me, but movement at the top of the stairs caught my attention. I looked up, and the moment I saw Lucien's face, I froze. His expression wasn't kind. "Lucien?" I asked tentatively.

He stared down at me for a moment longer before turning and walking back into the room at the top of the stairs. I was

afraid that he was refusing me, but the two men before me let me go and stepped aside, giving me access to the stairs. I climbed them slowly, both studying the crowd below and trying to ignore them.

My eyes immediately found the bar where two guys were fucking. The guy being fucked was flat on his back across the bar and four other vampires were feeding from him. I didn't have to look too closely to figure out that the shiny substance he was covered in was blood.

As I looked away, I found scene after scene of some sort of feeding going on, each one worse than the one before. I was less disturbed by what I saw than by the fact that my dick was hard before I reached the top of the stairs.

Lucien stood waiting at the open door, staring at the floor. I paused and he looked up. "Come in, Peter."

I went to him and his gaze shifted. "Look at me," I said softly.

"What are you doing here?" He closed the door with a slam before starting to move past me.

I blocked his path, pushing hard against his chest to stop him. "I came to see you."

He still wouldn't look at me. "And now you've seen me. You can go."

"Look at me, Lucien," I pleaded softly. "Please..."

Lucien lifted his head and steadied his gaze on me. Those pale blue eyes seemed darker than I remembered—almost tinged with red. I cupped the back of his neck and moved forward, capturing his lips in a kiss. He tried to pull away, but I caught his face in both hands.

"I'm sorry, Lucien," I whispered against his lips. "Sorry for treating you the way I did; sorry for not trusting you; sorry I couldn't do this earlier..."

His arms came around me and we were suddenly moving across the floor. My back hit a wall with a dull thud, and Lucien pulled away, turning me to face the wall. But it wasn't a wall—not really; it was a window that started about three feet off the floor and covered the entire length of the front wall. As I looked down, I could see the interior of the club below.

Lucien pressed his lips to my ear, hands sliding along my chest and belly. "See that down there? Those people?"

I nodded.

"See them dancing, living, fucking, feeding?"

I nodded again, slowly this time.

"This is my world, Peter; these are my people."

"All of them?"

"All of them and more," he said, kissing a line down my neck. "My coven is quite large. But here? I like to keep an eye on them."

I shuddered and rolled my head to the side, baring my neck, giving him more access. He growled, sucking hard against the juncture of my neck and shoulder. I nearly went to my knees at the sensations that surged through my body. "Guess things can still get out of hand with you watching." I shuddered again, his tongue moving over my skin, scattering my thoughts.

"The first time you were here was a bad night. After seeing what you did, I cannot blame you for your fears." He hugged

me tightly, resting his chin on my shoulder. "But not facing these fears is only going to do more harm than good in the long run."

"I know," I said. "But they were *eating* him; no matter how hard I try, I'll never be able to forget that."

He was silent for a long while. "I was not aware—at the time—that it was happening within the club itself."

"But you knew it was happening?"

When he didn't answer, I shook my head, struggling to get away from him. "How could you...?"

His arms tightened around me considerably, holding me in place no matter how hard I tried to get away. "No, Peter," he hissed. "I will not let you run from this—not without an explanation."

"Let me *go*."

"Do you honestly fear me? If you truly fear me, I will let you go."

"I'm not afraid of you." I struggled again, elbowing him hard in the gut. "I'm disgusted with you."

"Why? Because your human mind cannot comprehend that this is a different world from yours? With rules and punishments that are much, much different as well?"

"I can't believe that you would condone something so..."

"Violent?"

I nodded, the fight going out of me. "That's not the Lucien I know."

"Oh, Peter." He sighed softly. "It's not that you don't know that part of me as much as it is a part of me that you refuse to acknowledge exists."

"Help me to understand," I said after a few moments.

"And how shall I do that?"

"I don't know..."

He turned me around to face him, rubbing his thumb against my lips. "What you saw *was* a very violent act and I did not condone the way it was done."

"But you gave the okay for it?"

"Come, Peter; let's sit and talk this out." He took my hand and pulled me to an overstuffed brown leather chair near the fireplace.

I paused before I sat down, looking around the room. Deep hues of reds and earthy browns gave it a nice, cozy feel, regardless of its size. Two additional matching couches joined the two overstuffed brown leather chairs near the fireplace. A sizeable desk was off to one side of the room with a large leather chair behind it. On the far wall was a bed. It looked to be twice the size of a king-sized bed, and dark, wine-colored fabrics hung from the ceiling. If drawn, the fabrics would separate the bed from the rest of the room.

"What is it?" Lucien asked.

"Huh?" I asked before realizing that I'd just been standing and staring at the room while he wanted to talk. "Nothing; I was just looking at the room for the first time. It's nice ... cozy."

"I'm glad you like it," he said. "Perhaps you will see more of it in the future."

I hated the way he was being so distant, restrained. I just wanted things to be back the way they were. Before the fight. I wanted to be able to enjoy his company, his touch, his

laughter. I sat down in the chair and Lucien pulled the other one around to face me before sitting down.

"I can blur your memory of that night. You would still know what happened, but I can make the images go away."

"But I don't know what happened."

Lucien slid his hands over my thighs and I put my hands over his, just wanting that contact. "Yes; what you saw that night was a man, if you want to call him that, being eaten. But it was his *choice*. It was what *he* asked for in order to pay for the crimes he'd committed against his own people."

"What sort of crime warrants death by being eaten alive?"

"Terrible, terrible crimes, Peter; even speaking about them seems so terribly wrong and forbidden." His hands tightened on me. "The man was a Lycan..."

"Wait, wait; a Lycan?"

"Lycanthrope—Werewolf."

"And his people were Lycans? Werewolves?"

Lucien nodded.

"And he was eaten by his own people?"

Lucien nodded again. "He was a murderer. When we investigated and came upon ... the evidence ... it was clear that we couldn't let him live. His punishment was to meet death at my hand, or to be eaten alive, as had his victims."

"An eye for an eye...?"

"Exactly. I'd allowed a few of my people to feed from him before they were supposed to take him away. Instead of keeping an eye on that, as I should have, I was watching you. It was only when a look of horror passed over your face that I realized what was happening."

"You saw me that night?"

"Saw you and wanted you more than anything ... I still do."

There was a loud bump against the door and it opened the next second. The man in the red silk shirt who had stopped me only a short time ago came in, seeming out of breath. Lucien stood, turning toward him. "What is it, Xander?"

"Fight," he panted. "Two vampires passing through are fighting with two of yours over a human ... a donor."

"Shit!" Lucien growled and looked to me. "I have to take care of this. Will you be okay?"

"Yeah; of course." I stood, nodding. "Go, Lucien. I'll be here when you get back."

"I'll be right back." He leaned in and kissed me roughly, sending all kinds of shivers through me. As he reached the door, he pushed the man in the red shirt back into the room. "This is Xander. He'll stay until I get back."

"Lucien! What the fuck?" Lucien left and Xander looked at me, shaking his head. "I guess you're Peter."

"That would be me."

He studied me for a moment. "I've heard so much about you that I feel like I should have met you by now. It's nice to meet you, finally—and have a face to put a name to."

I didn't know what to think of that. Lucien had been talking about me? To his people? I didn't know who Xander was in relation to Lucien, but apparently they were somewhat close. I moved over to stand at the window, watching the activity of the club below. The longer I watched, the more fascinated I became.

My gaze rested on two young, dark-haired guys dancing out on the floor. They weren't dancing so much as they were putting on a public show of foreplay. After a while one of them took the other by the hand and led him to a couch off the dance floor. I watched them make out for a while, but before I knew it, the slimmer one had rid himself of his pants and had straddled his partner, riding him—fucking him—right out in the open.

I shifted, rearranging myself in my jeans. It wasn't until I heard Xander's chuckle that I remembered he was still in the room with me. "See something you like?"

I glanced back and couldn't see him for a moment. Movement near the bed drew my attention, and I saw that he was lying face down along the foot of it. Oh, yeah, he and Lucien were definitely close. They had to be. I couldn't see him taking liberties like this if they weren't.

"So, are you and Lucien close?"

"Close as in...?" He grinned at me. "What do you want, details?"

"Yes," I said, taking a few steps closer.

Xander sighed, rolling onto his side. "Sex has been very, very lacking since he started seeing you. The only way to get off with him now? Is to feed him."

"Do you feed him often?"

He shrugged. "Not as often as I'd like."

I wasn't sure how I felt about that. Hearing it from Lucien was one thing, but hearing it from Xander was just irritating. I turned and walked back to the window, my eyes immediately finding the couple on the couch. They were still

fucking—hard and fast now—and I found myself watching, waiting for them to get off. I glanced at the other people around the couple, and no one seemed to give a damn one way or the other.

As I moved my gaze back to the couple, I noticed Lucien. He was walking right by the couch as he headed for the stairs. He paused for a moment at the couch, his hand resting on the naked back of the guy riding the other. His hand slid down the man's spine, making him shiver, and a few moments later, the man was coming hard, head thrown back in pure ecstasy. Lucien moved on to the stairs without a word.

He paused as he neared the top, looked directly at me through the window, and smiled. I smiled back, uncaring whether or not he could actually see me. The door opened a few moments later, and Lucien walked in. "Everything okay?"

I nodded. Sure, there were things we needed to discuss, but not with Xander lying on the bed as if he owned it. Lucien looked to Xander and shook his head. "He's been a pain in the ass, hasn't he?"

Xander blew a kiss at Lucien before rolling off the bed. "Now you know that I'd much rather receive than give."

The look that Lucien gave Xander made me swallow hard. It was far from gentle, and I half-expected for there to be some sort of fight between them next. "Leave us," Lucien growled. "And no matter what happens, do not let anyone through that door. *You* included."

"But..."

"Out!"

"As you wish, Master," Xander huffed, and bowed his head to Lucien before walking out.

The moment the door closed, Lucien started toward me. I shrugged off his touch and looked him in the eyes. "Who is Xander to you?"

"He is the leader of the Lycans here and..."

"You left me up here with a fucking werewolf?"

Lucien continued on. "*And* even though he's acting like a total ass, Xander is one of my most trusted servants. I not only trust him with my life, I trust him with yours. Harming you would mean certain death for him—and I guarantee you, Xander is fond of having a heart still beating in his chest."

"He's jealous," I said.

Lucien nodded. "Just a little."

"Jealousy makes people do stupid things."

"How about you, Peter? Is there something you're jealous about?"

"Not so much jealous as irritated. He had no right to go throwing some of what he did in my face. Is that what he was looking for? For me to get jealous and walk out?"

"What did he say to you?"

I shook my head. "Just forget it."

"I will not forget it," Lucien said. "He will show you the same respect that he shows me, or he will pay dearly for it."

"You can't expect him to respect me just because I'm with you."

"Can't I? I'm his Master, Peter," Lucien said quietly. "He will respect you—if nothing else—because it is a direct order from me."

I cleared my throat, moving a little closer. "Everything go okay downstairs?"

"It went as expected," he replied. "Peter ... if you don't stop looking at me like that..."

I couldn't tear my gaze away from his. I wanted—needed—him. Desperately. "Like what?"

"A word of warning: I'm about two seconds away from throwing you on the bed and doing dirty, dirty things to you."

"Two?" I eyed him pointedly. "As in one..."

I didn't make it to two. Lucien's hand cupped the back of my neck, his mouth taking mine in a kiss. I didn't realize we were moving, though, until I was lying beneath him in the soft bed. He pressed his hips against mine and I moaned, pulling the edge of his shirt from his pants.

He hissed, showing his fangs. I slid my hands beneath his shirt and rose up, teasing at his lips with my tongue. When he opened for me, instead of kissing him, I ran my tongue against his fangs. He sucked in a quick breath and then quickly pulled away. "Stop!"

I pulled him back down, biting at his bottom lip. "Why?"

"If you don't stop, I will feed from you as I fuck you."

"Can't fuck me if you've still got your pants on," I said as my hands found the closure to his leather pants.

He grabbed both of my hands and pinned them above my head. "Did you hear what I said?"

I looked up at him and sighed. "So, you *don't* want to feed from me?"

It was his turn to look confused. "Peter, you don't know what you're doing."

"I know that I want you," I said. "Fuck! I've wanted you for months now! But I'm not stupid enough to expect that you won't want blood. I'm scared as fuck, Lucien, but I'm willing."

He buried his face against my neck, kissing and sucking the skin below my ear. I wiggled my hands free and began working at the closure of his pants again. When I got them open, I pushed them down his hips and caressed his ass, squeezing at him, pulling him against me.

He soon rolled off to the side and kicked his boots and pants off before sliding his shirt up over his head. He turned toward me with a wicked gleam in his eyes. "Your turn."

With his help, I made quick work of getting my clothes off. I rolled over him and settled between his legs, licking my way down his belly, trailing my tongue over scar after scar, evidence of his former life as a knight. As my tongue finally dipped into his navel, it touched against something metal. I pulled back to look and when I saw the barbell, I couldn't help but smile.

"Do you like it?"

"Oh yeah," I said, flicking the end of my tongue against it. "I like it a lot. That all you got?"

He nodded his head. "Until you tell me where else you like them."

I slid my hands up his chest and rolled his nipples between my fingers. "I like it here," I said, twisting one. "And here." I twisted the other.

Lucien's hands covered mine and he moaned. "And if I like them on you?"

"We'll negotiate." I moved down, kissing along his hip. When I came to his dick, I stopped and looked up at him. "And you were born when?"

His hand landed on the top of my head and he gave me a couple of gentle pats. "Don't worry, baby; I'm over eighteen."

I gave the underside of his hard, cut cock a light flick with my finger. "Don't be stupid," I grumbled.

"Ow!" he cried out, then moaned and pushed his dick toward me. "Do that again, it was kind of nice."

I flicked him again and he hissed. Just my luck. A sensation freak. "I thought you'd be uncut."

"Disappointed?"

"No," I answered quickly. "I've just heard that most of the older vampires are uncut, that's all. Considering that you were born in the late 1500's, in France, I just didn't expect this."

His fingers tangled in my hair. "Suck me and I'll tell you why I'm not."

I sucked just the head of his cock into my mouth, running my tongue in a ring around his flared ridge. "Oh..." His fingers tightened in my hair, and he tried to push me farther down onto his cock. I shook my head.

"Oh, yeah, I was supposed to talk while you did that, wasn't I?"

I gave a slight nod, trying not to laugh, and he continued on, moaning through his words. "Well, it's a very ... very simple explanation. My former Master wanted me this way."

I couldn't help wincing. "So you were circumcised as an adult?"

He nodded. "It's not as bad as it sounds. He made it ... pleasant."

I shuddered hard at the thought of it and looked down, examining his cock a little closer. There was a faint line of scarring, and I ran the pad of my thumb over it. "Is this the scar?"

"Umm ... that's it."

I bent my head and laved at the scar with my tongue. I enjoyed seeing him twist around on the bed as I worked him; enjoyed hearing the moans and cries and even a few whimpers. He finally pulled me up and kissed me as he rolled me beneath him. I melted into him as he bit and sucked at the skin down the middle of my belly. As much as I tried to stall it, I came.

He grinned at me then, his eyes full of mischief. "If I can make you do that with a little kissing, just think of what I can make you do when I fuck you."

"Shut up," I grumbled, pushing his head down further. He didn't skip a beat. He licked the come from my skin and licked and sucked his way down my dick and balls, before pausing at my ass. My legs spread even farther apart and he soon had them pushed back against my chest, fucking my ass with his tongue.

Holy. Fucking. Hell.

Just when I thought I was about to blow again, he released my legs and turned me onto my belly. I pushed back against him. "Not like this, Lucien."

He slid over me, hard cock sliding between my ass cheeks, his warm lips pulling at my ear lobe. "Like this, or not at all," he whispered.

I pushed at him again. "I want to see you ... to watch you."

"No, you don't, Peter." He sighed against my neck. "You don't want to see this. You're not ready."

I struggled to push him off when he made no move to get up. "Lucien! Get off!"

He lifted himself from me, but instead of moving away, I rolled over. I studied him for a moment, but he refused to look at me, keeping his eyes closed and his head turned away. He didn't seem to be angry or hurt; he seemed ashamed. I caught his face in my hands, forcing him to turn his face to mine. "Open your eyes, Lucien."

When he did, my heart skipped a few beats. His once-blue eyes were black as coal and his pupils had become elongated slits, glowing faintly red. I'd caught a glimpse of the way his eyes shifted a few months back, but had never seen the full effect. Oh yeah, that definitely would have freaked me out mid-coitus, but seeing him like this; the pained expression on his face, the trembling his body was trying to hide, the plea for understanding in his voice—it made me understand. This was that part of him that I needed to acknowledge and accept: his non-human side.

"Please ... stay with me," he pleaded softly, averting his eyes. "We don't have to do anything, just ... don't go."

I pushed him back enough so that I could look into his eyes again. "Not going anywhere." I smiled, pulling him down for a kiss. "And, yes, we do."

He moaned against my lips as I took his semi-hard shaft into my hand and began stroking him. He rolled us so that I was on top of him, and I let go just long enough to steady myself. As my hand found him again, he pulled me back down, kissing and nibbling at my lips.

My cock was leaking precome steadily against his hip and I was soon rubbing against him, wanting the slightest amount of friction. He let go of me for a few moments, and when he touched me again, it was with slick fingers and he was sliding one of them into my ass.

"Mmm ... tight."

"It's been a long, long time."

He moved me until I was straddling his belly with my hands resting against his chest. He began working his finger, slowly at first, trying to loosen me up. When I jumped as he found my prostate, he added another finger. Slowly he worked his way up to three fingers and just as I thought he'd try to add another, he pulled them out and pushed me back on his cock.

I cried out at being filled again so quickly, and my first instinct was to pull away; he caught at my hips, holding me close as he rolled me beneath him. The head of his cock brushed against my prostate, and I shoved my ass against him, wanting to feel it again.

"There we go," he purred, thrusting tentatively. "Getting better?"

My hole burned as it stretched around his thick cock, but I finally nodded. He seemed to take that as a good sign, because he began rotating his hips in a circular motion. The moment he did, the burn began to fade and I reached down at my sides, pulling at his bent knees as they rested against the bed.

"Fuck me," I begged, holding onto him for leverage. "Feed from me ... *show* me."

He growled down at me, his eyes flashing red. "Just a warning ... it *is* going to hurt."

I nodded that I understood and gasped as he thrust his hips against me. He grunted and growled as I met each and every thrust, looking down at me with a wicked glint in his eyes. I felt that fire down the base of my spine long before I was ready, and as my balls drew closer to my body, I tried to push the orgasm back.

But as I tried to push it back, Lucien moved forward, licking and sucking the sweat-slick skin of my neck. His moans and breathing in my ear pushed me over the edge and just as I came, he bit. I cried out in a voice that sounded more animalistic than human, incredibly turned on at the combination of pleasure and pain and the heat of him filling me.

The orgasm seemed to last the entire time that he fed. Only when he pulled away and kissed gently at my neck did it ease off. He kissed a long line up my jaw, and when he reached my lips, I opened for him.

"Not now, Peter."

"Kiss me," I whispered, my hands pulling his face back down for a kiss.

He gave in, finally, but when he wouldn't open for me, I bit his bottom lip. His mouth opened as he hissed, and I slid my tongue in against his. I should have been totally and completely disgusted at the metallic, coppery taste of blood. But I wasn't. In fact, I sucked his tongue into my mouth as if I couldn't get enough.

He pulled back slightly and bit down on his own tongue before kissing me again. I sucked it back into my mouth and didn't let go until the taste of blood was nearly gone. Lucien then rolled us onto our sides so that we were lying face to face, our bodies tangled together in a sweaty mass.

I nuzzled against his neck, sighing in contentment. "I could get used to this."

"I hope so." Lucien tucked a long strand of unruly hair behind my ear, "Because I plan on doing it again ... really soon."

Chapter Seven

I licked at my parched lips and stretched, flinching a little at the pain in my neck and in my ass. I turned my head slightly to look for Lucien, but he was gone. It was still dark, which I found incredibly odd until I noticed the curtains drawn around the bed. I sighed and lay back on the pillow, staring up at the ceiling.

I squinted, trying to make out the shapes above me, but gave up when my eyes grew heavy from the strain. I closed my eyes then, trying to remember the events of the night before. Everything was clear in my mind between us until about an hour after we'd fucked for the second time and we lay there talking. I couldn't remember what all we'd talked about, but I could remember him bugging me about going home with him.

When I finally agreed and tried to get out of bed, though, I couldn't seem to stand. Oh, yeah, I remembered falling face-first into the floor, remembered him laughing at me as he picked me up and wrapped me in a long leather coat before carrying me down to his car. I never saw the car, of course, never even saw the house. I did, however, see the bedroom and had remarked that it was exactly like his office. He'd laughed at me again, kissing me softly as he put me to bed, stripping his own clothes off and climbing in beside me. The last thing I remembered was him wrapping his arms around me possessively and nuzzling against my neck.

I started to get up, but when I rose up the slightest bit, the room went spinning. I flopped back down and my arm

bumped against the headboard. A soft light came on, illuminating the closed-in area of the bed. It was enough for me to get a good look at the shapes I'd been trying to make out earlier.

It was a collage of sorts, of beautiful, naked men in various states of arousal. There were a few single images of the men, but most of them were coupled up, doing what beautiful, naked men did best—sucking, fucking, kissing, licking, feeding, fisting, jerking off. I bit at my lip and closed my eyes, smiling when the images were burned into my memory. As my hand found my cock, a noise from beyond the curtain stopped me from going any further.

I rolled over to the end of the bed and parted the curtain, squinting out into the dimly lit room. A young man, of about twenty, stepped into my view, and I nearly fell over the footboard in surprise. He smiled at me kindly. "May I bring you breakfast, sir?"

He had a nice British accent, I think, but was suspiciously well-spoken for someone his age. And calling me sir? That was just wrong. I scratched at my head, trying to figure out whether I was hungry or not, and finally decided on not. "No, just some coffee maybe? Or tea, if you have it."

"We do have tea, sir, if that is what you prefer. However, I must advise you to eat. It is ... unwise ... to *give* and then not take sustenance."

"I'm not hungry," I grumbled. "But I'll have tea."

His brow narrowed in concern. "Sir, if I do not bring your breakfast plate, the Master will be displeased. May I at least

bring it to the room? Even if you do not eat of it, it will still have been delivered."

It didn't seem worth arguing about. "Whatever."

He nodded curtly and turned toward the door. "Hey!" I called out. "Where's Lucien?"

He paused and then turned slightly. "Master Lucien is at rest."

"Why isn't he *here* at rest?"

"He was uncomfortable with..." The man cleared his throat before continuing. "He assumed that you would not want to see him in that condition."

I suppressed a grumble. Damned Lucien and his assumptions. "When will he be awake?"

"In about four hours, sir. He wishes that you not leave until then."

I nodded that I understood. "And what is your name?"

"Simon, sir; if you have need of anything at all, please let me know. I will be back shortly."

I watched as he opened the door and called out again. "Hey, Simon?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Please stop calling me *sir*."

"Yes, s..." He broke off, catching himself at his mistake. "I will do my best."

He closed the door, and I lay back on the bed, sighing. Four hours. What the hell was I going to do for four fucking hours? I stared up at the scene on the ceiling and smirked. I wondered how many times I could jack-off to the images in four hours.

Simon was back before I could think too much on that. He placed the tray on the bed and smiled. "If we do not have a tea of your liking, I can send someone out for something more fitting."

I thumbed through the packets of tea and found a vanilla caramel tea. It was one of my favorites. "This is perfect."

He nodded and began fixing my tea, and when I caught the scent of bacon I couldn't resist lifting the domed cover over the plate. Besides the bacon there was a wide variety of breakfast foods and berries. My stomach growled a bit, and Simon looked up at me knowingly.

I shrugged. "Maybe I'm just highly suggestible."

"I will leave you to your breakfast."

"Thank you, Simon." I smiled and plucked a blackberry from the bowl.

An hour later I was stuffed and dozing when I heard someone clear his throat beyond the curtain. "Simon?"

"No, it's me, Xander."

I rolled to the edge of the bed and pulled back the curtain. He pushed the material back a little farther and sat down on the edge of the bed. I laid back to put a bit more distance between us, pulling the sheet up over my hips. I still hadn't found the energy to get up and find a shower. "What are you doing here?"

"I've brought you clothes." He smiled. "If you want them, that is."

"Thank you."

His eyes traveled down my chest. "Do you need anything of me? Anything at all?"

My dick twitched and tried to poke its head up and say yes, but I shifted my leg to try to hide it. What the hell was wrong with me to be so open to a blatant come-on? But damned if I wasn't thinking how nice it'd be to have him suck me off as I stared at the ceiling above. I shook my head, trying to shake the thoughts away as I did. "As much as my body seems to be betraying me right now, no, I don't believe I need anything."

"It's normal," Xander said quietly. "You ingested his blood, so you'll be more aroused for a while. He wanted to explain some things to you last night, but you were so sleepy..."

"I felt like I was drugged," I said, interrupting him. "Please tell me it's not like this every time."

Xander slid his hand over my thigh. "No, it's not like that every time. Your body will adjust to his blood in a matter of hours. I'm sure you'll find the results to be quite satisfying."

I sucked in a quick breath as my legs automatically parted for him. Part of my mind worried what Lucien would think, and the other part didn't give a flying fuck as Xander pulled the sheet down and began sucking me.

I couldn't resist tangling my fingers into his long, silky hair, holding onto his head as he bobbed up and down. It wasn't long before I was thrusting my cock deep into his throat, taking full advantage of that mouth as I came. He nuzzled against my spent dick before kissing the head and rising up to look at me.

I felt as if I'd just fucked up ... big time. After all, I had the feeling Xander wasn't quite happy with my presence.

"Xander..."

He just smiled. "Don't worry. As Lucien said, things work differently around here."

"But I'm not like this, Xander," I said, shaking my head. "I don't do..."

He bent and kissed me on the forehead. "If you decide to stay, it's quite likely that you will begin to see some things differently. Sex is one of them."

"Lucien's going to be so pissed."

He laughed as he stood. "Lucien is the one who sent me to you."

* * * *

I'd taken my shower, but not strayed any farther than the bathroom. Sure, I'd wanted to have a look around the house, but I'd just been too damned tired to leave the vicinity of the bed. I wasn't used to being awake during the day, and my body sure as hell knew it until it became late afternoon. I was sitting up on the edge of the bed when I heard the door open and close.

Expecting it to be Xander or Simon, I reached for my jeans. "Don't put them on yet," Lucien said as he walked around the end of the bed wearing nothing but a loose pair of wine-colored, silk pajama bottoms.

"Hey." I smiled, rising up to meet him.

He leaned in and sucked at the skin of my neck. "Feeling better?"

I shivered as my hands slid inside the waistband of his pants, pushing them down his hips. "I'm feeling okay now."

"Want to feel good?" he whispered, pushing me back onto the bed.

I grunted as his body made contact with mine and he pushed my legs apart with his. His hard cock pressed just beneath my balls and I reached down, stroking him as he tried to push into me.

"Not without lube, you're too big for that." I let him go long enough to shimmy up the bed and grab the bottle I'd found earlier beneath the pillow. He looked a little impatient and a lot excited. Instead of moving back toward him, I lay back against the pillows, opening the bottle of lube.

"What are you doing?"

I squirted a good-sized amount into the palm of my hand and winked at him as I began stroking myself. The look in his eyes became predatory as he crawled across the bed. When he got close enough, I put my foot out, pressing it against the middle of his chest to stop him.

"Peter," he growled.

"Watch," I whispered, moaning as I tightened my fist around the head of my shaft.

I finally slid my hand down my slick shaft to my balls, massaging and tugging at them before spreading my legs even more and trailing my fingers down to my hole. It was still sensitive from him fucking me, but with a little bit of playing it was just hungry.

"You're playing with fire," he hissed, his eyes showing more red than black.

I licked at my lips, adding another finger and shoving them deep. "Ooh, but I love the way it burns."

He was over me in an instant, pulling my hands from me and pinning them above my head. He impaled me on his cock in one swift thrust, and as I tried to catch my breath, he grinned down at me. I struggled, trying to get my hands free to touch him but he leaned in, nipping at my ear. "Does it burn?"

"So fucking good!"

He released my wrists from his grasp and rose up, putting my ankles on his shoulders as he thrust. He wasn't careful or gentle, and he certainly didn't take it slow. His fingers bruised the flesh of my ass as he gripped me. Beads of sweat rained down from him, and I rose up, trying to lick it from his lips.

He moaned and pushed my legs apart again, sliding an arm beneath me and arching me up against him. He sucked and licked at my nipple and then suddenly bit into me. I pushed my chest out further, not wanting him to stop. Even though it hurt like hell, I wanted more. I loved the feeling as he drank from me, the feeling of his tongue as it slid back and forth across my nipple. He finally pulled away, smiling, and I looked down to see the blood running in two small rivulets down my chest. Where it should have scared me, it just made me incredibly hard.

"Sexy," he purred.

"Finish me," I moaned.

He wrapped his arms around me, burying his face into my neck as he fucked me. His thick cock pounded into me, thrust after thrust, and when I felt the orgasm coming on, I pulled his head tighter against my neck. "Feed..."

He bit into my neck just as my cock erupted between us, and I struggled for air as he poured himself into me. I could feel his fangs imbedded deep into my flesh, could feel him drinking and taking his fill—and I fucking loved it.

He finally released me and I pulled him in for a kiss. We kissed lazily at first, exploring and tasting, but when I bit at his bottom lip as I had the night before, the kiss turned hungry. He pulled back and reached up, drawing his thumbnail against the skin of his neck.

As the blood began to run, I quickly rose up, licking the long trail with the tip of my tongue. When I reached the cut, it was already healed. I huffed in disappointment but Lucien just placed a gentle kiss to my forehead.

"Teasing is not nice, Peter."

I grinned and tried my damndest to stop the laughter. "I don't know; it was pretty fucking nice, if you ask me."

I felt the bed dip beside us and turned just in time to see a shirtless Xander crawling up next to us. I tightened my arms around Lucien's back possessively, and Lucien gave Xander a look of warning. "I didn't call you to play; I called you to feed."

Xander reached out and traced a finger up the inside of my thigh, "But he likes to play. Don't you, Peter?"

Before I could form a response, Lucien had Xander pinned up against the wall by his throat. Xander's feet were dangling about two feet off the floor. "Do you defy me so easily now?" Lucien hissed.

Xander grabbed at Lucien's hand, struggling to get free. I rose from the bed and placed my hand on Lucien's shoulder,

and he turned suddenly, hissing at me. I let him go immediately, forgetting the words I was about to speak, and backed away slowly.

Lucien immediately turned back to Xander. "Your freedom. Is that what you want?"

Xander stuttered and stammered. "N-no! I would be lost without you."

"You would be dead without me," Lucien said coldly. "Remember who it is that allows the heart to beat in your chest and the breath to course through your lungs. Remember *that* the next time you defy me."

Xander bowed his head in submission, even though Lucien still held him by the throat. "I am yours, Master. Do with me as you see fit."

Lucien's grip on Xander's throat loosened, but he didn't let go. As soon as Xander's feet touched the floor, Lucien grabbed Xander's head violently and bared his neck, sinking his fangs deeply into the flesh. A blood-curdling scream tore out of Xander's mouth, and I stood frozen to my place beside the bed, unable to move.

Lucien fed from him for a long time before letting him go. Xander slumped to the floor, blood staining his neck and chest, still running in a thick, gelatinous line from the punctures and tears in his neck. Lucien kicked at him in disgust. "Get out!"

I watched Xander stumble and fall to his knees a few feet from the door, and instead of him getting up, he crawled the remainder of the way. I started over to help him, finally

realizing that I could move, but Lucien shot me a look of warning before I made two steps.

"Don't, Peter," he growled.

"What have you done to him?" I asked, my voice sounding incredibly small.

"I fed," he snapped. "Does it bother you so much?"

"If his throat didn't look like you tried to rip half of it out, maybe not." I looked away from him in disgust and found my jeans, putting them on quickly.

"He was out of line."

"He was playing, Lucien," I said as I zipped my jeans.

"And he knew better," Lucien grumbled, then stepped toward me, tugging me by the front of my jeans until I was pressed against him. "He's testing me because he doesn't think I'll discipline him in front of you. Now ... where do you think you're going?"

"I'm leaving," I said, attempting to push him away—and failing.

His grip tightened as he pushed me back onto the bed and climbed over me. I pushed at his chest, aggravated, and he just smiled down at me—his fingers deftly working the button and zipper open.

"Stop it, Lucien," I snapped, trying to swat both him and his hands away.

"Don't make me bind your hands." There was humor in his words, but definitely a threat to go along with it. I couldn't decide which there was more of.

I paused, heat rising in my cheeks as an image of being bound and fucked by him played through my mind. His hand

wrapped around my cock, squeezing roughly. "Oh, Peter," he whispered as he began to nip at my neck, "what a pretty picture."

Before I knew it my jeans were off and he was sliding down between my legs, taking my cock deep. His throat closed around the head, swallowing, and I gasped for breath. I rose up on my elbows, taking in the sight of his lips caressing my shaft. "Now, *this* is a pretty picture."

Lucien turned his head slightly and one of his fangs scraped against the length of me. It was an interesting sensation, but one I wasn't so sure I wanted to feel more of. An image of him feeding from me there went through my mind and he rolled his eyes up to look at me, winking.

"Don't even think about it, asshole."

He pulled off me, his tongue probing against my slit. "It's not as bad as you think it is," he said, scraping his fangs along the ridge for effect.

I moaned unexpectedly and pushed my hips toward him.

He grinned. "Maybe some other time, then."

"Maybe," I said, surprising myself.

Lucien seemed thoroughly satisfied with my answer, taking me in deep, sliding his hands up the flat planes of my belly toward my chest, twisting and pulling at my nipples. I writhed beneath him, losing myself to the warm, wet heat of his mouth and his demanding hands. I felt it coming way too soon; that familiar tingle, the fire in the pit of my belly. My hands found his head, fingers forming fists into his soft, dark hair.

"God, Lucien," I gasped. "Gonna..."

He moaned and the vibration was just too much. My body went taut and I shot. Lucien pulled off enough to catch my come on his tongue and then crawled up over my body to kiss me and share. His tongue slid against mine, and I realized my hands were still fisted in his hair. I let go and slid my hands down to his face, pushing him away gently.

"I think we still have a lot to talk about," I said softly.

He closed his eyes and nodded, resting his forehead against mine. "And we will, Peter, I promise."

"Now?"

"No, not now. Now, I'd like you to try on some clothes that Xander bought for you earlier."

"The jeans you just coaxed me out of were the ones he brought."

"Not those, Peter. The ones I want you in are leather."

I wondered if he knew just how much I liked—but couldn't afford—leather. As much as he'd been in my head, it was a pretty sure guess that he had a clue. "Where are we going?"

He pressed his lips against my ear. "I want you hot and sweaty, with the scent of leather clinging to your sweet skin, and your adrenaline pumping. *We ... are going dancing.*"

Chapter Eight

The clothes and boots that Xander had bought fit me perfectly. Lucien had sat back in his chair as I tried the pants on, running his tongue across his fangs and grinning wickedly as he repeatedly asked me to turn around so he could see my ass. Even though I protested the first few times, it was nice to have him look at me in such an appreciative manner. He finally pulled himself out of his chair and went to his closet.

If closet was what it could be called. It was damn near the size of my own bedroom at my apartment, filled with dressing tables and benches, as well as mirrors and large, antique-looking mahogany dressers. I told him that I'd never seen anyone with more clothes in my entire life. A mischievous grin had played over his face in the reflection of the mirror as he pushed a button and part of the back wall slid open, leading to another closet.

I'd walked in to just explore, but was taken aback at what I saw. It wasn't necessarily clothes in his second closet. Oh, there were clothes all right; mostly leather, but in addition to that, there was tons of tactical equipment and small weaponry.

"What's all this?"

A sad smile had played across his face. "Remnants from another time, Peter."

I'd known that there was a whole lot more than he was telling me. After all, he still hadn't told me everything about his past. "Tell me about it sometime?"

He'd paused, and then nodded before silently turning and walking out through the main closet. When I'd finally followed, I noticed his clothes laid out on the bed. The sound of running water had drawn me into the bathroom, and I had stripped, joining him in the shower.

It was only when I was on my knees before him that he'd finally smiled again, but I could still see the pain that lingered beneath. I didn't know the extent of the pain of his past, but I knew that if it affected him like that, then it was something pretty bad. That he could feel pain—and maybe even regret—made him just that much more lovable.

* * * *

Through Lucien's devious ways, I had a week's vacation. It was the first time I'd ever really been into Rave as a customer rather than as an employee. Most of the time, it was the last place I wanted to be when I scored a night off. Tonight though, it was either Rave or The Den. I'd managed to quell most of my fears about The Den, but it wasn't a place I was ready to go back to so soon. Lucien had smiled, telling me that he wanted me comfortable and that we'd hit The Den another night. What I didn't realize, though, was that I wouldn't be so comfortable at Rave either.

Why? Because most everyone that frequented Rave knew me. Most had hit on me at some point or another in the past, some more recent than others. I wasn't sure I wanted to know how people were going to react after seeing me dancing.

We walked into Rave at half past ten. The place was packed and absolutely buzzing with energy. The music was so loud I could feel the thump of the bass in my chest. Lucien eyed me for about half a second before taking my hand and walking to the DJ's box. Blake, the DJ, tried to protest when Lucien just waltzed over and started turning dials and pushing buttons, but Lucien gave him what I'd begun to call *the look*, and Blake stepped back, giving Lucien full access to the board.

Lucien pointed to the board. "It can be loud and have impact without shattering the teeth of the customers. Don't make me come back up here."

Blake nodded, stammering, "Y-yes sir."

Lucien winked at me as he took my hand, and I damn near melted into a puddle. Damn, but he was sexy as fuck! We didn't make it ten feet from the box when Lucien pushed me back against the wall, growling in my ear. "You think I'm sexy, huh?"

"As fuck," I said, baring my neck to him even more. "Wish you'd stay out of my head."

"Nervous that I might find something in there you don't want me to know?"

"Maybe."

He licked and sucked at the skin of my neck, but didn't break the skin. I slid my hands around his waist, pulling him against me. "As you wish," he whispered.

I had a sudden image of him being out of my mind completely. The lost and empty feeling of being without him in such an intimate way wasn't what I'd expected. I grasped

him more tightly to me before he could pull away, as if I was in danger of losing him completely.

"What is it, Peter?"

"Nothing," I said, feigning a smile. "Just something that crossed my mind. I'll tell you about it later. Now? Let's just dance."

He leaned in and brushed his lips against mine. "I'd like a drink first."

"A warm, sticky one?"

He laughed, and it flowed through me like the faint beginnings of an orgasm. I gasped, putting a hand on his chest and pushing him away. "How the *fuck* do you do that?"

"Just part of who I am."

Something in the way he'd said the words drew my eyes to his. It was as if he was waiting for me to tell him that I didn't like it—that I didn't like that part of him. But I did. I liked it a whole lot; it was just disconcerting as hell. "I like you, Lucien," I said, pulling back to look into his eyes. "Just the way you are."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah..." I laced my fingers with his as I pushed away from the wall. "Come buy me a drink and maybe I'll dance with you."

Lucien laughed, shaking his head. "Lead the way, baby."

I led him through the crowd to the bar and slid onto a stool. There was a guy behind the bar I'd never seen before. He was definitely hot; lean build, olive skin, dark hair, and the most interesting green-gold eyes I'd ever seen. He looked much younger than I knew he had to be to work behind the

bar. I looked absently around for Jack, but never found him. It was very odd for there to be a new guy behind the bar and for Jack not to be his constant shadow.

Lucien wrapped his arms around my shoulders and rested his chin on the top of my head. The new guy turned and gave me a smile and Lucien a wink. He looked directly at Lucien, though, asking him what we'd like. I cleared my throat meaningfully. "I ... will have a Fuzzy Cum."

"Peter speaks for himself, René," Lucien said in an authoritative tone. "You will address him directly."

"Yes, m ... sir," René nodded, then looked to me, swallowing hard. "A Fuzzy Cum?"

"Yeah, you know what it is?"

He nodded and smiled politely. "I do, sir; coming right up."

Lucien slid his arms around my chest and pressed his lips to my ear. "He meant no disrespect, even though it seemed that way."

"He just ignored me," I said, watching as René added the peach schnapps to the shaker and reached for the soda.

"My people are going to have just as difficult a time getting used to you as you are to them. In all the years I've been with them, I've never been with anyone as I am with you. They're not quite sure how to act."

Even though I wondered how one of his *people* came to be behind the bar at Rave, my curiosity over him not dating won out. I turned my head, causing his lips to brush across my cheek. "What? You've never dated anyone?"

"Are we dating?" His mouth curved in a mischievous smile.

"Shut up," I said, jabbing him with my elbow. "I'm being serious."

"Never."

René set my drink in front of me and waited expectantly. I took a sip of my drink and smiled. "Very good, René."

Lucien handed him a few bills and René gave him a Scotch on the rocks. Something passed in the way they regarded each other, and I glanced back and forth between them. They were talking. Not where I could hear it, but in that freaky way where Lucien could speak right into my mind. Now, he seemed to be doing it with René.

That pissed me off. Well, maybe pissed was too strong of a word. But it aggravated the fuck out of me. I downed three-quarters of my drink in nearly one gulp and slammed the glass on the bar before heading off to the dance floor. I waded through the crowd saying my hellos to the regulars I came across in the process.

I stood out on the floor, bodies bumping and pressing against mine as I tried to find a rhythm to the music. Arms slid around my shoulders from behind, but I instantly knew it wasn't Lucien. I tried to shrug them off without making a scene, but whoever it was held tightly to me. Then I recognized the barbed-wire tattoo around the wrist in front of me. Jack.

I turned my head to look at him. "Hey, Jack."

"Hello, Peter. See you didn't take my advice."

I shrugged him off, turning to face him. "Leave it alone, Jack!"

Jack shook his head. "No, I don't reckon there's anything I can say to you now that'd change your mind. You're practically glowing with his blood running through your system. Has he fed from you?"

"I don't think that's any of your business."

"No, I don't guess it is," he said bitterly. "I'm trying to help you, Peter; no matter how much it seems like I'm trying to step in between you and a *good thing*. Lucien ... is not a good thing."

I stepped toward him angrily, but Lucien's hand landed gently on my shoulder. "Easy, Peter."

Jack looked up suddenly, looking like a deer caught in the headlights. "M ... Master, I didn't mean..."

Master? Goose bumps covered my skin as I looked from Lucien to Jack. Lucien's forehead rested against the side of my head, putting his lips right at my ear. "See for yourself, mon amour."

* * * *

Images of Jack and his boyfriend, Mike, flooded my mind. I saw snippets of them at parties, meetings, intimate gatherings, and even a few of Mike feeding from Jack. No wonder Jack had always been so sympathetic of vampires in general and had always wanted to hang out at The Den. Mike was a *vampire*!

"Ten fucking years and you couldn't tell me that, Jack?"

"I'm sorry, but..."

I turned away in disgust. Not at the facts laid out before me, but at Jack, who I'd considered to be my best friend.

When I looked back again, Jack was on his knees before Lucien with his head bowed and Lucien was staring down at him angrily. I focused my gaze on Lucien and thought hard, as if I were yelling his name through my mind.

Lucien flinched and looked directly up at me. I gestured with a nod of my head for him to follow me. He looked down at Jack once more before starting through the crowd. When he reached me, I pulled him close. "Dance with me."

"You okay?" he asked, brushing his lips against mine.

"No," I grumbled, sliding my hand over the leather-clad bulge of his crotch. "You're keeping things from me, Jack's keeping things from me. Am I not worth telling?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You were *mind-fucking* with René."

He turned me around, sliding an arm around my chest and pressing himself against my ass. I could feel his hard cock, even through the tight leather of both of our pants. *"The only person I mind-fuck is you."*

The words slid through my mind, like a hot knife through butter, making me shudder. "But I saw you."

"It was business, that's all. René was telling me of a few rogue vampires passing through here. I sensed them when we walked in, but they seem to be gone now."

"And you couldn't tell me about Jack?"

"I have been telling him for months, since you and I started seeing each other, to tell you the truth. But it wasn't my place to tell you, Peter."

The music changed to something more upbeat, and I turned, backing away from him, satisfied with his answers

and a bit sorry that I'd walked away from him earlier. Heat showed in his eyes as he followed me and I couldn't help but grin. "What's that look for?"

"Let's dance."

I watched in rapt fascination as Lucien tugged his shirt over his head and tucked it into the back of his pants. When I saw the two silver rings in his nipples, my jaw dropped. He smiled knowingly and reached out, tucking his fingers in the waist of my pants, drawing me in close. My fingers instantly went to the rings, but I hesitated, remembering they weren't supposed to be messed with until they healed.

"Go ahead," Lucien said, grabbing one of my hands and sliding them up across his chest. "They healed before we even left the house."

So that's what he'd been doing in the bathroom before we left. He'd closed the door—and locked it—telling me he'd be right out. When he'd come out, he'd been completely dressed. It touched me that he'd do something like that just because I liked it. I leaned forward and licked and sucked at the ring through the left nipple as his hands threaded through my hair. Oh, he was going to spoil the fuck out of me.

I quickly remembered just how well Lucien could dance, and memories of our first time out on the floor filled my mind. He was content with letting me step back and watch every now and then, but he soon had hold of me, not wanting to let me go. Not that I minded at all. The feel of his rings scraping against my back, even through my shirt, soon had me hard and leaking.

I finally pulled away from him in between songs and headed for the bar. I needed water. No matter how much leather breathes, I forgot how hot I always got while wearing it and dancing. When I reached the bar, René was in the back room and Jack was covering the counter. I groaned inwardly at having to deal with him. "Water," I said sharply when he stopped in front of me.

Jack reached down into the cooler and got me a bottle of water. He held it in his hands for a moment as if he was trying to think of something to say, but finally slid the bottle across the counter in exchange for the sweaty bills I held out for him. I opened the bottle of water and turned my back to him, leaning against the bar so I could watch Lucien from where I was. I smiled when I saw that he was still dancing.

"I've never seen him let go the way he does with you," Jack said from behind me. "I know I've never seen him dance like that."

I clenched my jaw tightly, shaking my head. "Why couldn't you have just told me about Mike? Do you have *any* idea how this feels?"

He was quiet for a few moments and then cleared his throat. "I wish I could go back and change things, but I can't."

"No, you can't."

"I still stand by what I said. Lucien is dangerous."

"And Mike's not?" I asked, turning to look at him. "You fucking bastard. How dare you give me the line of bullshit about not getting involved, when you're doing the same..."

"It's not the same! This isn't the life I want for you, Peter."

"Right," I said bitterly. "Don't give me that shit. What suddenly makes you think that you know what's right for me and my life?"

He rolled his eyes. "Don't you think I'd like to go back sometimes? To know what it'd be like to see myself grow old? For twenty-five years, I've looked at this same face in the mirror, no wrinkles, no age spots. Being twenty-nine forever might sound good in theory, but it sucks just a little in real life."

Jack hadn't aged in the entire time that I'd known him. I'd always attributed it to good genes. I'd never considered that he was bound to a vampire. He didn't wait for me to answer before looking at me pointedly and continuing. "I guarantee you, you'll be weighing the pros and cons of your mortality sooner than you expect. Every time he feeds from you—and you from him—it just further cements the bond between you both."

With that, he turned and walked away, leaving me to digest his words. I downed the rest of my water and tossed the bottle into the garbage can a few feet away. When I looked up, Lucien was standing in front of me. He held his hand out in silent offering, and when I accepted, led me toward the rear exit. He pushed the door open and waited for me to walk out before following.

Lucien walked over and sat on an old crate, stretching his legs out in front of him and crossing his ankles. "Why the long face, mon amour?"

I shrugged, digging a cigarette out of my pack and lighting it up. "Do I have to worry about my mortality any time soon?"

"Come here, Peter." His tone was gentle, soothing.

When I stepped toward him, he pulled me to straddle his lap. "Don't try to distract me with sex," I said.

"Would I ever try to distract you with sex?" He put his hand over his heart. "I'm hurt that you would think so."

I leaned forward, kissing him. "You'll get over it. Talk to me, Lucien. What am I looking at here? What do you want from me?"

"What do I *want* from you?"

I nodded.

He sighed, sliding his hands up my torso, his thumbs eventually grazing my nipples through the thin material of my shirt. "I want you to be happy."

"That's an incredibly clichéd thing to say."

"Just because it sounds clichéd doesn't make it any less true."

I took a drag off my forgotten cigarette and flicked it to the pavement. Since I'd met Lucien, I'd smoked less and less. Maybe I was trading one addiction for another. "Where did you come from Lucien? How did you come to be Master here?"

Lucien opened his mouth to say something, then paused as if scenting the air. He pushed me quickly off his lap and stood. "Peter, you need to go with Gino."

"What? Who's Gino?"

Lucien grabbed my shoulders and turned me around, and I jumped when my eyes met those of Eric's partner.

"I am." He smiled, reaching for my arm. "Come on. We have to go."

"Go?" I turned to look at Lucien and he was gone. "What the fuck is going on? Where's Lucien?"

"I'll tell you on the way," he said, grabbing my arm. I tried to pull away, but he held tightly to me and pushed me into the club. Once we were inside, he slid an arm around my waist and guided me close to the floor. He stopped and looked into the crowd, and only moments later Eric appeared before us.

"Problems?" Eric asked.

Gino nodded. "We need to get Peter home, now."

A look of concern passed over Eric's face as he looked from Gino to me, but he just smiled warmly, reaching for my left arm. Gino and Eric were suddenly on either side of me, hands gripping my arms tightly, as we headed for the door. I planted my feet when we finally reached the door. "I'm not leaving here without Lucien!"

"Master Lucien is not here and has left you in our care," Gino said calmly. "He has instructed us to take you home and stay with you until he returns."

"But..."

Eric smiled and opened the door. "Come on, Peter. You know he wouldn't have left you with us unless he didn't have a choice. Something's going on and we need to get going; get you home so that he can meet us there when whatever danger this is passes."

I gave in, knowing that I wasn't going to get anywhere arguing. Not to mention knowing that he was probably right. "Fine. Let's go, then."

"Finally," Gino drawled.

We walked quickly toward my apartment. Not quite running, but definitely not walking at a nice leisurely pace. I had a feeling that while we were walking, Eric and Gino were involved in deep conversation. They kept passing knowing looks and nodding slightly to each other as they tried to maintain a casual look about them. About two blocks from my building, Gino's grip on my arm tightened considerably.

I tried to jerk my arm away, but he relaxed his grip a bit and cleared his throat. "On the roof, across from Peter's building."

My eyes followed Eric's to the roof, but I couldn't make out anything but a tall, dark form illuminated partly by the light of the moon. "I'll take care of it," Eric said.

"No," Gino whispered, giving Eric a heated look. "I'll get this one. Take Peter and wait for me inside."

Eric's expression grew wary and he nodded in agreement. "Take care, Gino. Remember what happened the..."

Gino stepped in front of Eric, his hand still gripping my arm, and quieted him with a kiss. "I've been hunting for over fifty years, my love. Wait for me."

Gino turned to look at me, smiling and showing his fangs. "Please, do let him in."

Before I could answer, he was gone; seeming to disappear before my very eyes. Eric sighed and we started walking again. A few steps later, Eric paused. I looked over at him, seeing his jaw clenching tightly and his nostrils flaring.

"What is it?" I whispered.

He let go of me and slid one of his hands into his pocket, drawing out a knife. "Ever been in a fight, Peter?"

I couldn't even remember the last physical fight I'd been in, but I'd had some martial arts classes when I was a kid.

"It's been a while."

With a flick of his wrist and a few turns of his hand, I realized that the knife he'd pulled out was a butterfly knife. He handed it to me. "Don't be afraid to use it. Neck, face, eyes..." He smiled wickedly. "Balls ... any place that hurts like fuck and bleeds a lot."

"I don't see anyone," I said, taking the knife and sparing a look around.

"I think there are six of them," Eric said softly.

"Vampires?" I asked, hating myself at the sudden squeak in my voice.

He hesitated for a moment, and then gestured toward my building, urging me to keep walking. "I'm not quite sure. They could be merely servants, but they have some sort of link to a vampire. I can feel the psychic disturbance rippling the air."

I swallowed hard as we waited for a line of cars to pass before crossing the street. This had so not been in my plans for the evening. We crossed the street and just as I thought we were going to get away without any trouble, I was proven wrong.

Six figures stood a few feet away from the entrance to my apartment, watching us intently as we approached. "Should we still be walking toward them?"

"Stop when I do," Eric said quietly. "Let them come to you. And Peter? For God's sake, don't be afraid of killing them. It's you or them. Make it be them. Ready?"

"As I'll ever be, I guess," I said, steeling myself for what was about to happen.

"Can we help you guys?" Eric asked. Guys? I looked at him like he was crazy. No, definitely not guys—more like creatures. One of them gave a sickly smile revealing gnarled, rotting teeth. I was taken aback, more by the smell that emanated from them rather than the sight of them. Another one, wearing nothing but torn, ragged jeans moved toward me, and Eric whispered, "Revenants, Peter. Not human, not vampire, caught somewhere in between."

"Is this a good or a bad thing?" I asked, stepping back as another creature moved toward me.

Eric chuckled, and I wondered how he could be so calm. "Well, depends on how you look at it. They can't think for shit, so if you have any skill in fighting, you're already one up on them."

"But?"

"But, they fight to the death because they'd rather eat you when the fight is over."

I tried to call up every martial arts move that I could into my memory. The one with the gnarled teeth and horrendous breath lunged toward Eric. Eric caught him with ease and seconds later a sickening pop filled the air as Eric snapped his neck and dropped him to the ground. To my horror, the damned thing tried to get up.

A cold, clammy hand landed on my forearm and I jerked away as another creature lunged toward me. I put my hands on its chest and gave a hard push to try to get him away from me. He only moved back a few feet but it was enough to give

me the leverage that I needed. I realized that the kicks and stances I'd tried so hard to learn when I was a kid were a bit like riding a bicycle.

It all came back to me rather quickly. I kicked and punched and blocked, and put two of the monsters to the ground. I'd lost my knife on the first one, though; the handle of it was the only part that could be seen as the blade was embedded through what was left of that thing's throat.

The revenant with the torn and ragged jeans came toward me, and as Eric screamed out, I spared a glance in his direction. Which was a mistake. I missed a crucial block and its hand quickly wrapped around my throat.

It moved in to bite me, and I panicked, kneeling it in the balls. It screamed out in pain and I lunged for the knife. I'd just managed to grab it when the creature I'd kneed flung himself over my back, wrapping his arms around my neck.

I stabbed at one of his arms, nicking myself in the process, but it was enough to make him release his grip on me. When he did, I turned suddenly and shoved the knife into his chest. He snarled and growled at me, still trying to fight me and I pulled the knife out, stabbing him again. I'd stabbed him at least eight or nine times before he finally fell to the pavement writhing in pain.

I turned just in time to see the last revenant shove his hand straight into Eric's belly. It was like watching something terrible in slow motion. I could hear myself screaming the word 'No', and could feel myself moving toward them, but it was like I just couldn't move fast enough. When I finally

reached them, Eric was falling to the ground and the creature was falling into a heap on top of him.

I surprised Eric's attacker, I'm sure, when I grabbed its head and slit its throat. It tried to fight back, but I pushed it to the ground and stabbed it repeatedly—in the neck, face, chest, eyes—until it stopped moving. I looked up and was relieved to see that all six of the revenants were dead or at least hanging by a thread.

Eric gasped and I moved to his side, horrified by the blood pouring out of him and onto the pavement below. I pulled his shirt up to see the damage that the creature had done and winced at the fist-sized hole in his otherwise perfect belly. Eric gasped again and blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. "Get inside, Peter," he rasped. "There could be more."

I managed to get the knife closed and into the tight pocket of my pants. When I slid my arms through Eric's and lifted him off the ground he cried out. "Easy, Eric; gonna get you inside. Can you try to walk?"

"Fuck!" he cursed, wrapping an arm around my shoulder for support. "I don't think so..."

"It's okay, we're almost there," I said, more pulling him to the door than letting him walk. I leaned him against the wall as I punched in the security code and when the light turned green, I pulled the door open, dropped him to the floor as gently as I could in a hurry, and pulled the door shut. I looked out the small window and was relieved to see none of the creatures moving to get up. I scanned the rooftops of the buildings nearby, trying to see if Gino was anywhere in sight. When I saw nothing but darkness, I turned to Eric.

He was flat on his back, gasping in pain and staring wide-eyed at the ceiling. I knelt down and gathered him up, whispering words of encouragement to him to try to get him up the stairs. When we finally reached my door, I was relieved that I'd argued with Lucien—and won—about keeping my keys with me.

Once inside, I kicked the door closed and practically carried Eric to my bed. I laid him down and pulled his shirt open, carefully pulling the fabric of his shirt from the hole in his belly. He cried out and grasped my hand.

"Tell me what to do, Eric," I said. "What do I need to do to help you?"

He shook his head. "Nothing. Just don't leave me ... please?"

"I'm not going anywhere," I said, then looked at the wound again. "You're a fucking vampire! Why aren't you healing?"

He smiled sadly. "Haven't fed."

I pulled my shirt off quickly and straddled his body, baring my neck right at his mouth. "Then feed so you can heal."

He tried to push me away but failed because he was so weak. "Can't feed from you," he whispered. "Lucien will..."

"Fuck Lucien!" I growled. "You'll feed because *I* allow it. Now come on, Eric; don't make me open my own vein."

Eric's arms slid around my shoulders and I felt his cool breath against my warm skin. "I'm so sorry, Peter," he whispered. I felt his fangs rest against my skin and in the next second, a white-hot pain as he bit into me. I winced and

instinctively tried to pull away, but Eric held tight. The intense pain as he fed became a dull, aching throb.

After a few minutes of him feeding, he began arching his hips into me. I could feel his hard cock pressing against my belly, and he moaned suddenly, one of his hands sliding between us to free himself from his leather pants. Once he did, he took one of my hands and wrapped it around his shaft.

"Please ... " I heard the word whisper through my mind and couldn't help smiling. If he was hard and wanting to get off, he was going to be okay.

"Better?" I asked hoarsely.

He withdrew from my neck and pulled me in for a kiss. "You taste of my Master," he whispered.

I let him kiss me, ignoring the fact that the taste of my blood on his lips just turned me on even more. Within moments he'd pushed down my pants, baring me so that his hand could wrap around my cock. We started to jerk each other off, and I felt his fangs dig into my neck again. It wasn't like before; I moaned as warmth, not pain, spread through my body.

Eric flipped me onto my back and I bared my neck to him, arching my hips into his hand. I came hard, coating his newly healed belly with hot, sticky semen. Eric soon followed and then lay beside me on the bed, panting, rubbing his hand over the newly formed skin and muscle where his wound had been. "Thank you."

I nodded absently, suddenly feeling groggy as hell. My mind grew foggy, and I had the sinking feeling that

something was terribly wrong. I tried to open my mouth to ask Eric what was happening, but no sound came out. I vaguely remembered Gino and Lucien, kneeling beside me on the bed; remembered rolling to the edge of the bed and puking my guts out; remembered quiet words and whispers filling the room as I tried valiantly to make sense of it all. When Lucien finally wrapped his arms around me and pressed his naked form against mine, it was all I needed to stop the room from spinning and to quell the nauseated feeling in the pit of my stomach.

Chapter Nine

The incessant ringing of the phone jarred me out of a deep sleep. I tried to move in order to answer it, but there was another body wrapped around mine. A cold body. My eyes traveled to the arm around my waist. Lucien's arm. Lucien's battle-scarred arm with the odd tribal tattoo on the inside of his wrist. The phone stopped ringing, finally, but now that I was awake, I had to piss. I touched Lucien's arm, giving it a tentative shake. "Lucien?"

Nothing.

No stirring, no sounds, no breathing. Christ! I wasn't ready for this. I turned as much as I could in his arms and pushed him off me. Thank God he wasn't stiff; if he had been, I'd have probably puked. My stomach roiled at the thought and I wasn't so sure I wasn't going to puke anyway. I shot up out of bed and ran toward the bathroom.

Pissing in the toilet and puking in the sink takes effort. Much more effort than I was ready to put out. I finished at the toilet and turned the water on in the sink, washing my hands and face; brushing my teeth. I braced myself on the sink, finding my reflection in the mirror. I looked like shit; the hazel eyes that stared back at me—oddly, now more gold than green—looked tired, old, as if that one part of me had aged a few years even though I hadn't. My face was covered in tiny cuts, scrapes, and bruises. And my neck ... there was a large purple handprint around my throat and two dark, nearly black, bruises at the bend of my neck. They looked like bad hickies with holes.

I touched the two bruises with the tips of my fingers and hissed. They hurt like fucking hell. Lucien had bitten and fed from me several times so far, and it'd never felt like this afterward. But it hadn't been Lucien. It had been Eric ... and Eric had been hurt. I shuddered at the memory of the wound—the blood—and my stomach roiled again. Several dry heaves later, I walked back into my bedroom.

I stood at the foot of the bed, eyeing Lucien. He'd shifted positions, but I couldn't tell whether it was because of how I'd moved him or if he'd moved on his own. I also couldn't tell if he was really breathing or if I was just seeing things. I looked at the clock on the nightstand. Five-thirty. Five-thirty? Fuck! Was it five-thirty in the morning or five-thirty in the afternoon? I strode to the window and flipped the blinds open. Light poured into the room and I had to cover my eyes with my hands.

An ungodly shriek sounded out from the bed and I turned just in time to see Lucien scrambling to cover himself with the comforter. "Oh, shit!" I cursed, struggling with the blinds to get them closed. "I'm so sorry!"

Once the blinds were closed, I ran to the bed and pulled the comforter away from Lucien's face. He was panting heavily and his eyes were wide with fear. I felt like such a dumbass. I cupped my hand to his cheek, my thumb brushing gently over his bottom lip. "I'm sorry, Lucien. God, I'm so sorry!"

He closed his eyes tightly and his hand cupped my neck, bringing my head to his chest. "It's okay," his voice rasped. "How are you feeling, Peter?"

"Sick."

"Sick? How so?"

I looked up at him and gave a slight shrug. "Just nauseated; I'm sure it'll pass."

"He fed too long."

"He was hurt, Lucien. I don't think he realized it."

His lips pressed tightly together in what I knew was anger. "It matters not whether he realized it at the time. What matters is that if he'd fed even a little more, it would have been too late. He could not even have turned you to..."

"So what are you saying? That he almost killed me?"

Lucien gave a curt nod. "He had no right to feed from you. Even though my blood in your system has made you stronger and made your body able to heal and repair itself more quickly, that does not mean that it is foolproof. I am the only one who knows how much you can give and when. Do not trust that another vampire knows it—or cares—especially when he's trying to save his own life."

I rolled away from him and stood. "What was I supposed to do? Sit here and watch him die?"

He stood and I noticed that most of his chest was stained with old, dried blood. Before I could ask where the blood had come from, he looked up at me angrily. "You are not to put yourself in that kind of position."

I stared at him for a moment. "What the *fuck* do you mean by that?"

"Just what it sounds like," he growled and stepped around the foot of the bed. "You are not to feed anyone else."

Whether they're on the edge of death itself or whether it's just for a good fuck."

A good fuck. "Is that what this is about? You jealous?"

Before I could even blink, I was trying to pry my face away from the wall. Lucien's body was pressed tightly against mine, his cock hard in the cleft of my ass. "You're damned right I'm fucking jealous," he snarled, thrusting his hips against me.

"Get off me, Lucien," I warned, trying to use the wall as leverage to push him away from me. It wasn't working.

"This feels so familiar," he hissed. "How about we move this to the bathroom?"

Fear washed over me; he'd apologized for that night. I suddenly wondered if they'd just been pretty words to shut me up. I didn't want to believe that. Didn't want to believe I was falling so hard for someone who'd play me like that. I turned my hand slightly and reached up, sliding my fingers through Lucien's hair.

His body relaxed against mine almost instantly, and I turned in his arms while I had the chance. His lips covered mine without another word, and I wrapped my arms around his neck, holding tight as he walked us to the bed.

When he laid me down, his cock pressed right against my hole. He moaned and started to pull away, but I reached between us, grasping his cock. "Burn," I whispered.

Lucien shifted and buried himself into me in one swift movement. It hurt. Hurt like fucking hell, and burned like the hottest of fires. I clutched at him, my fingers digging into the flesh of his arms, fingernails drawing blood. Tears flooded my

eyes from the pain, and my entire body broke out in a cold sweat.

But I needed this.

Needed him.

He locked his arms beneath my knees and leaned forward, pressing his forehead to mine as he began fucking me. His eyes were closed, and the only sounds in the room were our grunts and groans and the sound of flesh pounding against flesh. He threw back his head suddenly, growling, and his movements slowed. "Son of a bitch!"

"What?" I asked, my grip on his arms tightening. "Don't fucking stop now!"

There was an intense expression on his face as he looked down, but I wasn't so sure he was seeing me at all. Before I could say anything, he shook it off and continued his movements. His thrusts got harder and harder until I was crying out more from pain than pleasure. But no matter the pain, I could feel my orgasm coming on. I could feel that burn low in my belly, and before I knew it, I was coming and he had his fangs buried deep in the bend of my neck.

I'd never come so hard or so painfully in my entire life, and I'd certainly never passed out while in the middle of an orgasm either. Until now. One moment I was seeing fireworks, and the next I was struggling to open my eyes. When I finally got them open, all I could see was Lucien—with a relieved expression on his face. "Are you okay?" he asked hesitantly.

I frowned, reaching up and smacking him in the chest. It wasn't as hard as I'd wanted it to be, but it was all I could manage at that moment. "What the fuck?"

He nodded sagely. "Good. If you can be pissed, you're fine. Let's get up and in the shower."

As he went to pull me up, I jerked away from him. "Just get out," I said. "And take your boys with you."

"You know I can't do that, mon amour."

I grumbled, shifting away from him. I hissed when I sat up on the edge of the bed. My ass felt like it'd had a fifteen-foot telephone pole shoved into it ... without lube. When I stood, Lucien was in front of me. I met his eyes defiantly. "I'm not in the mood."

He raised his hand, brushing the tips of his fingers down my cheek. I sighed and leaned into him, and Lucien grinned. "It seems that your mood isn't set in stone."

"My ass hurts, you son of a bitch," I growled.

"I want you to remember who it was that put that feeling there," Lucien spat out, his smile vanishing. "Every fucking time you move."

I didn't respond to that. I knew that all he wanted was a rise out of me. Instead, I shrugged him off, made my way to the bathroom, and started the shower. While I waited for the water to get warm, I caught a glimpse of Lucien as he passed by the doorway, headed for the living room. Good, I thought. He was actually leaving. I needed time to think. And heal.

I took a long while in the shower, letting the warm water soothe the bite marks ... as well as my ass. Every time I moved, though, as Lucien had pointed out, I went through a

combination of whimpering, shuddering, wincing, and growling—not necessarily in that order. With only a towel wrapped around my waist, I headed for the kitchen.

When I opened the bedroom door, however, I wasn't prepared for what I saw. Xander was sprawled out naked on my couch, come on his belly and two very fresh bite marks at his throat. Lucien was sitting beside him, still naked himself, but clean from obviously washing up, eyes closed and a satisfied look on his face. Eric and Gino were lying on the floor on a pile of pillows and blankets, bodies tangled together. I didn't think they'd woken yet.

My eyes flicked back to Lucien and Xander. "I thought you'd left."

"And as I told you," Lucien said lazily, "I can't do that. The sun is not yet set. You have the most exquisite draperies, Peter. They block out the brightest light. Where did you find them?"

"I am not going to talk draperies with you, asshole." I headed for the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. There was a little bit of juice, but damn, that was about it. When I closed the refrigerator, Lucien was leaning against the counter on the other side.

"You need protein. When we get to the house, Simon will have you a meal prepared. He'll also see to your supplements as well."

I laughed. "If you think I'm going with you, you're severely mistaken."

"Why the anger, Peter? What has you so pissed off?"

"You can read my thoughts; you figure it out."

Lucien reached out and took my hand. "You told me to stay out of them—remember?"

I rolled my eyes. "Since when have you ever done what I asked?"

He drew me close, even though I tried to pull away, and wrapped his arms around my shoulders. Kissing the top of my head, he sighed. "We need to stop, right now, and take a step back. All of this anger and sarcasm is getting us nowhere."

"I don't even know where to start."

"How about I start?" He paused, as if unsure if he knew what he was about to say. "Instead of getting pissed about what you did for Eric, I should have been grateful. I *am* grateful, Peter."

"I couldn't just watch him die," I said. "Not when I could do something to save him."

"Even at the cost of your own life?"

"I didn't think of it that way at the time, Lucien."

Lucien seemed to consider that for a moment. "I can understand that."

"Why do I feel a 'but' coming on here?"

"But I still feel that..."

"You're jealous," I interrupted.

He met my gaze for a long while, then nodded. "Very."

"Why are you jealous, Lucien?"

He smiled weakly. "It is my nature to be jealous."

"That's bullshit! What's the real reason?"

"I want you for my own, Peter. The thought of you..." He broke off. "It's entirely selfish on my part. I admit that. But I have a really hard time thinking of you with anyone else."

I raised my brow at that. "Says the man that sent Xander to me for a blow job?"

"Xander isn't just another child ... he isn't just another vampire from my coven. He is connected to me like no other."

"Okay," I said. "What if I said that I was jealous of you and Xander? It isn't every day that you come out of the shower to see your lover in the aftermath of getting off with someone else."

"I didn't get off." He shrugged. "I only fed."

"Xander got off."

"It's either pleasure or pain when I feed. Xander—as is his right—chooses pleasure."

I pulled away from him and he let me go. Resting my ass against the counter on the opposite side of the kitchen, I crossed my arms over my chest and leveled my gaze at him. "Let me ask you something, Lucien. It's obvious you can't feed from Xander every single time. What about when you don't feed from him? Do you bring others to your bed? Do you give all of these strange people pleasure as well?"

"There are times, yes, that I bring them to my bed. At the club, of course. Not many have ever been to my home. As for pleasure? Yes, I do give them pleasure. But it only lasts while I feed. They don't remember me ... and I don't care to know their names or anything else about them. All I care about..."

"Is the blood."

He nodded sharply. "I cannot live without it, Peter. There was a time that..."

"That what?"

"That I didn't have to be so close to others to feed." A dark, haunted look settled over his face. "But those days are long gone. I must do what I have to do to stay alive. The question is, can you handle it?"

I wanted to say yes, to say that as long as I had him, I could handle anything. But that would've been a lie. I didn't know what I could handle at this point. "Honestly, I don't know."

"Then I suppose we must address concerns as they arise." Lucien sighed and held his hand out toward me. "Come on; let's continue this in the bedroom."

I shook my head. "There's no way you're getting near my ass again for a while."

A smile spread slowly across his face. "I can make it better, lover. Come ... I'll show you."

* * * *

There was something to be said about the healing properties of Lucien's blood. I didn't understand it by a long shot, but I sure as hell appreciated it. The pain in my ass had been reduced to a small ache in only a matter of hours. We discussed what happened the night before with the revenant attack, and after much grumbling, I finally agreed to stay with Lucien until he could get it all figured out and taken care of. Unfortunately, due to a problem at the club, Lucien ended up sending me back to his house with Gino and Eric as escorts.

I hadn't minded. They spent most of the time it took to get to Lucien's thanking me and offering to thank me in ways I

was sure Lucien wouldn't have approved of. Once at Lucien's though, they'd apologized, saying they had to feed but that they'd be back soon. I was left all alone with Simon, who had disappeared after promising dinner and supplements. I made my way to Lucien's room and put my bags down at the foot of the bed.

I crawled over the bed and lay down, staring up at the scene painted on the ceiling. Lost in my own imagination, I nearly jumped out of my skin when Simon cleared his throat from the side of the bed. He held a silver tray in his hands with several bottles of pills on it and some water. "I didn't mean to alarm you, sir. I have the supplements that Master Lucien requested. Dinner will follow shortly."

Simon set the tray on the bed beside me and I rolled up, looking at the names on some of the bottles. "I've never heard of some of this stuff."

"I assure you, it's all safe," Simon said, "And necessary."

"Okay. Thank you, Simon."

He handed me a sheet of paper. "For your convenience, I've written down your dosage and the number of times a day you need to take each one. If you have any questions, just let me know."

I took the paper, grimacing at the thought of how many pills it all added up to. When I looked up, Simon was gone. I knew he wasn't a vampire, but I was definitely beginning to doubt whether he was human.

Two hours later, I was half-reading and half-drowsing over a book on the history of French knights, when I heard voices in the hall. Two figures stopped in the doorway and I looked

up over the edge of the book to see Gino and Eric, huddled together against the doorframe. "Hey, guys."

Eric smiled, punching Gino playfully in the arm. "See? I told you he'd be in here bored out of his mind."

I laughed. "You guys seem happy."

"Horny is more like it," Lucien said, appearing in the doorway between them. "Isn't that right, boys? You've fed, now you want to fuck?"

Eric nodded. "Just wanted to stop in and keep Peter company until you got back. But now that you're back..."

Lucien leveled his gaze on Eric. "Gino, take your boy here to bed before he gets himself in trouble."

Gino grabbed Eric by the arm, nodding. "I'm sorry, Lucien."

Lucien kissed Gino on the forehead. "It's all new right now. It'll pass and everyone will find their place. I'm willing to overlook a few things until then."

As Gino and Eric walked away, Lucien shut the door and turned toward me. "Miss me?"

"What was all that about?" I asked, laying the book on the nightstand.

Lucien rolled his eyes. "Dear God, Peter. Please, no more questions. Just let me deal with them as I always have."

I bit my lip, frowning. "Everything okay at the club?"

He nodded. "Just a couple of rogues passing through, causing problems. They've been taken care of."

"Killed?"

He studied me closely. "Do you *really* want to know?"

I shrugged. "Makes no difference to me, really."

He raised an eyebrow at that. "Is that so?"

"Well, I figure rogues are pretty much like revenants ... uncontrollable and dangerous. Better to fix the problem before it gets out of hand."

Lucien smiled, moving toward me on the bed. "You're handling some of these things surprisingly well."

"Might as well." I spread my legs for him, and he settled between them, pushing my shirt up to expose my chest. "Don't get comfy. You're not fucking me again tonight."

He licked his way down the middle of my belly, and when it dipped into my navel, I arched toward him and he grinned. "I was thinking..."

His fingers worked at the button and zipper of my jeans, quickly getting them open. He pulled my cock out, grinning at it like it was the first time. "What were you thinking?"

His tongue trailed along the underside, following a thick, blue vein. "I was thinking," he paused, and then continued, "that I could suck you for a while."

"Oh. That sounds really nice."

"And that I can get you nice and hard."

Oh.

"Then I was thinking ... that you could fuck me."

Chapter Ten

I looked down at him wide-eyed. "Yeah?"

He nodded, turning his attention back to my cock, licking, sucking, and swallowing me down so perfectly. A short time later he shifted on the bed, drawing my attention to the black knee-high boots he was wearing. Such a bad boy, I chuckled to myself. I pushed him off my cock. "Didn't anyone ever tell you not to put your boots on the bed?"

He laughed. "Actually, my Master and I used to go round and round over it. He finally figured out that I did it on purpose."

"Did he punish you for it?"

"Most exquisitely." He rolled to the side of the bed to pull off his shirt and unbuckle his boots. I shucked my clothes quickly and crawled over to him, licking a long line up the middle of his back.

He shuddered, leaning back into me and I slid an arm around his chest, letting my fingers find the ring in his nipple. I tugged on it and he rolled his head off to the side, exposing his neck. I'd seen his vampires baring their necks to him in what seemed like submission, so I didn't know if he'd done it on purpose or not. I didn't ask to find out. My lips found the bend of his neck, sucking in the smooth skin.

Lucien gasped and bared his neck even more and I nipped at his skin with my teeth. "Kind of wish I had fangs," I whispered.

"Yeah? What for?"

"Because I love the way you taste."

"Too much of a good thing ... isn't always a good thing."

"I'm not talking about draining you, either."

He moved away from me, opening the drawer on the nightstand. When he closed it and pulled his hand away, I wasn't able to see what he held. I pressed my chest against his back, sliding my arms back around his chest. He was still for a moment, then took one of my hands, pressing something cool and metal against my palm.

"What is it?" I asked, trying to pull my hand back to look at the object.

Lucien kept a tight hold on my wrist, but finally let it go. I looked at the silver-colored object. It was about four inches long and had a pointed tip on one end and a button at the other. I turned it over in my hand, trying like hell to figure out what it was. "What does it do?"

"You've heard of people that have blood fetishes?"

"Yeah..."

"This tool was a gift to me from someone like that. He was heavy into blood-play, but he wasn't careful about whom he played with. I fixed him, though, and what once was his fetish has now become a necessity. As for the tool? I'm not sure it even has a name. What I do know is that it's another way to get blood when you don't have the resources to get it from a bite."

He reached for the object and I handed it back to him. I watched as he placed the pointed tip against his neck and pushed the button at the opposite end. There was a metallic thwap and blood began to run in a long line toward his chest.

I pulled him back onto the bed, moving toward him, then hesitating.

"Can I?"

He nodded. "But not too much, Peter. When I say no more ... no more."

I nodded absently and moved over him, latching on at the perfect round hole in his neck. The moment his blood passed over my lips, I whimpered. His sweet, coppery blood flowed over my tongue, and I swallowed it down hungrily, my mouth working his neck as my fingers worked at his nipples. His wound closed a short time later and I flicked my tongue over his smooth, perfect skin.

I pouted. "Not fair."

He grinned lazily, pulling me down on top of him. "Help me with my pants and you can have more."

I rolled off the bed and grabbed Lucien's pants by the legs and pulled off his pants, tossing them onto the floor. Lucien moved up on the bed, one knee bent and the other leg stretched out. My eyes traveled down his long, muscular legs and I smiled appreciatively at the light dusting of hair covering them. "Damn," I whispered.

"What?"

"I just want to eat you up."

"Then you're in the wrong fairy tale, lover."

"How 'bout suck you dry?"

"Ooh, then I believe you've come to the right place." He grinned, letting his bent knee fall open. "See anything that interests you?"

I crawled over the bed and when I reached his feet, I paused to kiss the arch. He laughed and pulled his foot away, and I continued up his leg, licking, kissing, sucking at the skin as I went. When I reached his cock, I ignored it and went straight to his balls.

As my tongue laved at his balls, he fisted his hands into my hair. I worked his balls over, sucking them into my mouth one at a time and rolling them around my tongue. Soon, his hands left my hair and he locked his arms beneath his knees, giving me a perfect view of his ass. I rolled my eyes up at him. "What do you want?"

"Want you to fuck me with that tongue."

I nuzzled my way down, inhaling his scent. I kept my eyes on Lucien as my tongue touched against his hole. When his breath caught and his eyes rolled back into his head, only then did I look away. I turned my attention to his hole and he was soon shaking and whimpering, arching his ass against every thrust of my tongue.

He groaned when I pulled away and settled myself between his legs. I licked and bit at his nipple with the ring and he arched up against me. "Peter..."

I ground my hips against him, letting my cock slide across his and he sucked in a quick breath. I watched him, loving the way his body responded to mine. His hands soon came between us, twisting and pulling hard at my nipples. "Oh, fuck!"

"Need you to fuck me, Peter. Need you so much."

"Haven't got you ready yet."

His hand closed around my cock and he pushed me back a little, lining me up at his hole. "Please..."

I pushed against him tentatively but couldn't even get the head in. "Just let me open you up a little."

Lucien sighed in resignation and I rolled off him to grab the lube from the nightstand. I moved back to him, my fingers slicked up and my dick still hard as a rock. It took a while, but I worked my way up to three fingers. "How long's it been, Lucien?"

He ground himself on my fingers, his breath hitching repeatedly. "I've lost count; ten, fifteen years, I think."

I tongued at his navel and then bit and licked my way up the middle of his chest. "Why so long?"

"I have no equals here, Peter," he said softly. "No one I can let go with as I can with you."

"Oh, Lucien..."

"Please? I'm not going to last."

I pulled my fingers away and pressed against him, slowly pushing my way into him. As he took me in, his gaze never left mine. Buried completely into his tight heat, I paused, smiling down at him. "You're so hot."

"Werewolf blood," he said, a glint of amusement in his eyes.

I bent, pressing my lips to his. "Love the way you feel; love being inside you."

Before I could pull away, he caught my bottom lip between his teeth. "Fuck me. Hard."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah..." He handed me the silver-colored object. "If you want..."

"Shh..." I took it from him, clutching it tightly in my hand as I started to move; in and out with gentle, tentative thrusts, trying to gauge just how long I was going to last. I had a feeling it wasn't going to be long at all. Not with Lucien meeting my every movement and making that sound.

God, it sounded like there should have been more people involved in this than just me. There was no doubt that he was enjoying the fuck out of this. And I hadn't even started yet. I kissed him again and his tongue swept against mine hungrily. Fangs nicked at my lip, stinging, and it only heightened the sensations.

I thrust hard into him and he cried out, clutching at my arms, my chest, moving his hands to my ass and pulling as if he could pull me inside of him. And damn did I try. He met every single movement and when that familiar tingle in my balls started, I cursed, trying like hell to ignore it.

Lucien's breathing changed and he started encouraging me, shoving his ass against me. "God, Peter ... I'm right there. Just..."

I suddenly remembered the tool and realized that I'd dropped it. I felt around on the bed for it and finally found it under Lucien's shoulder. I nodded. "Just ... yeah..."

He turned his head, baring his neck and I bent forward, sucking hard at his skin. Seconds later, I pressed the tool against his neck. I didn't even hear the metallic click as Lucien cried out, shaking. Blood poured from the wound and I covered it with my mouth, taking in his rich, hot blood.

Lucien came, bellowing out an earth-shattering roar that would have scared the hell out of me had I not been in the middle of coming myself. His ass tightened, his muscles drawing every drop of come out of me.

I collapsed against him, trying to catch my breath. "Shit!"

"Ungh..." was Lucien's wordless reply.

We lay tangled together for a long while, treating each other to slow, languorous kisses, teasing touches, and whispered words of appreciation. It all led to Lucien slicking me up again and sliding down my shaft. He rode me hard and fast, twisting and pulling at my nipples.

I wrapped my hand around his cock and jerked him to the same rhythm he rode me in and twenty minutes later, we were panting and clinging to each other, Lucien licking and nuzzling at my throat.

A sharp knock on the bedroom door made Lucien pause. "What is it?"

Xander's voice was hesitant. "I really hate to interrupt, Master, but we have a problem."

Lucien sighed heavily and lifted himself off me. "You okay with him coming in?"

I nodded, sliding my arms around his neck and kissing him once more. He suddenly pushed me away, grimacing, as he rolled off the bed. The moment he stood, he fell to the floor, barely able to hold himself up by his hands and knees. He screamed, clutching at his head.

I started to go to him, but Xander came through the door fast, holding his hand up for me to stay put. I sat back, wide-eyed, trying to figure out what the fuck was going on. Xander

knelt beside Lucien, forcing Lucien to look at him. "What's going on, Lucien? Talk to me."

Lucien pushed Xander away as well, shaking his head. "Caleb ... get me Caleb!"

Xander ran out of the room without hesitation, and I moved slowly off the bed, kneeling beside Lucien. "Baby? What's wrong?"

He looked up at me, blinking hard, as if trying to focus. Tears tinged with red were rolling down his cheeks and I leaned forward, wiping them away cautiously. "My robe," he whispered.

His robe? I looked around frantically and found it draped over a chair close by. I retrieved it and moved back, draping the satiny material around his shoulders. He grabbed at my hand and slowly pulled himself up before sitting on the edge of the bed. I sat down beside him, sliding a hand over his.

"Lucien? Please ... talk to me."

Lucien cleared his throat and sighed. "It seems ... that someone has been murdered. One of my own..."

His voice hitched as he broke off and I squeezed his hand. "I'm so sorry, Lucien."

"I've always heard that it hurts more to lose one of your own than it does to lose one that you've acquired by bonding and ceremony. That appears to be true." He ran his hands over his face, sighing again. "No one ever said that the pain was more physical than anything else."

"Really?"

He nodded. "It literally *hurt*."

"But you're okay?"

"Yes, love; I'll be okay." He stood and started for the bathroom. "When Xander comes back with Caleb, please make them wait and don't let them in here. I need ... a few moments."

I pulled my jeans on while I waited, and Lucien was still in the bathroom when Xander and Caleb arrived about fifteen minutes later. When Caleb walked into the bedroom, I had to do a double take. He wasn't just hot. He was fucking beautiful.

He was dressed in brown leather pants, black boots, and a tight, sleeveless black shirt that left little to the imagination. His brown, curly hair was cut close on the sides, leaving the top just long enough to give the curl definition. Full, pouty lips turned up in a smile as he looked at me, and I found myself unable to breathe as one of his dark brown eyes winked at me.

No one could ever take Lucien's place, and I couldn't think of anyone being more beautiful than him, but Caleb was a definite runner up. In fact, the more I looked at Caleb, the more I saw of Lucien in him. They could have been brothers. I shook those thoughts away, remembering *why* Caleb and Xander had come in.

I cleared my throat and stood to address them. "Lucien will be with you both in a few minutes."

Caleb nodded and stepped forward, holding out his hand. "I am Caleb—Lucien's first in command ... and his favorite. If I can be of service to you in *any* way, you have but to say the word."

I took his hand, shuddering at the almost electric sensation that went through me. "Peter."

He leaned in, still holding my hand, pressing his lips to my ear. "It's very nice to meet you, Peter."

"Ahh ... Caleb," Lucien said as the bathroom door opened. "I see you've met Peter."

Caleb slowly let go of my hand. "I hope to be seeing more of him."

Lucien gave him a teasing smile. "You are most unworthy."

"I beg to differ, *Master*," Caleb said, the tone of his voice nothing less than seductive. "I am worthy of a lot of things."

Movement caught my eye, and I watched as Xander moved over to a chair and sank down in it. His eyes flashed up to meet mine momentarily, but the look was far from friendly. He looked away quickly, but the jealousy just seemed to be radiating off him. Great. I'd made a fucking werewolf jealous. A werewolf that most likely wouldn't hesitate to do something ... stupid.

I moved back to the bed and sat back against the headboard, pulling my knees up to my chest. Lucien pointed to the bed, and then to one of the empty chairs. "Sit, Caleb. Anywhere is fine."

"Anywhere?" Caleb asked as he crawled onto the bed. "I mean, anywhere could be ... interesting."

Lucien rolled his eyes and sighed, sitting in a large, leather-covered chair. "Did Xander tell you why I needed you?"

Caleb shook his head, shooting a disgusted look in Xander's direction. "He's being a pain in the ass. I swear, one of these days..."

Caleb stopped speaking immediately as Lucien held his hand up in warning. "We have lost Joshua."

"Lost him ... how?" When Lucien didn't reply, Caleb slid off the bed and went to him, kneeling before him. "Lucien? What's happened?"

"I do not know the details yet," Lucien said, sliding a palm gently over Caleb's cheek, "But he has passed."

Caleb sank down and buried his face in Lucien's lap. After a few moments, Lucien leaned forward, moving his hands over Caleb's back, through his hair, and finally pulling Caleb's face up to meet his own. "I must know who did this, Caleb. They must..."

"Pay," Caleb answered coldly.

Lucien gave a curt nod, and Caleb sighed, laying his head back down on Lucien's lap. Lucien threaded his fingers through Caleb's hair, working his fingers gently, lovingly. There was no doubt of the closeness of their relationship; lover, friend, Master. Where I was sure there should have been jealousy, there wasn't any—love, admiration, and respect having taken center stage.

Xander cleared his throat. "Um..."

Lucien glanced at him, as if daring him to speak. "What was the problem you were speaking of, Xander?"

"We're, uh ... having company."

"What sort of *company*?"

Xander stood, inching his way to the door. "Christopher will be here a few hours and—"

Caleb ducked as Lucien bolted out of the chair, grabbing Xander up by the shirt. "What do you mean he'll be here in a few *hours*? You know you are to give me at least a week's notice on his arrivals!"

"I-I just received word," Xander stammered. "Just ... just before I came to your door."

Lucien glared at Xander, growling, then let him go so suddenly that Xander fell to his knees. "Christopher never comes unannounced."

Xander knelt before him, practically begging. "I know, I know. And I wouldn't even have known this time, but ... Oh, God, there's more." Xander looked ill. "Antoine is coming with him."

Lucien went incredibly still. "How did you find this out?"

"Roberto called. He wanted to warn me that Antoine needed bags to supplement his feeds, so we'd have them on hand. Roberto thought that I knew that Christopher and Antoine were coming..." Xander broke off. "I swear to you, I didn't have a fucking clue."

Caleb slithered onto the bed beside me, leaning his shoulder against mine. I turned my head and leaned closer. "Who are these people that Xander is talking about?"

"Well," Caleb whispered. "Roberto is Antoine's human servant, though why he's not traveling with them is a mystery to me. Christopher is..." Lucien turned toward us and Caleb stopped mid-sentence. When Lucien turned away, Caleb

leaned in again, his voice nearly inaudible. "Lucien can fill you in on Christopher and Antoine."

I looked up at Lucien; he was both visibly shaken and just pissed as hell. Whatever was happening, added on to what had happened with Joshua, wasn't making for a good night. Xander was cowering away, and Caleb was sticking beside me, pretending he wasn't there at all.

Lucien fumed and paced and fumed some more, cursing about how he didn't like surprises and how he was busy and how he didn't need this right now. He fumed even more, growling that he didn't have to see Christopher; that *he* was Master of Houston and *he* set the fucking rules.

"But Houston is a Council-sanctioned area, Lucien. Christopher and Antoine both are Council representatives and you are bound to..."

The vase that went flying through the air missed Xander's head by mere inches and shattered against the wall behind him. Xander went pale and sank down on his knees again, bowing his head silently. Lucien pursed his lips in anger, staring down at him. "Shall I send you back to the dungeon? Back to Nikolas to have him teach you obedience ... again? Shall I get him to remind you about being silent when silence is warranted?"

"No, Master."

I chanced Lucien's wrath and leaned in close to Caleb again, keeping my voice just a whisper. "I've heard of this Nikolas—seen him once, I think. Who is he?"

"Werewolf, Dungeon Master, obedience trainer, hunter of rogues, sadist..." Caleb nuzzled closer against my ear. "He

was one step away from being the Lycan Master, but that sadist part pretty much disqualified him. He really is a nice guy—outside of the dungeon. And when he's not hunting. And..."

"I think I get it, Caleb." Sometimes, it was better if there were things I just didn't know. I looked back to Lucien.

He stood before Xander with his jaw and fists both clenched tightly. "I ought to, just to give you a fucking reminder."

"Whatever you desire, Master," Xander whispered.

"Get up," Lucien snapped. "Wake the house, ready the staff, and get ... out."

Xander scrambled up and out the door so fast that it took me a moment to realize he was actually gone. When my eyes left the slammed door and came back to rest on Lucien, he was staring at me. I tossed the options around in my head of running and hiding, versus staying and more than likely fighting.

"Caleb, love," Lucien said softly. "Give us a few minutes."

"I'll get a scout team together and start looking into Joshua's death."

Lucien hesitated before nodding. "Very well; at the very least, find his body and bring it home."

Caleb brushed his fingers along the back of my hand as he slid out of bed, but with Lucien damn near glaring at me, I made no move to reciprocate. Anything. The door closed again as Caleb made his exit, and I got up off the bed, keeping my eyes trained on Lucien.

"You gonna talk to me, or are you just gonna glare and threaten?"

"Come here," he growled.

"Uh ... no." I shook my head. "If you think you can bellow and glare and threaten, and that *I'm* going to just drop and follow orders, you're severely mistaken, baby."

"Am I?" he asked, stalking toward me.

"Very," I answered curtly. "I will be a lot of things, but being your servant or your whipping boy isn't going to be one of them. Now, if you want to step back, calm the fuck down, and talk to me—we'll handle this together."

"Together?" he scoffed.

"Why is that so hard for you to believe?"

"Twenty-four hours ago you weren't even sure you wanted *me*. Hell, we stood in your apartment only hours ago and you said you weren't sure what you could handle. Now, you want to stand beside me? Forgive me if I'm a little hesitant to believe that. This isn't a game, Peter..."

"I know that, Lucien," I said, cutting him off.

"And it's not something I should have expected you to have to deal with," he responded. "I never once thought about the repercussions about bringing you into this world. But death? It changes things, changes perspectives, makes you stop and add everything all up and decide whether what you're doing is right."

"I'm here because I want to be, Lucien."

"I cannot change who and what I am to ease your mind."

"I'm not asking you to," I said softly. "Things are much clearer for me now than they've ever been before. The things I don't understand, I'll learn to deal with."

"And what if you can't? What's going to happen when you wake up one day and wonder how the *fuck* you got here and how the *fuck* you're going get out?"

"That's never going to happen."

"I should have left you alone months ago—hell, a year ago I should have admired you from a distance and then forgotten about you." He shook his head. "I don't want to bring you into this life, Peter; this world."

"But I'm here, Lucien." I met his eyes, just needing him to see that I meant every word. "And you gave me plenty of chances to walk away."

"Why didn't you?" he asked, a trace of anger coming back into his voice.

"Because I love you, and I can't—I won't—go back to a life without you."

His eyes widened in shock. "You can't mean that."

"You bet your ass I mean it." Lucien turned away, running his hands down his face. I watched him for a moment, swallowing hard. "But if you don't feel the same way and if you truly don't want me here..."

He turned toward me suddenly, shaking his head. "I don't want you to end up hating me when you've had enough."

I closed the distance between us and slid my arms around his neck. "I could never hate you, Lucien."

Lucien looked at me sadly. "Never say never, Peter. What would you do if I fucked up and fed too long, and in an effort

to save you, I turned you? What would you think of me then?"

"That you would be my Master and my lover?"

"I'm serious."

"I'd probably be a little freaked out."

"A little?"

"Okay, maybe a lot at first," I retorted. "But Lucien, I know that it's a possibility. I'm not so naïve to think that loving you doesn't come without a few risks. But because I love you, it's a risk I'm more than willing to take."

He pulled me into an embrace, his face still troubled. "And for that you are a fool."

"Then a fool I'll be," I said, sinking into him. I'd sure as hell felt the fool when I professed my love to him and he'd passed it off with another question.

We stood there for a long while until Lucien pulled away, searching my face. "What's wrong, Peter?"

I shook my head, not wanting to voice my disappointment. I was not going to push. Instead, I moved to change the subject. "So, tell me about these two that are coming. Why does it upset you so much?"

"Christopher comes at least once a year to make sure that I am of sound mind." He shrugged and pulled away, moving to sit on the edge of the bed.

"And Antoine?" I asked, moving to stand in front of him.

He parted his legs and pulled me close, letting his hands run up and down the outsides of my jean-covered thighs. He finally wrapped his arms around my waist and laid his head

against my belly. "I have only seen him twice in the last seventeen years."

I could have sworn that I heard a hitch in his voice, but instead of asking about it, I slid my hands through his soft, dark hair. He moaned and leaned more into my touch and then there was the unmistakable sound of him trying to hold back tears. Tears burned at my eyes, and I didn't know why, except that Lucien was hurting. Why he was hurting, though, was still a mystery. I bent and kissed Lucien on the top of the head. "Who is he, baby? And why would you welcome him here if he's done something to hurt you?"

Lucien let out a deep sigh. "He's my Master, Peter. He's the one who chose to send me away and put me here."

Chapter Eleven

"I don't understand," I said, crouching down on the balls of my feet to bring us to eye level. Lucien wouldn't meet my eyes, and I finally put my hands on either side of his face and turned his head, forcing him to look at me. "You don't have a Master, Lucien."

He nodded, still fighting away tears. "I don't think I've ever accepted that."

I bit at my lip. "After seventeen years, babe, I think it's time."

"I never wanted this," he said, his voice nearly a whisper. "Never wanted to be a fucking Master of anything. Don't get me wrong, Peter. I'm glad I'm here, now, with you..."

I leaned forward and ran my tongue along his lips, pushing his robe back off his shoulders. He moaned, then captured my lips in a kiss before pulling me back onto the bed to lie above him. I broke the kiss and pulled back to search his face. "You know that you don't have to hide and shield with me, don't you? You know that what goes on between us, behind that closed door, is just between us?"

He nodded. "I know ... and I can't thank you enough for that."

"Don't thank me for that, Lucien."

"I don't want you to see me as weak, Peter."

"Never gonna happen, lover." I smiled reassuringly. "What do we need to do? What do you need me to do to help you get ready for this?"

"Strip ... then just lie here with me for a while. I need to think, and believe it or not, you being here right now makes that so much easier."

I got up from the bed and made short work of stripping off my jeans. When I crawled back onto the bed, Lucien laid on his side, putting his back to my chest. It was only then that I realized that he wanted me to hold him. I smiled and wrapped my body tightly around his. "Better?"

He nodded and sighed, but I didn't think it was in frustration. I think, for once, it was a sigh of relief. We lay there for the longest time with only the sound of Lucien grumbling to himself. He finally turned in my arms to face me. "When you said you weren't going anywhere, did you mean that you weren't leaving me in general, or that you weren't leaving here either?"

"What do you want?" I asked.

"I want you to stay ... here."

"For the week?" I wanted to be completely sure of what he was asking.

He shook his head. "No, Peter, not just for the week."

"What do you want, forever?"

He cleared his throat. "For as long as you love me."

For as long as I loved him? I could do it without question. But I'd be the first to admit that one-sided love could be a bitch. My fingers trailed over a long, jagged scar on his shoulder. "What's this one?"

He thought for a moment. "That one ... was a lance. Hurt like a son of a bitch, and I think the woman who patched me

up was mad and didn't have a clue as to what she was doing. For weeks after, I thought I was going to lose my arm."

I chuckled. "Medieval medicine, huh?"

He shook his head. "Believe me, a lot of that was nothing more than trial and error."

I shuddered at the thought and shifted, kissing down the line of that scar. He spread his legs as I rolled over him, arching his hips up against me. The head of my cock brushed beneath his balls and he arched his hips a little more, causing the head of my cock to brush his hole. He was so totally relaxed that when I pressed against him, rocking my hips just slightly, my cock slid into him in one easy movement.

I held myself above him, reveling in the rapturous look in his eyes. "For as long as you want me."

He pulled me in for a kiss, teasing and nibbling at my lips. "Always."

I kissed and ran my tongue over every part of his body I could manage to reach as I slid in and out of him at a slow, steady pace. It wasn't long before he was writhing on the bed, making the most beautiful of sounds, clutching at my arms and back before finally threading his fingers into my hair and holding me tightly, kissing me as deeply as I was fucking him.

His ass tightened around me and his body went taut as he threw his head back, moaning and keening, coating my belly with his come. That sent me right over, and I thrust a few more times before burying myself balls-deep and filling him. I shuddered and sank down over him, my cock still deep in his ass.

"So," he started, clearing his throat. "Can I send a crew to pack up and move your stuff?"

"A crew?"

He grinned. "There are more benefits to being here other than just me."

I thrust hard, grinning as his eyes rolled back in his head. "You don't say."

He grabbed hold of me and flipped us over, putting me beneath him. "Don't be a smartass."

"Why not?" I laughed. "I'm starting to think it'll get me in lots and lots of all the right kind of trouble."

"And then some." His expression grew serious. "This is your home, Peter; I want you comfortable here."

"So, how about showing me to my room?"

He bent his head and captured my left nipple between his teeth, biting down hard. I gasped and arched toward him.

"Okay, okay, so tell me where *your* room is going to be!"

He bit down even harder and the pain made me cry out. "Either fuck me or stop!"

"Your ass isn't available." He let me go, soothing the bite with his tongue. "Will you live?"

"Just barely," I said, whacking him on the shoulder. I sat up and looked at my nipple, frowning at the angry purple color. Sparing a glance up at Lucien, I smirked. "Better put something shiny through that."

Lucien raised an eyebrow. "Yeah?"

I nodded. "Fuck, yeah. Want to be reminded, quite often, just how much I belong to you. Can you heal it fast, like you did my finger?"

"I can, yes."

"Fuck me tonight and put it in as I come." I remembered that we'd have company. "Well, if we can get away from the company long enough."

"Fuck them," he growled. "If they wanted my time, they should have come when they were scheduled. No one comes before you."

His words caused my heart to flutter, and a huge grin to spread across my face. I lay back, stretching beneath him, caressing his cheek with the palm of my hand. "I'm sure you have a ton of stuff to do, babe."

He nodded. "I do need to get a few things in order. They'll be here before dawn, which means we only have a few hours. Hungry?"

"A little."

"Think you can find the kitchen?"

I rolled my eyes. "Yes, dear; I think I can find the kitchen. I mean, I've come and gone twice, and made it to the front door from here all on my own. I think I can make it to the kitchen without getting too turned around."

"You made it to the front door?" Lucien asked, quirking an eyebrow. "How do you like my statues?"

"Your what?" I said, growing confused.

Lucien laughed, kissing me before he rolled off the bed. "Peter, my love, you only made it to the door separating this wing from the rest of the house. The door you've come and gone through twice is my own personal entrance." He walked to the closet, still chuckling to himself, and when he reemerged, he was wearing a black silk robe. He tossed a

similar robe to me and grinned. "Come on, babe; let me give you a tour of the house."

* * * *

The house? Was fucking huge! I slid onto a stool at the island in the middle of Lucien's commercial-sized kitchen, staring at the stainless steel appliances and the dark woods of the cabinets.

Lucien's arms slid around my shoulders. "Everything okay? You haven't said anything since we left the library."

I shook my head. "I'm still trying to get over the fact that you have a fucking library! And separate wings of the house! And..."

"It was all here when I took possession, Peter. This is our house and our home ... but it wasn't put here by me. Personally, I prefer something a little more ... discreet."

"Discreet?" I laughed. "Says the man who has filled his house with statues of well-endowed men fucking each other's brains out!"

"Hey, I had to lighten the atmosphere!" He kissed the side of my head and walked to a large stainless steel refrigerator. He opened up the door and leaned back a little to look at me. "Come pick something out. There's plenty to choose from."

I slid off the stool and walked over, sliding an arm around his waist. "So much food for someone who doesn't eat."

He nodded. "It's kind of ironic. I used to love food. Now, it's just ... here."

"Food's changed since you last ate, I would imagine."

"Actually, when I first came here, I literally made myself sick eating chili and all kinds of other crap that vampires have no business even glancing at."

I frowned at him. "How could you have done that?"

"Long story, love." He moved away, leaving me standing at the refrigerator. "Anything look good to you?"

I forced away my questions and turned my attention back to the refrigerator. Some fancy looking cheeses grabbed my attention along with some grapes. I picked them up and carried them to the bar where Lucien had set out a plate. Before I could ask for wine, he set a chilled bottle out onto the counter and started uncorking it.

"Reading my mind?"

He shook his head. "No, but at this time of night, that's what I would have chosen. The wine," he pointed to a small refrigerator behind him, "is restocked daily. Anything special you want, just leave a note on the door for Simon. He'll get it for you."

"Cool," I said, turning around and trying to figure out where to find a knife. "Knife?"

Lucien smiled. "The drawer where you're standing as well as next to the sink."

I backed away and took out a knife, cutting a few slices of cheese as Lucien washed the grapes. He then went to the refrigerator and began searching for something, grumbling until he pulled out a small, square box. "I think you will like this," he said, setting it on the counter before moving to the other side of the kitchen.

I picked the wooden box up and opened it up, peering in at the contents. All I could see was a white cloth, so I took a chance and put my nose up to the container. It was strong, but not stinky, cheese. I looked up to see Lucien sliding a baking sheet with small pieces of bread on it into the oven. "What the hell are you doing?"

He looked up at me, his pale blue eyes bright and happy. "Just toasting it a little; five minutes, at the most."

I grabbed a couple of grapes and walked over to stand beside him. He plucked one of the grapes out of my hand and popped it into his mouth, smiling as he savored the sweetness of it. "Fruit isn't so bad," he said, pausing as he swallowed. "Hard on the system, though, and better after a feed—most definitely."

I looked at the clock on the wall. "You still need to feed?"

"I don't necessarily need to, but I am going to."

The buzzer on the oven went off, and Lucien grabbed a potholder, pulling the pan out. He placed a line of bread on the plate and put the pan in the sink. "I'll get the wine."

I grabbed the plate and, after Lucien reminded me, the box with the cheese. We made our way back to the bedroom, and I put the plate on the bed and lay down, watching as Lucien poured wine into the glasses. He turned to me and winked. "There's a remote in the nightstand."

I reached over and opened the drawer, finding the remote. "And the TV?"

He made his way over to the bed, exchanging a glass of wine for the remote. He pointed the remote away, over the foot of the bed, and before I knew it, a large, flat screen was

coming down out of the ceiling. "One of those gadgets I love so much," he said with a grin.

I rolled my eyes and plucked the remote out of his hand. "If it's yours, then there's porn on every channel."

"Green button, baby." He laughed. "Twelve DVDs full of it."

I resisted the urge to hit the green button and left it on the news channel that was showing, muting it. Lucien sat beside me and took the cheese out, paring away the golden-colored rind. He spread the cheese on a piece of bread and held it to my lips. I took a bite and moaned at the taste.

Lucien smiled. "Like it?"

"Damn," I said, savoring the creamy, sweet-tart flavor. "What is it?"

"Pont-L'Eveque. When I was alive, we called it Augelot."

"It's really, really good, Lucien."

"It was my favorite."

I leaned forward and brushed my lips against his. "Want a taste?"

He slid his tongue inside my mouth, sliding his tongue against mine. The taste of Lucien with the wine and the cheese was dizzying, and I swayed above him. He pushed me away after a few moments, licking at his lips. "If I don't stop now, I won't be stopping at all."

I chuckled, settling back on a pillow and taking another bite of the bread. Lucien started to get up, and I reached out, placing my hand on his arm. "Lucien? You *are* alive."

He nodded, and then looked at me as if he didn't know what to say. He got up from the bed and started for his desk.

He made it about four steps before turning back to face me.
"Thanks."

I smiled and sat back again, taking a sip of my wine. "Do you need to go out to feed?"

"No, I just need to round someone up. Will you be all right while I go do that?"

"Actually, I thought I might want to watch ... if that's okay."

Lucien studied me for a moment and then gave a curt nod. "Eat first. I'll call for him after I make sure my books are in order."

He turned away and went to sit at his desk on the far side of the wall, pushing a button as he sat down. Two computer screens rose up from beneath the desk and he switched them on, pulling out a hidden keyboard. I watched him as I ate, typing things up, mumbling to himself as he switched from screen to screen. He was still working thirty minutes later when I'd finished eating. Instead of bothering him, though, I stared at the silent TV screen, trying to figure out who this Christopher was and why *he* was checking up on Lucien.

"I'm not that busy, Peter," Lucien said after a few moments. "What's on your mind?"

"Who is this Christopher?"

"Ahh." He nodded, going back to typing. I didn't think he was going to answer, but he finally cleared his throat.

"Christopher is our ... well, he's pretty much our equivalent of a doctor. If something's wrong with you, nine times out of ten, he can fix it."

"Why does he check up on you so often? You're not sick, are you?"

He shook his head emphatically. "No, no ... nothing like that. I wish we had more time, Peter. There's so much to tell you, so much I wanted to be able to fill you in on."

"Is this going to be a friendly visit, or do I need to keep my distance?"

He spun around in the chair and smiled. "Oh, they're friendly all right. But it's kind of like having your family come to stay with you. No matter how much you love them, they still get on your fucking nerves. But the fact that Antoine's coming, too? I just don't know."

I got up from the bed and walked to him, straddling him in the chair, wrapping my arms around his neck. "Do you think it's a test?"

"Actually, that's exactly what I'm starting to think." His arms circled my waist. "I just can't figure out what for. So ... you really think you're ready to watch me feed?"

"Might as well." I smiled. "Besides, I want to know if watching you feed turns me on as much as you feeding from me does."

"Do we need to talk about rules?"

"Rules?" I asked. "What do you mean by that?"

"You know I offer pleasure or pain to my donors. You are more than welcome to join in on either one."

I swallowed hard, my body trembling just a little. The thought of sharing something like that with Lucien was almost too much. "Join in like ... sex?"

His hands moved up my sides, his thumbs moving over to graze my nipples. "I don't want there to be anything that we can't share."

As his hands slid inside the robe and down my belly, my breath hitched. By the time his fingers reached the base of my cock, I was grinding hard against him. He looked at me expectantly, and I realized I hadn't really answered him. But rules? I couldn't really think of any. "You expect me to think right now?"

"No one fucks you but me," he said softly.

I nodded quickly. "That's a given. Can I ask the same of you?"

He frowned, pulling his hand from me. I sat back for a moment, shaking my head. I didn't quite understand that one. He didn't have any equals but me, and hadn't been fucked in so many years. Why he couldn't agree was confusing me. "Lucien?"

He looked away for a moment, as if he were thinking something he didn't want me to know about, but when he turned back to me, he was smiling. "You know what? That's something I can do."

"Why the hesitation?"

"With Christopher and Antoine coming here..."

"Oh!" I said, interrupting. "Why the sudden change of heart?"

"As you said, my love; I have no Master. My ass is my own."

I chuckled and pulled at one of his rings. "No, it's not. It's mine."

He pulled me in for a kiss. "All yours."

Before I knew it, he was practically fucking my mouth with his tongue as I ground against him. We'd have probably kept on going, but there was a knock at the bedroom door. Lucien pulled away, studying me closely. "He'll come in, strip, and lay on the bed. I do not talk to them other than to find out their wishes ... pleasure or pain. You are free to do anything you want to him as long as you stay within the boundaries of what they desire. If something is too much for him, and he tells you so, you must stop."

"And that's him at the door?"

Lucien nodded. "And he's clean, as is required. Do with him as you wish, my love."

I got up from Lucien's lap unsteadily, my cock hard and protruding from the front of my robe. Lucien kissed me on the forehead before starting for the door. I pulled my robe closed and watched as Lucien opened to the door to reveal a young, hot blond. The blond was wearing nothing but a simple white robe that made me think of him as some sort of virgin sacrifice.

The young man walked into the middle of the room and stopped, letting his robe fall to the floor. I groaned inwardly at the sight of his nude form. He didn't have a bit of hair anywhere on his body. Lucien closed the door and stepped up behind the man, who turned to face him, keeping his head bowed. Lucien caught my eye over the top of the man's head. "This is Kevin. Tonight Kevin requests...?"

"Pleasure, my Lord," Kevin said softly.

Lucien nodded and gestured toward the bed. Kevin lay down, letting his legs fall apart in an open invitation. Lucien tore his eyes away from Kevin to look at me. "No pleasantries, just fucking, sucking, or whatever you want."

"Do you like him?"

"I've fed from him once, several months back. He's ... unique."

I stepped up to Lucien as I untied the belt on my robe, letting it fall to the floor. "How so?"

He let his own robe fall to the floor, keeping his eyes locked with mine. "Because he prefers that I not feed at his neck."

Looking at Kevin all spread out on the bed as he was, that could only mean one thing. Fuck. Lucien moved to the bed, and I stood frozen in my place for a few moments, watching as Lucien settled between Kevin's legs and began to lick at Kevin's balls.

It was almost too much. I went to the other side of the bed and crawled across it, coming to rest with my knees on either side of Kevin's head. I rubbed my cock over his lips, leaving a trail of precome over his fair skin before sliding my cock into his mouth. He moaned around me, and the vibration nearly sent me over way too soon.

I looked down to see Lucien flicking his tongue over Kevin's slit, and I slid over Kevin in a sixty-nine position, joining Lucien as he worked. I licked up one side of Kevin's cock as Lucien licked up the other and we met at the head of Kevin's cock, sucking him in, then kissing each other. As Lucien and I kissed, I began to rock my hips, thrusting into

Kevin's mouth. He took each thrust without complaint, and I realized that he had his hands on my hips, trying to pull me deeper into his throat.

I soon felt that burn at the base of my spine, my belly trying to tighten. Lucien smiled, licking his lips. "Don't hold back."

I nodded and a few seconds later Lucien moved off Kevin's cock and began licking at a soft spot where leg and groin met. Kevin was soon bucking his hips, keening around my cock, his body just begging for more.

I bent and swallowed his thick cock down, and Lucien looked at me then, holding my gaze. I knew it was coming. Hell, I was about to come. I sped up my thrusts, sucking hard and fast at Kevin's cock. He bucked beneath me, sucking me wildly, his moans muffled by my dick buried deep in his throat.

Lucien opened his mouth, revealing long, white fangs and bit deeply into the soft spot of skin he'd been licking. Kevin screamed out around me and came hard, emptying his load into my throat. The taste of him sent me over and I thrust a few more times, burying my cock balls deep and just letting go.

Kevin writhed on the bed beneath me, but he soon calmed, his body lax. I shifted, pulling my cock from his mouth, still licking and nibbling at his spent cock. It was only then that I realized Lucien was still feeding. Before I could voice concern, though, he rose up, looking seriously drugged. Blood dripped from his lips and he moved toward me quickly, shoving his tongue into my mouth, kissing me roughly.

We ended up rolling across the bed, and Lucien pinned me down, humping against me. I reached down and took his thick cock, stroking him hard and fast. His kiss tasted of blood, and when it should have disgusted the fuck out of me, it drove me on, made me want more. Lucien gasped suddenly and threw his head back, coating my hand and stomach with his hot, sticky fluid. He moved down in a blur and gathered it on his tongue before sliding up my body again to kiss me. I sucked the come from his tongue, craving even more. But Lucien soon turned his head away, sank down over me, and buried his face in the bend of my neck.

I clutched him to me tightly, then spared a look down at Kevin. He hadn't moved since we'd moved off him, and I started to worry that maybe something had gone wrong. Before I could move, though, Lucien began to trace my ear with the tip of his tongue. "He's fine, babe. Just down for the rest of the day."

I shuddered and kissed the side of Lucien's head.
"Shower?"

"Wash your front?"

I smacked him hard on the shoulder, laughing. "Perv."

"Yes, but you love me that way."

I couldn't exactly disagree with that. I loved him any way I could get him.

Chapter Twelve

I came out of the shower to find Lucien already dressed in a faded pair of jeans and a tight black T-shirt. Damn, I just wanted to strip him out of those clothes and take him back to bed. He blushed a little and I rolled my eyes. "Wouldn't be blushing if you stayed out of my head."

He stepped up, grinning. "I have tried, my love, but it's so hard to stay away."

I let my towel fall to the floor and watched as Lucien's heated gaze traveled down my body. I reached for my jeans on the bed, and as I pulled them on, Lucien stepped behind me and slid his hands down my belly. "If you don't stop, we're gonna be naked and sucking each other off when they get here."

"I like the way you think," he whispered, lips tugging at my ear.

I shivered and pulled away from him. "Stop it!"

Xander walked in, and Lucien snickered, hugging me tightly and placing a kiss in the bend of my neck. "Finish getting dressed; I'll leave you alone ... at least until Xander and I are finished."

Xander shook his head and pulled a chair up over by Lucien's desk. I watched as he took out a legal pad and began pointing things out to Lucien and asking him what needed to be done about a ton of different things. I walked over to stand behind Lucien, wrapping my arms around his shoulders.

Lucien sat up suddenly. "They're here."

Xander nodded and stood. "I'll show them in."

"No!" Lucien said quickly. "Put them in the library and tell them I'll be with them shortly. And Xander? No one is to go near the library until I say that it's okay. Got it?"

"As you wish." Xander ducked his head, walking out and closing the door behind him.

Lucien stood, sliding his arms around my waist. "A lot's happened in the past couple of days. I have to admit I'm wondering what's going through your head."

"Right now? I'm just really glad to be here with you. I'm nervous about this meeting here in a little bit, but I'm doing okay."

He brushed his lips against my forehead. "I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous, too."

I laid my head on his shoulder, wishing there was something I could do to make this better for him. I just wanted to take him back to bed and forget about this whole thing. Lucien pulled away after a while. "Before I forget, I need to get you authorized for the security system."

"The what?"

"The security system for the house; you need to be authorized for access to each and every part of the house as well as the emergency lockdown."

I couldn't help the laugh that escaped. "Damn, it sounds a little like Fort Knox."

"It pretty much is. This entire wing locks down during the daylight hours. The walls are already reinforced with steel and concrete, and in the day, solid steel shutters cover each and every window. In the event that this room is breached or otherwise compromised, there are two ways out; through the

closet and the hidden panel that I showed you the other day, and the bed.

"The bed?"

He nodded. "Inside the nightstand on the right, there's a covered switch. If you press it, steel doors will cordon off the area of the bed. You must be quick, though, because those doors don't give a shit whether you've got a hand or foot in the way. After that? The bed will descend into the vault below, where there are more options for getting out of the house, depending on the time of day. There are only four people that have access to this room at any given time."

"You, Caleb, Xander, and Simon?"

"And now you."

Lucien took my hand and pulled me to the door and then out into the hallway. He pressed his hand against a wooden panel that slid easily off to the side. A screen appeared alongside a keypad and he placed his hand on the screen. He smiled at me as a soft, pale-green light slid below his hand.

"It not only scans the handprint, but heat as well as heartbeat. Which means someone can't just cut off your hand and try to use that to get in."

"Honey, that is *not* comforting."

"It wasn't meant to be." He stepped back. "Put your hand on the screen."

I did as he said, and as the green light slid along the length of my hand, Lucien punched a shitload of stuff into the keypad off to the side. When a small light above the keypad flashed green, he pulled my hand away, kissing my palm.

"Now that we've got that taken care of, go slip your boots on."

I'm ready to get this shit over and done with, and get back to you and me."

* * * *

We walked down the long corridor, through the double doors separating Lucien's wing from the rest of the house, making our way to the library. Just before we rounded the last turn, Lucien's hand slipped around mine. I looked over at him before giving his hand a reassuring squeeze. Something told me that Lucien had quite a bit going on in his head and this visit of Christopher and Antoine's wouldn't be like any of the ones before.

As we came upon the closed double doors of the library, Lucien stopped suddenly. When I reached for the door, he pulled my hand away, putting a finger to his lips. "Shh..."

"What?" I whispered.

"Listen," he responded, pointing toward the door.

I raised an eyebrow at him, not hearing anything but the tick-tock of the grandfather clock a few feet away, footsteps off in the distance down one of the long hallways, and grunts. I paused, waiting to hear it again. Yes, grunts and groans, quick, heavy breathing, and the unmistakable sound of skin slapping against bare skin.

"They're fucking?"

"It would seem that way," Lucien said, a smile spreading slowly across his face. "I'll give them a moment—they're almost done."

I figured there was no point in asking how he knew that. But no matter what was happening on the other side of that

door, I could see that Lucien still wasn't at ease. I turned into him, sliding an arm around his waist, pressing my palm into the small of his back to pull him close. He let go of my hand and wrapped his arms around me. "It's gonna be fine," I whispered.

He nodded against my neck. "I know. I'm just glad you're here."

I pulled away, kissing a line up his jaw, working my way to his parted lips. His breath hitched as I slid my tongue between them, searching out his fangs. I ran my tongue over them, loving the feel of them, knowing exactly what they could do. I knew that one little slip up would have Lucien sucking my tongue greedily as I bled. I shuddered at the thought and pulled away, baring my neck to him.

He struck hard and fast, piercing my neck without the tenderness I was used to. The pain was staggering, but he caught me and held me close as he licked at the line of blood. "Tout ce que j'ai jamais voulu, tout ce que je ne l'aurai plus besoin. Je t'aime, Peter."

His words washed over me, made me feel all warm and happy; then I realized I didn't have a clue as to what he'd said. I punched at his chest with my fists. "English, asshole!"

The grunts behind the door grew into loud moans and cries of ecstasy. Before they could grow any louder, though, they turned to keens and sobs, then grew silent. Lucien pulled away, grinning, giving me a brief kiss before letting me go. "Later. Right now, we have guests to attend to."

My knees sagged a little as he let me go, and I had to adjust myself in my jeans. "Bastard."

He smiled, resting his hand above the door handle.
"Ready?"

"As I'll ever be."

Lucien squared his shoulders and opened the doors, entering the library like he owned the entire fucking world. The sight of him so strong and so confident didn't help with getting my hard-on to subside. I was ready to fall to the floor, pull out my cock and just start stroking. I felt a little woozy again for a moment, and Lucien's voice purred through my mind.

"Easy there, baby. Just come to me and I'll make it better."

I tried to step toward him, but it was like an electric current was trying to find a way into my body. Lucien's arms came around me, putting my back against his chest, and the feeling was suddenly gone. I blinked a couple of times and then realized Lucien was talking.

"And you couldn't wait until you got to your rooms?"

"At least we waited until we were inside the house," a low, seductive voice said, from somewhere in front of me. "Who is your friend?"

I looked up and it was only then that I saw the two other men in the room. They were both near a large sofa; one of them still bent over the arm, naked ass exposed, pants around his thighs, the other, shirt pushed up around his torso, pants pulled up, but the front open. His flaccid cock was jutting out the front of his pants, still dripping with semen.

"This is Peter," Lucien said, and by the sound of his voice, I knew he was smiling. He pointed to the taller, dark-haired man. "That is Christopher." He pointed to the other man, who was now standing, buttoning his pants. "And that is Antoine."

Christopher stepped forward as he tucked himself in, then offered his hand to me. "It is very nice to meet you, Peter."

God, he was beautiful; startling green eyes, jet-black hair, skin that was as fair and smooth as porcelain. His mouth turned up in a smile that said he knew just how beautiful he was. I looked at his hand, wondering if it smelled of sex, trying to fight the urge of pulling it up to my face and just inhaling. I forced the thoughts away and took his hand. "It's nice to meet you, as well."

Antoine stepped up, but instead of offering me his hand, his heated violet-blue gaze traveled down my body. He studied me for a few moments, then stepped in so close that his lips were nearly touching mine. His nostrils flared as he sniffed at me. Gooseflesh covered my body, and I fought not to react. He finally stepped back, licking at his lips. "Absolutely beautiful," he whispered, extending his hand to me.

It took everything I had in me to take his hand. "Nice to meet you," I said softly.

Antoine nodded. "I hope you feel the same when I'm through with you."

"Enough!" Lucien growled.

I sank back against Lucien, strangely comforted by his rising anger. Antoine raised an eyebrow at Lucien as if he couldn't believe Lucien had spoken up.

"Is there a problem, my child?" Antoine asked, his voice dripping with a sweetness that turned my stomach.

"You will *not* come into *my* house expecting that you will have free rein over it or its inhabitants. This is ... my house ... and you will show respect."

"And what a lovely house it is." Antoine smiled and leveled his gaze on me. "What about him?"

Lucien's hand came up around my throat, his thumb caressing the bite mark he'd just put there. "He is my companion and is to be shown the same respect that you show me."

Antoine's eyes flicked back to Lucien. "Respect must be earned."

A low, rumbling growl from Lucien reverberated through my chest, but his words into my mind were gentle. "*Go to the chair in the corner, Peter. Please.*"

I was nervous as hell but didn't question him. I slipped out of his arms and made my way to a leather chair in the far corner of the room. I sat down uneasily and waited, my heart pounding in my chest. I felt something brush my arm, and looked up to see Christopher leaning against the side of the chair.

He smiled down at me and slid his palm across the middle of my back. "This is necessary," he whispered.

I shrugged away from his touch and turned my gaze back to Antoine and Lucien in the middle of the room. To anyone else, they looked in quiet conversation, but I knew there was a hell of a lot more to it than that.

I studied Antoine for a moment, taking in his features from a safe distance. His long black hair curled down just below his broad shoulders, hiding my view of his face from the side. He had an athletic, but lean body beneath his black jeans and shirt. Antoine turned toward me suddenly, his arms stretched out at his sides as if posing for me.

"Get a *good* look, pretty," Antoine hissed, his eyes practically glowing. "It'll be me making you scream come nightfall."

I froze, watching as Lucien's hand shot out and wrapped around Antoine's throat. Antoine tore himself out of Lucien's grip, lunging toward him. Lucien flew back into the bookshelves and hit with a sickening crack. The shelves exploded with the impact, bits and pieces of wood flying everywhere, books falling to the floor. Lucien cried out in pain, and I watched in horror as he pulled a long, jagged piece of wood from his back.

I bolted out of the chair to go to him, but Christopher caught me before I made ten feet, forcing me back into the chair. I swung at him and missed, but couldn't figure out how. "Get the fuck off me!"

Christopher knelt, his expression serious. "If you love him at all, you will not get in the way of this."

"Fuck you!" I spat out.

"While the thought of that is highly erotic, step back and realize what is going on here." Christopher cupped his hand to my cheek and pressed his lips to my ear. "He is meeting his maker and his Master, here, on his own ground, for the very first time."

"He doesn't have a Master," I growled.

"Exactly," Christopher whispered.

The sound of glass shattering drew my attention back to the fight. Lucien was on the ground, rolling away as Antoine tried to stab him with what looked to be a dagger. I turned my head away, unable to keep watching, and Christopher pulled me close. "Have faith."

I shook my head. "I didn't expect this. He said it'd be a friendly visit."

"You may not have expected it, but I do believe that you helped to facilitate it."

I crossed my arms over my chest defiantly. It was the only way for me to stay put and try to get the trembling to stop. I turned my attention back to Lucien and Antoine just in time to see Lucien send Antoine flying through the double doors of the library. The doors splintered into pieces, and I sighed in relief until Antoine came flying back through, a long piece of wood in his fist.

Antoine pinned Lucien to the ground and shoved it into his chest. My whole world stopped as the blood poured from Lucien's chest. I screamed and tried to run to him, but Christopher held me in place. How he kept me in that chair, I'd never know, because I fought him with everything I had in me. Christopher forced my gaze back to the floor where Lucien was on his hands and knees, coughing up blood.

Tears streamed down my cheeks as I watched helplessly. Lucien looked up at me and smiled.

"*Je t'aime, Peter,*" his voice slid through my mind, "*means I love you.*"

I remembered his words to me before we'd walked into the library. It was bittersweet to hear it now, like this, but I clenched my jaw tightly, fighting back the tears. "Then end this," I begged.

I knew he'd heard me when he nodded, but I realized it was too late when Antoine grabbed him from behind and pressed a dagger tightly to Lucien's neck. "Who ... is Master here?" Antoine hissed.

Lucien's hand went up suddenly and grabbed Antoine's hand over the dagger, wresting it away from him. It sliced across Lucien's neck in the process and blood began pouring out over the floor. In a blur, Lucien was on top and had shoved the dagger through the upper part of Antoine's back. Antoine tried to rise up, but the dagger kept him pinned him to the floor.

Lucien grabbed a handful of Antoine's hair, pulling his head back at a painful angle and sinking his fangs into Antoine's throat. Lucien fed for a few moments, then ripped his fangs from Antoine's throat. "I ... am Master here!"

It was only then that I realized I'd been holding my breath. The tears began again, and I started out of the chair. Christopher let me go this time and I ran to Lucien, slipping in a pool of blood as I neared him and sliding the rest of the way, coming to a stop just inches away. I fell to my knees and threw my arms around him, cursing him even as I told him how much I loved him.

Lucien rolled me beneath him and smiled down at me. Even covered in blood he was the most beautiful thing in the world. He ripped at my jeans and I spread my legs in

invitation. But he didn't move to enter me. He pushed his jeans down to his hips and began humping against me. I threaded my fingers in his hair, holding tight, our eyes locked together. Our hips rocked together in a damned perfect rhythm, both of us working desperately toward the same goal. I kept his gaze, sliding a hand between us to pull at one of his rings.

Lucien growled, and the more I pulled and the more our heated flesh slid together, the louder his growls became. Our rocking became more intense and I could feel the orgasm coming. After only a few more thrusts, my body went taut and I shot. Lucien bared his fangs and I tilted my head back, giving him free access to my throat. As his fangs pierced my neck, his hips rocked hard and heat spread between us.

He pulled away and slid down my body, licking up our come as it pooled just above my dick, then crawled back over me, wiggling his tongue in invitation. I grinned and rose up, flicking my tongue against his, laughing as come and spit dripped onto my chest. Lucien's arms came around me and he laid me back onto the floor, brushing his lips against mine.

"Love you," he said softly.

I lifted my head to look down at us, and the image of us naked in a bloody, sweaty heap flashed through my mind. We weren't completely naked, but we were damned close. I smiled and kissed him again. "Love you, too."

A throat cleared nearby, and I turned my head to see Antoine settled back in Christopher's arms, rubbing at a nasty, but healing, hole in the near center of his chest. I remembered Lucien being stabbed in the chest and frantically

pushed him away, feeling for any sign of a wound. Relief settled through me when I found no holes, only the old scars from his life before. Lucien smiled knowingly and got to his feet. He held a hand out for me and I took it, letting him pull me up.

I surveyed the room around us, shocked. It looked like it should have taken more people to cause so much damage ... and the blood. There was so much blood covering the floor, some of it starting to congeal, some of it running in a thick line to soak into the Oriental rug a few feet away. Lucien walked over to Antoine and held out his hand.

Antoine stared at it for a moment and then took it, letting Lucien help him up. Antoine and Lucien stood face-to-face for the longest time before Antoine finally smiled. "Yes, you certainly are Master here."

Lucien gave a curt nod.

"And I'm proud of you," Antoine said, wrapping his arms around Lucien. Lucien faltered for a moment, but soon held Antoine just as tightly, nodding his head.

Christopher caught my eye and smiled. "Some things must be done our way."

I nodded my head. I didn't understand it—but I accepted it. Antoine soon let go of Lucien and came to stand in front of me. He studied me for a moment, then smiled genuinely. "Perhaps we can start over."

"That'd probably be best," I said.

Antoine held his hand out, and when I took it, he brought it up, turning my hand over and kissing the inside of my

wrist. "Lucien is very lucky to have someone like you. It is my pleasure to meet you, Peter."

"Mine, too—I think. Let me get the image of you shoving that dagger through his chest out of my head and we'll be okay."

Antoine's expression was sympathetic. "Understandable."

Christopher let out a deep sigh of relief. "Everyone okay?"

I walked over to Lucien and wrapped my arms around his waist, burying my face in his neck. His fingers slid gently through my hair, before he placed a kiss to the side of my head. "I'm fine. Have to feed, again, but I'm fine."

Antoine cleared his throat. "Same here."

"You on bags or live feeds?" Lucien asked.

"Live, right now, but supplementing with bags," Antoine said hesitantly. "Is that a problem?"

"No, not at all," Lucien answered. "In fact, we have both at your disposal."

Christopher walked up and rested his hand on my shoulder as he kissed Lucien. "We're going to go shower first. Same room as usual?"

"No," Lucien said quickly. "My wing; the room right across the hall from mine."

Christopher looked at Lucien in surprise. "Really?"

I moved around where I could see Christopher and Antoine, and they both looked at Lucien in shock. Lucien just laughed. "Really. Don't look so freaked out about it. It's just a room."

Antoine finally smiled, shaking his head. "Whatever you say, Lucien."

"Shut up, or I'll put you in the family wing."

Christopher snorted. "Which is where I've been for seventeen fucking years."

Lucien reached over and whapped Christopher hard on the back of the head. "Watch it, or you'll be right back over there."

"Yes, Master," Christopher teased.

Before Lucien could get to him again, Christopher was suddenly gone, a light mist in his place moving quickly for the door. I couldn't help but laugh. Damned vampires and their tricks; it seemed that every time I turned around, I was seeing a new one.

* * * *

My stomach growled as I rounded the corner for the kitchen. That wine and cheese had been oh-so-good but it had lasted not-so-long. I needed food—real food. Simon wasn't anywhere to be seen, and the rest of the staff had pretty much disappeared once the library had been cleaned up. As I neared the kitchen, I caught the distinct scent of something cooking. My stomach growled again, and I hurried to see if Simon was actually cooking.

I stopped dead in my tracks when I walked in to find Christopher sitting at the bar, newspaper spread before him, a cup of coffee in one hand and a half-eaten biscuit on a plate in front of him. He looked up at me and smiled. "Hello, Peter!"

"Hey..."

"Hungry? There are more biscuits in the oven, keeping warm."

I walked a little closer as he took a small bite of his biscuit, then took a sip of coffee. "You're actually eating that?"

A small smile started across his face. "It's really the one thing I crave, and I indulge when I can."

"Yeah, but how?"

"You want to know how I'm eating, but not why I'm awake at eleven-thirty in the morning?"

"I have a feeling those two things are related," I grumbled. "So, by you answering one of those questions, it's probably going to answer a shitload of mine."

Christopher studied me intently for a moment, and I met his eyes expectantly. He finally sighed and gave a slight smile. "I don't know who you are or where you came from—but I like you."

"I'm thrilled." I moved to the oven and peered inside. Oh yeah, I could eat a biscuit ... or two. I grabbed a plate from the cabinet and got out two biscuits. When I stepped back to the island, Christopher had gotten out the butter, honey, and several jams and set them near me.

"Coffee?" he asked, as he refilled his own cup.

I shook my head. "Nah, not really in the mood for coffee. Tea would be nice, though, if I can find it." I started rifling through cabinets and finally found the box of vanilla caramel. I held up the box and smiled. "This ... is better than coffee."

Christopher raised an eyebrow. "Yeah?"

I nodded and grabbed the teakettle from the stove, filling it with water. "Oh yeah; I'll make you a cup."

Christopher chuckled and sat down again, turning his attention back to the newspaper and his biscuit. I watched

him until the tea kettle whistled and then made two cups of tea, putting in cream and sugar to bring out the flavor, and brought them over to the island, setting one of them down in front of Christopher.

He picked it up and smelled it, taking a small sip. He made a sound of approval and smiled. "Damn, it *is* better than coffee!"

I nodded.

Christopher closed the newspaper and pushed it aside, resting his elbows on the bar and cradling the hot cup of tea between his hands. He watched as I sliced open my biscuit and spread butter on it before finally clearing his throat. "Did you and Lucien have a chance to talk before dawn?"

I shook my head. "No. We were lucky that he was able to feed and shower."

Christopher nodded, but kept looking at me.

"What?" I asked, growing uncomfortable under his gaze.

"Just trying to figure out where to start." He sighed. "I don't know whether to tell you about my eating and being awake or..."

"Or?"

"Has Lucien told you how he came to be here?"

"Sort of," I said, taking a bite of a buttered biscuit spread with honey "I know that he never wanted to be here."

"He told you that?"

I nodded.

"Do you understand what happened this morning?" Christopher asked hesitantly.

Images of the fight flashed through my mind again, and I pushed them away, taking a sip of my tea. I nodded slowly as I put the cup down. "I understand it. I just don't understand why it had to be so violent. They could have killed each other."

"They very well could have." Christopher sighed again. "As human as we try to be at times, the cold, hard fact ... is that we are not. This is a violent world, Peter."

"I know that," I said quickly. "And really, that doesn't bother me as much as I'm sure it's supposed to."

"Then what does bother you?"

"Losing him, for one."

"The other?"

"Why did you come early? Why didn't you tell him that Antoine would be coming with you?"

Christopher smiled. "And let him have the time to prepare for meeting Antoine as his Master? Peter, Lucien has had one foot in here and the other in New York for far too long. This was the only way to get him to realize that Texas is where he well and truly belongs. While he acts as Master, he has never really become *the* Master. Now that he's done that, his powers and territory should flourish."

I hated that it made such perfect sense. "Lucien came here from New York?"

Christopher nodded.

"And you and Antoine are ... what? Lovers?"

He bit at his lip. "I'm not quite sure what we are, myself. I have a family, he has a family, but we're not really complete without each other."

"That sounds terribly like a riddle."

He sighed heavily. "Believe me, it's a riddle to us, too. One moment we're distant friends, and the next we're bonded so tightly together that being apart is, quite literally, painful. Believe me, it hasn't been an easy road to travel."

"I would guess not."

He was silent for a long while after that, paying close attention to his tea and biscuit. He finally pushed it away and looked up at me. "About twenty years ago, the vampire who was Master here began causing problems. He pretty much went crazy, killing humans, killing his own people. The Council tried several different approaches in dealing with him, but none of them worked."

"What Council?"

"The Council of Elders. They're our governing body. They make the rules—the laws that we abide by. Lucien may be Master vampire of this coven, but he still answers to the Council. If he were to break one of our laws, the Council would see to his punishment."

"Okay," I said, strangely intrigued that vampires actually had rules and laws.

"Anyway, the Council contacted us to search within our covens to find a young Master who was strong enough to take over this coven and get things back into shape."

"So I guess Lucien had to fight for that, too?"

Christopher nodded. "He issued a challenge, the old Master accepted. In less than an hour, Lucien had assumed control of the entire coven and the old Master's properties."

"Which Lucien couldn't give a shit about," I grumbled.

"No, he never did," Christopher said. "He came here and did as he was appointed to do."

"And the problems for the Council had been solved," I said bitterly.

"Actually, it solved that problem, but created a few more." Christopher sighed. "For one, Lucien was an Enforcer."

Great, another term I wasn't familiar with. "Enforcer?"

"Just like it sounds. They enforce the laws and carry out executions of rogues, revenants..."

"Yeah, yeah, okay. I get it. That actually makes a hell of a lot of sense; knight ... Enforcer? I can see it."

Christopher smiled. "He's told you he was a knight, then?"

I nodded. "With all of the scars he has, he'd have had to tell me something."

Christopher got up from his stool and walked to a window, trying to open the blind. He seemed disappointed when the blind opened to reveal metal shutters. "Every member of the Enforcer team is on a serum."

"What kind of serum?" I asked hesitantly.

"It allows them to withstand the rays of the sun, to not be tied to the sleep of death at dawn. It also decreases the need to feed as much or as often."

My eyes went to the crumbs on Christopher's plate, and I swallowed hard as the realization set in. "You're on it, too."

Christopher turned toward me, but made no move to come closer. "I developed it. We attempted to keep Lucien supplied here—to keep him on the serum. But after about a year, we had to stop the shipments."

"Why would you do something like that?"

"Over the course of that year, we had five shipments of the serum intercepted; two were by hunters, who then refilled the vials with a colloidal silver compound, and three were by power-hungry vampires. It was decided by the Council, that the serum was too dangerous to risk transporting."

I slid off the stool, my anger rising. "How long was he on it?"

"A little over five years."

"Five years?" I clenched my fists, taking a deep breath. "You essentially gave him his life back after being tied to the darkness for nearly four hundred years, and then you send him here only to take it all away? That's like killing him all over again, isn't it?" Christopher looked away and I stepped toward him, grabbing his jaw and forcing him to look at me. "Isn't it?"

He pushed my hand away. "Yes, it is. And stopping the serum is hard. It's like dying all over again. That ... is why I've been coming here for seventeen years."

I reared back and decked him, surprised both at the blood that began to trail from his lip to his chin, and the way he just stood there and took it. "You would *not* be welcome in my house."

Tears fell steadily as I stalked out of the kitchen and made my way back to Lucien's bedroom—our bedroom—and I wiped them away roughly with the palm of my hand. No wonder Lucien hadn't wanted to talk about his past. When I reached the room, I put my hand against the security screen, waiting for it to scan. The green light flashed, and as soon as

my hand touched the doorknob, the door in the corridor behind me opened.

I didn't turn and acknowledge it, but as I turned to close my door, I caught a glimpse of Antoine with a worried expression on his face. I closed the door without a word, heard the steel locks slide into place, and made my way to the bed. Lucien was just as he was when I'd left him, beautiful as ever.

I crawled up and wrapped my arms around his lifeless body, burying my face into his chest, and I cried; for him, for what he'd been through, and because I couldn't imagine going through it myself.

Chapter Thirteen

I awoke to the clicking sound of someone typing away at a keyboard. Lucien wasn't beside me, and it took me a moment to figure out that I had to move to the edge of the bed and pull back the curtain before I could look out into the rest of the bedroom. As I moved the curtain out of the way, I was surprised to see Xander instead of Lucien. "Where's Lucien?" I asked.

Xander didn't respond right away, continuing on with his typing. I wondered if he'd even heard me, but before I could ask again, he pushed away from the desk and looked at me. His expression wasn't entirely friendly. Either that or he was worried. When I heard his voice, I opted for the second. "He should be back at any time."

"Where is he?"

"Smoothing over things with Christopher, for one; feeding, for another."

"Oh," I said softly. "So he...?"

"Oh, yeah, he knows." Xander stood and walked to the bed, pulling the curtain back long enough to slide into the bed to sit beside me. It was only then that I realized he was wearing nothing but a pair of thin, black cotton shorts.

"Is he pissed?"

"At you? No. He's more pissed with himself because he never told you." Xander pulled his legs up to his chest, wrapping his arms around his legs.

"So you know all about it, too?"

Xander sighed. "I never knew the whole story—still don't. But since I was here when he went off the serum, I do know how bad it was." He looked down at me and gave a weak smile. "It was bad, Peter."

"Did I fuck things over with Christopher?"

He let out a long exhale. "I don't think so. I think he just needs some reassurance that he is, indeed, welcome here."

"Why would he think he wasn't?"

Xander shrugged. "Well, you pretty much told him that he wasn't."

"No, I said that *if* it were my house, he wouldn't be welcome here."

"Peter? This *is* your house. Your word is as good as Lucien's."

"Fuck!" I threw the sheet off and started to get up.

As I crawled to the end of the bed, the curtain swept open before me. I looked up to see Lucien, pinning me with an intense gaze. It made me nervous to have him looking at me like that. He'd looked at Antoine the same way just before they tried to kill each other. "I'm sorry, Lucien."

Lucien kept his eyes trained on me. "Xander? Get him some clothes."

"Yes, sir," Xander said, quickly getting off the bed and leaving the room.

Lucien let the curtain go before me, and I couldn't bring myself to open it to look at him. I didn't have to. The curtain on Lucien's side of the bed slid completely open. He didn't make a move to crawl onto the bed and I sat back on my

knees, watching him as he stared at me. After a little while, I couldn't take it anymore.

"Say something ... please?"

"I don't know *what* to say."

"Did you get things smoothed over?"

"Somewhat," he said. "It will be for you to let them know they are still welcome."

"If it were up to me? They wouldn't be."

Lucien dropped his robe, revealing his nude form, and crawled across the bed, resting on his knees before me. "I am sorry that I didn't tell you all of this before..."

"I understand why you didn't, Lucien."

"But what's done ... is done. We cannot change it; we can only get past it."

The tears that I thought I'd gotten rid of burned at my eyes again, and I reached out and cupped the back of his neck with one hand, running the thumb of my other hand over his lips. "But they hurt you so much."

He kissed at my thumb. "It hurt them to send me here as well, Peter. It wasn't a decision that they came to easily. Even though it's hard to think about at times, I'm not angry about it anymore. They're still my family."

I dropped my hands and sighed. "I didn't think before I reacted, and I didn't realize what kind of position it could put you in."

"And I assure you, Christopher understands your reaction. He would be the same way in defending those he loves. But..."

"I'll talk to him," I said before he could finish.

Lucien smiled. "Funny, though, I think he likes you more now that you've decked the shit out of him."

"That must be some weird-ass vampire thing. You all seem to like a little pain with your pleasure."

He moved forward and pushed me back onto the bed, nipping at the skin along my throat. "Do not pretend that it does not get you off as well."

"Everything with you gets me off." I moaned as he began humping against my thigh, his cock hard and leaking against my bare skin.

Xander crawled up beside us laying an armload of leather clothing on the bed. The leather could only mean one thing. We were going out. But with two extra vampires to entertain, I didn't figure we were going to Rave. I looked up at Lucien. "The Den?"

He nodded. "I hate to push you like this, but..."

I raised my hand, pressing my fingers to his lips. "If I'm gonna be sticking around? I need to get comfortable being there. It's not like anyone's going to be getting up close and personal with me."

"Well," he said hesitantly. "They're going to tonight."

"What? Why?"

"Simply put? They need to know who you are and where you stand."

"Show and tell, huh?"

"Yeah."

Xander cleared his throat. "If at any time Lucien has to leave your side, I'll still be there. But I guarantee you, they will show you nothing but respect."

"Probably so much respect, at times, that it'll make you gag," Lucien added. "There will be, however, quite a few Lycans at the club tonight."

I reached out, sliding my hand along Xander's arm. He was being downright friendly, and I wondered just how long it would last. "Well, I know one of them; that ought to help."

Xander moved closer, stopping to nuzzle against Lucien's shoulder before stretching out on his side. Lucien smiled. "Even though he's bound to me, he's one of the most powerful Lycans we have. N'est ce pas, mon loup?"

"Oui, Maître." A low rumbling growl came from Xander, and it raised every hair on my body. Xander leaned forward, running his tongue lightly along the length of my throat. When he nipped me and pulled at my skin with his teeth, I arched beneath Lucien.

"Oh, fuck..."

"Soon enough," Lucien whispered. "Xander? Go into the bathroom and get the piercing kit."

Xander grinned and slid off the bed, and I looked back to Lucien. "Now?"

"Change your mind?"

My heart was suddenly pounding in my chest. "No, but..."

"No buts, Peter. Xander will pierce you when it's time."

"I just thought you were going to do it."

"I was, but I would rather have Xander do it so that it's right and we don't have to take it out and do it again—because I fucked it up."

"I hardly think you'll fuck it up."

"Would you rather know that for sure or take the chance of having it done again?"

"Actually, I'd take the chance of having it done again," I said. "I wanted this to be something just between you and me."

Lucien grinned and started pushing my shorts off. "Then I promise not to fuck it up on purpose."

"You fuck it up on purpose and you'll pay, asshole."

He bent his head and began nipping at my chest, working his way down my belly. "Pay how?" he asked before nuzzling his face against my balls.

I arched my hips up against him and threaded my fingers through his hair before pulling his head up roughly. "I'm sure I could figure out *something*."

Something told me that I'd either just fucked up ... or that I had done something really, really right because he suddenly went completely still. "One of these days ... I just might hold you to that."

"That what you need? You need someone to take you there?"

He jerked his head out of my grasp. "No, not someone—you."

Lucien's eyes went from pale blue to black in a matter of seconds, and the red glow in the center was coming on fast. His hand slid up my belly and something scratched at my skin. I looked down to see long claws where his perfectly manicured nails had been. When I looked up at him, there was a long, thin line of blood running from his lip where he'd

been biting at it. I leaned up, licking along the line of blood before sliding my tongue into his mouth, teasing his fangs.

He growled after a few moments and pushed me back down on the bed, pinning my wrists with his hands. His claws bit sharply into my flesh and I winced. Lucien dipped his head, running his tongue along the hollow of my throat. "Tell me you want it," he whispered. "Tell me this is okay..."

There was hesitation behind his words, and when I tried to look at him, he turned his head away. "Look at me," I demanded.

He seemed to have a hard time doing it, but he finally relented and looked down at me. I wriggled one of my hands from his grasp and ran my thumb against his bottom lip. He sighed, and as his lips parted, I caressed one of his fangs, then found the point, puncturing my thumb deep enough that blood immediately pooled inside his lip and began to run down his chin. He looked at me in shock, but pulled my thumb in quickly, sucking hard.

Even though it hurt, the feeling of him sucking at my finger went straight to my cock. I gasped, arching my hips up, trying to make contact with his body above mine. "My body, my blood, and my heart ... it's all yours, Lucien. Stop worrying, okay?"

He let go of my finger and growled down at me. "I can't help but worry, Peter."

I pulled at one of his nipple rings. "I trust you, Lucien—fully and completely. If you think the eyes, the claws, the blood, or even that sexy-as-hell growl is going to bother me ... you're severely mistaken."

"Why can you accept this part of me so readily?"

"Because it's a part of you—and I love you. So give it a rest and just accept it, babe. You're stuck with me. Now, speaking of sticking..." I grinned. "Can we get back to the sex already?"

Lucien let go of my other hand and flipped me onto my stomach so fast that I didn't have time to object. I pushed back against him, but when he started kissing and licking a line down the middle of my back, I couldn't help but relax. Soon, I was crying out my appreciation as he tongue-fucked me into my first orgasm.

Before I even finished spurting my load onto the bed beneath me, Lucien was pushing the head of his lubed cock into my ass. From that point on, everything dissolved into flesh against flesh, fangs, claws, biting, licking, and the frequent, heated kisses any time I'd turn my head enough so that Lucien could reach my mouth. His hands locked together with mine when they weren't grasping at my hips, attempting to hold me in place.

I couldn't seem to get enough of him. As my cries for more got louder, he flipped me onto my back again and shoved his cock into my ass, causing me to nearly pass out at the sensation. He reached over and grabbed something from beside me, and it was only then that I saw the piercing kit, and only then that I realized his claws had disappeared.

I watched in anticipation as he set two needle canulas and two rings on my chest. He smiled, taking one of my hands and leading it to my cock. "Do it for me, baby. Stroke that pretty cock while I work."

"God, Lucien ... hurry," I panted.

He nodded, then stilled me, stopping me from fucking myself on his cock. "Just stroke, this won't take but a second."

I whimpered, stroking furiously as he lined the needle up. The needle was pushed through my skin, pulled back out, and the ring set in place so expertly that regardless of the pain, I was fascinated. My left nipple throbbed and the sensation seemed to go straight to my cock. I wasn't so sure I'd make it through the next piercing without coming.

Lucien grabbed the second needle and pushed it through as expertly as he had the first, and by the time he was setting it in place I was coming, coating his belly and mine. Lucien chuckled, then shook his head. "You weren't supposed to do that yet."

"Don't let that stop you," I said quickly, grinding my ass against him. "Fuck me 'til you come, Lucien. Need to feel you in me."

"You mean you can't feel me in you now?"

I whacked him hard on the shoulder. "Ooh, you're so damned funny."

He bit into his tongue and dipped his head, flicking his tongue against my nipples, letting the blood run into the fresh piercings. I writhed beneath him, enjoying the newfound sensations, feeling like I was about to explode all over again.

"Can't get enough of you, Peter." Lucien pulled away, licking at his lips, looking—and sounding—as if he'd just consumed the best drug in the world. "You taste ... fuck!"

"Are you getting drunk off me?" I couldn't help but ask, trying like hell not to laugh.

He didn't answer so I reached up and pulled sharply at one of his nipple rings. He hissed and thrust hard, making me lose my train of thought. All I could do was cry out as his thick cock started pounding at my ass again. I fisted my hands in the sheets as he spread my legs, opening me up wider, his fingertips bruising my flesh.

The angle he was thrusting in was oh-so-right, and his cock was sliding steadily back and forth against my gland. My belly tightened low, and that familiar tingle was rushing down my spine. I panted, pushing out sharp, steady breaths, trying to stave off the inevitable.

"Fuck, Lucien! Can't hold it..."

He met my eyes, holding my gaze as his thrust became more determined. After a few moments, he growled. "Not yet! Let me in, Peter..."

Let him in? I wondered just what he meant by that, but before I could question him, I felt a slight push into my mind. I nodded quickly. "Always, Lucien."

"See inside of me," he whispered. "I want you to see this through my eyes."

I started to ask him how, but I suddenly felt as if I'd slipped my skin and became a part of him. I was feeling what he was feeling, seeing what he was seeing, and hearing his most intimate thoughts echo through my head. It was so much to take in—too much—and I found myself gasping for air and trying to pull away as if it would help.

Lucien was there, then, comforting me, soothing the sensations so that the experience was no longer painful. "Shh ... it's okay, baby. I've got you."

"Hurt," I said, trying to catch my breath. "But I want to try again."

"You sure?"

I nodded.

I felt the push again, but the feelings and sensations were toned down to a level that I could handle. At first, it was all entirely physical. I could feel what he felt as he fucked me—the tight, slick heat of my ass, the way my skin felt to his touch, the way I tasted as he licked and sucked at the skin of my neck.

It was all suddenly gone as I seemed to slip into another part of his mind. I could still see myself laid out before him, clutching him tightly as he buried himself into me over and over again, but the feeling wasn't at all physical. It was pure emotion.

I followed that feeling carefully, unsure that I wanted to know the depths of it. Almost panicked that it wouldn't be what I needed it to be. The further I followed that connection, though, the more intense it became. My heart felt like it was about to burst through my chest.

"That is what I feel every time you look at me," Lucien whispered. He slowed his movements, sinking down over me, cradling me lovingly in his arms. "Every time you smile, every single time you touch me."

"Me, too," I added quickly, needing him to know I felt the same way.

He chuckled softly and a comforting warmth went through my entire body as he opened his mind to me even deeper. What I saw and felt arched my back and stole my breath. As I gasped for air, Lucien was there, calming, reassuring, coaching me on how to accept what I was being shown.

"Breathe with me," he whispered.

I nodded, my eyes never leaving his as we breathed together. His movements inside of me matched our breathing, and it somehow changed the entire tone of our coupling.

There were soft caresses, lingering kisses, and a change in that lust-driven, hunger-filled fuck that we'd had only a short time before. This was entirely different. We were making love and sharing the deepest, most intimate pieces of ourselves—with each other.

My hands slid around his back, my fingers playing up and down his spine. He gasped and moaned when I hit certain places that I knew were sensitive spots for him, and I smiled knowingly as he met my eyes, silently begging for more. His long, slow strokes had my body tightening up, the orgasm creeping slowly down my spine. I shook my head quickly, tears flooding my eyes at the thought of what we were sharing coming to an end.

"Just let it go, baby," he whispered. "Body, mind..."

"Heart and soul..." I pulled him into a kiss, whispering the words over and over again.

He pulled back slightly, just enough to look into my eyes. The moment our eyes met, my body tightened and writhed against him. Lucien was soon crying out, telling me how beautiful I was as he filled me. As his body shuddered, he

brushed his lips against mine, wiping the tears gently from the corners of my eyes.

Words weren't necessary. There wasn't anything either of us could say that we didn't already know.

* * * *

Xander and I walked in the kitchen to find Simon putting the finishing touches on a salad. Xander walked over and looked at it with a grimace. "Salad? What the fuck is that for?"

Simon rolled his eyes. "Fuck you, Xander. Eat it or don't; I don't give a shit."

Xander turned to me and grinned. "See? He *can* talk like a normal person."

"I'd hardly call you normal," Simon said, shaking his head.

I chuckled as they exchanged insults. The accent was still there, but Simon could, indeed, sound more like a person than a servant. I watched as Xander slid his hands over Simon's hips and nipped his ear. Simon snickered as Xander whispered something I couldn't hear, and by the way Simon's body backed into Xander, I could only assume it'd been sexual.

Everything around here was sexual.

Simon finally shrugged away from Xander and turned toward me, setting a bowl of salad on the island counter.

"How do you like your steak, s...?"

I held my hand up. "If you call me sir, I swear I'll kick your ass."

"But..."

"But nothing," I said. "Here at home, Peter is what I prefer. I understand that there are times when respect for my position has to be made known, but I trust that you know when that is and can use your own judgment."

Xander looked at me wide-eyed. "Well, look who wants to play 'king of the castle' now."

Simon cleared his throat. "So, Peter, how do you like your steak?"

"Rare, please," I said, turning to sit down at the bar.

A short time later, Simon was setting plates in front of Xander and me and making one for himself. I looked over at Xander. "Are we the only ones in the house eating?"

Xander shook his head as he cut into his steak. "Nope. We just eat first. Rules of the house."

Before I could ask what the other *rules of the house* were, Simon damn near fell all over himself as he stood and backed away from the bar, looking at someone behind me. I knew it wasn't Lucien. I turned to see Antoine and Christopher standing in the doorway; they both seemed hesitant about coming into the kitchen any further.

"Come on in and have a seat," I said. "Sit down, Simon."

Antoine walked in first and took a seat beside Simon, but before Christopher could sit down, I stood and cleared my throat. "Not you, Christopher. Can we talk?"

Christopher sighed and started back out of the room. I followed, and when he leaned against the wall and shoved his hands in his pockets, I moved to stand in front of him.

"Look," I said. "I'm sorry about earlier."

"You've nothing to be sorry for." He shrugged. "You were reacting to something that hurt someone you love."

I nodded. "That's just it, I was reacting. I didn't stop to think how Lucien may or may not feel about things now."

"Sending Lucien here was hard, but the decision to stop the serum was probably harder. I would not have wished that on him."

"But, what's done is done," I said. "And as Lucien said, all we can do is move forward. What I said earlier was wrong, Christopher. If Lucien can forgive the things in his past, I can, too."

"We love him, Peter. You must understand that," Christopher said quietly.

"I do. And you and Antoine are both welcome here. I want that cleared up."

"Thank you." He leaned in and brushed his lips against mine. "I'm glad Lucien has found someone to love him enough to get pissed when he's been wronged."

I smiled as I pulled away. "Are you two coming to the club tonight?"

"For a while, then I think we're going to beg off and go exploring on our own. As much as I want to visit, I want to spend time alone with Antoine."

I nodded. "I can understand that."

Christopher slipped his arm around my shoulders as we made our way back to the kitchen. "You and Lucien are always welcome to join us, Peter."

For some reason, I got the feeling that he wasn't talking about joining them while they went exploring, unless it was *in*

the bedroom. "I'm starting to think that fucking is a like a handshake around here."

Christopher chuckled. "Does it make you uncomfortable?"

I shook my head. "No, it doesn't bother me. As long as I know where Lucien and I stand? Anything goes for me."

"Me, too, mon amour," Lucien said.

I looked up to see him leaning against the wall, arms crossed over his chest, and a mischievous grin on his face. He was already dressed for the evening; black leather pants so tight that he looked like he'd been melted and poured into them, a form-fitting shirt that had little flecks of silver in the material, and heavy black boots that came up just below the knee. My eyes went to the very obvious bulge at his crotch, and I could see the outline of his cock through the material. Damn, but that was just sexy as hell!

I moved away from Christopher and went to Lucien, sliding my hands around to cup his ass, nuzzling into his neck. "You look good enough to eat."

He laughed, that low, seductive laugh with just a hint of a growl mixed in. "You can eat me any time you want, baby."

Christopher leaned against my back, and I could feel his cock pressing against my ass. I whimpered before I realized it and pulled back just in time to see Christopher and Lucien sharing a kiss. Lucien broke away and kissed me, probing at my lips with his tongue. I opened for him instantly, relishing in his taste. Fangs scraped at my neck and I shuddered, causing Christopher and Lucien both to chuckle. Damn them. Being with Lucien was intense. Being with Lucien and

Christopher would probably be one continuous orgasm. Throwing Antoine into the mix? I probably wouldn't survive it.

"But what a way to go," Lucien whispered.

I smirked. "Temptation, temptation."

Christopher kissed me on the back of the neck and pulled away, looking to Lucien. "Are we riding together?"

Lucien nodded. "I'd like to get there early, though. We've got a lot of people coming in tonight, and I think Peter will be more comfortable if we're already there when they start trickling in."

"Not a problem," Christopher said. "As I was telling Peter, Antoine and I are probably going to take off on our own and go exploring at some point. In all his years, Antoine has never been to Texas."

"Um-hmm," Lucien snorted. "Stay out of the cemeteries, Christopher. Here, you're a lot more likely to find them full of unruly teenagers."

Christopher let out an exaggerated gasp. "Now what the hell would we do in a cemetery?"

"I could think of a few things," Antoine said as he walked up behind me.

I jumped at his voice and turned to glare at him. "Don't any of you make any fucking noise?"

Antoine winked at me. "I make beautiful noises ... as do you. What do you do to him, Lucien, to make him scream that way?"

I blushed and Lucien caught my eye, smiling. "Show him."

I moved toward Lucien, leaning against him and putting my back to his chest. Christopher and Antoine both looked at

me expectantly and I finally raised my shirt to reveal the two new silver rings. Antoine looked at the rings, then up at Lucien.

"And you healed him, too?"

"I wanted to play with them too much *not* to," Lucien said softly.

Christopher bent his head and ran his tongue against an erect nipple. I whimpered and arched toward him. Antoine's fingers pulled at the other ring, and he moved toward me, brushing his lips against mine. Lucien's hands slid around my waist before sliding down my belly and into my jeans. I pushed back against Lucien, grinding my ass against his crotch.

Lucien sighed. "Come on, guys. Knock it off; if we start this, we'll never get out of the house."

Antoine and Christopher both huffed in disappointment as they pulled away. Christopher looked from me, to Lucien, and back to me again. "Maybe later?"

"Maybe," Lucien said, his hands coming back up to rest on my belly. "But right now, I need to get Peter dressed so that we can get to the club."

Antoine slid an arm around Christopher's shoulders. "And we need to do the same, don't we, lover?"

Christopher damn near melted at Antoine's words, nodding, and letting Antoine lead him down the hall. I waited until I heard the door to the wing close, and turned to Lucien. "It's obvious how much they love each other. Why aren't they a couple?"

"It's a very, very long story," Lucien said.

"Is there a short version?"

He shook his head. "Not really. Christopher and Antoine met through Lukas and Catherine—Christopher's partners."

"So Christopher's bi?"

Lucien shrugged. "I wouldn't go so far as to say that. He's had sex with a few women in his time, but he highly prefers men."

"Like you?"

"No," Lucien said. "I was never with any woman because I *wanted* to be. But Antoine never cared one way or the other, and that was the way he ran his coven. If he put you with a woman, you fucked her to make him happy. If he wasn't happy, you paid dearly for it."

"Damn," I said, shaking my head. "That had to have been hard."

"I vowed never to run my coven that way. While there are some circumstances where I'll allow sexual punishment, sex is primarily reserved for pleasure. No one is ever forced to have any sort of relations with someone not of the preferred gender." Lucien sighed. "There are ways that I do things that you may not agree with, but you must understand that in *this* world, I do what is necessary."

I reached up and took his face in my hands. "I know you do."

Something passed through his eyes, but he fought to push it away. "You need to finish eating so we can go."

"No," I said hesitantly. "Not until you tell me what just went through your head."

He stared at me for a moment, and then looked down at the floor. "I'm scared, Peter," he whispered. "Scared that when you see me acting as Master..."

"I've seen you acting as Master," I said, forcing him to meet my eyes. "With Caleb, comforting him even as you grieved with him. You may not have wanted to be here, but you genuinely care for and love your people. I will love you whether you are Master Lucien, my lover Lucien, or Lucien, my friend ... and I will always stand beside you—never against you."

"I don't deserve you."

"Sure you do." I winked. "I mean, after all, you waited over 400 years to find me."

He laughed flicked at one of the rings through my shirt. "And after 400 years, I'm not going to let you go so easily."

"That, my love, is what I'm counting on." I took his hand and pulled him along the corridor leading back to the kitchen.

Lucien sat across from me as I finished eating, making small talk with Simon and Xander as well. The more I watched them interact, the more I realized that, while Xander and Simon served Lucien without question, Lucien treated them more as family or friends than servants. I admired that so much. After I finished eating, Lucien and I excused ourselves and made our way back to the bedroom. As we walked down the long corridor, I reached out and took his hand.

He raised an eyebrow at that, but I just smiled. "I don't give a shit whether it's cliché or not."

* * * *

I shifted for the umpteenth time trying to minimize the bulge of my cock in the leather pants. Christopher smirked at me from across the limo. "Not used to leather?"

I shook my head. "Not the leather, exactly, but the way these fit. I'm not used to wearing come-fuck-me pants."

Lucien snickered beside me. "Stay with me long enough and you will."

Antoine leaned forward, his eyes trained right on my crotch. "I can see why. You always did have the most exquisite taste in men, Lucien."

Lucien slid an arm around my shoulders, drawing me close, ignoring Antoine's statement. *"If you do not like it, I will call for Xander to bring you something else."*

"I'm just not used to it," I sent back. *"I'll get used to it—for you. But don't expect me to wear them all of the time."*

"I'd rather have you naked, anyway." Lucien shifted, smiling. *"Ignore Antoine. He doesn't understand the concept that not everyone wants to bow down and suck his cock."*

I chuckled, then blushed as I realized I'd just given away that Lucien and I had been talking back and forth. I glanced at Lucien apologetically, but when I looked back to Antoine, he winked. I was tempted to slouch down in the seat, push my pants down, and wiggle my cock at him in open invitation for him to suck me off, but the car came to a stop.

Lucien's amused voice filled my mind. *"Maybe some other time."*

I was getting so used to him being in my head and reading my mind that his now-constant habit of offering little

suggestions or little condolences was becoming natural ... and I liked it. I liked the fact that it was such an intimate thing between the two of us. I smiled at Lucien, and he smiled back knowingly as he moved to get out of the car. I followed him, and Antoine followed me, humoring himself by nuzzling against my ass as I stood. Christopher gave him a hard push and Antoine nearly fell out onto the gravel because he was laughing so hard.

Lucien looked at me and shook his head. "By the way they act, one would never know they were both adults and two of the most feared Masters in the country."

Christopher laughed. "If we did not laugh, dear Lucien, we would have to cry at the misery of it all."

Lucien rolled his eyes. "See what I mean?"

I shook my head. "At least we don't have to put up with them for very long."

"You're damned right." Lucien started walking away. "I'm going to open up."

As Lucien made his way around the corner of the building, Christopher leveled his gaze on me. "All joking aside, I know this is a big step for you, Peter. If you need anything at all, just say the word."

Antoine nodded in agreement. "It's a big step for Lucien, as well."

"I know, and I want it to go well because of that." I took a deep breath, blowing it out slowly. "As opposed to before, I know I'm safe. Right now, I'm just nervous."

Christopher slid an arm around me and urged me to start walking. "Nervousness is a precursor to fear, Peter. Some will

mistake one for the other. If you fear them, they will never respect you. Hold your head high and know that *you* are in charge."

"But I'm not," I said in self-defense.

Christopher cleared his throat. "I heard what you said to Simon in the kitchen. That power and authority? It came to you naturally. Now all you need to do is believe it for yourself."

His words made sense, and I nodded. Before I could respond, though, we rounded the corner to see Lucien standing in front of the club, hands on his hips, staring at the ground. I broke away from Christopher, knowing immediately that something was terribly wrong.

I jogged across the gravel, and as I neared Lucien, I wasn't prepared for what I saw.

A vampire was staked to the door, burnt beyond recognition. A sheet of paper, scorched around the edges, had been pinned to his chest by a long, silver sword. On the sheet of paper were the words: "One by one."

The vampire's mouth was open as if he'd been screaming but his fangs were gone. Claw marks were embedded deep into the wood of the door, evidence that he'd been alive and that he'd fought to try to get away.

Lucien's arms were suddenly around me and he was pulling me face-first into his chest. I held onto him tightly, shaking my head in horror and disbelief. "He was alive!" I cried into his chest. "He was alive when they did this!"

"He was," Lucien agreed, rubbing his hands over my back to comfort me.

"Was he yours?" Christopher asked.

"No," Lucien said. "But by the look of what's left of his clothes, he wasn't just a rogue either. I'd say it was a pretty sure bet that he was just passing through, perhaps even looking for a coven."

"We need to notify the Council," Antoine said quietly. "They will expect retribution. Have you had problems with hunters recently?"

Lucien sighed. "Not that I'm aware of. Joshua was killed last night, but we have no details yet. Caleb has assembled a team to investigate."

"This looks like it was done by hunters," Christopher offered.

"If it was, this is the first strike in over six months."

"Perhaps your hunters are looking to make up for lost time," Antoine said quietly.

"Joshua was one of my best," Lucien agreed. "If someone managed to take him, as well as kill him, they know what they're doing. I've called for Silver; he should be here shortly."

I pulled away from Lucien and turned, staring up at the vampire, my horror quickly turning to anger. "Can we bury him?" I asked. "He at least deserves that."

Antoine stepped up beside me. "Will you help me get him down?"

I nodded, and Antoine and I set to work getting the vampire off the door and laid on the ground. I knelt beside him for a moment, wondering where he was from, how he'd managed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. After a

long while, I looked up at Lucien. "You never answered me. Can we...?"

Lucien stopped his discussion with Christopher and knelt down beside me. "If you want to bury him, we'll get it done. I promise. Right now, I need to go inside."

Something other than the dead vampire before us was bothering him. I could hear it in his voice, see it in the way he kept scenting the air. "What's wrong?"

"The smell of death and blood is strong," he said quietly. "Too strong for it to be just from our friend here."

Christopher called out for Lucien, and he stood and turned to follow Christopher into the club. I followed after them only to have them both stop in front of me at the second door. There was blood smeared across the doorframe. Lucien growled and pushed past Christopher to open the door. The scent of old blood hit so strongly that as I followed Lucien in I had to pull the neck of my shirt up over my nose to dull the stench. The sight inside of the club was infinitely worse than the one on the outside.

Chapter Fourteen

Lucien made his way slowly across the dance floor, his gaze locked on the lifeless body hanging from heavy chains in the center. As he walked there was an odd sound, as if the floor were wet. I moved in a little closer, staring at the dark floor for a long while before realizing that the floor seemed to be moving. No, not the floor, but blood moving in a viscous line toward me; old blood, that had been long exposed to the air and would have been dried if there hadn't been so much of it.

I gagged before I could stop myself, the scent of death and decay strong. Burning bile rose in the back of my throat and no amount of swallowing was making it go away. I turned to run back outside before I added the contents of my stomach to the river of blood on the floor. As I did, I ran right into Christopher's chest.

Christopher grabbed and held me at arm's length, even as I fought to get away. "Look at me, Peter."

He wouldn't let me go, so looking at him was about the only thing I *could* do. "The smell," I whispered, swallowing hard.

He nodded and placed his palm over my face. I started to pull away, but my stomach settled so suddenly that I could do nothing but sigh in relief. "How did you do that?" I asked as he pulled his hand away.

"Vampire secrets." He smiled gently. "You okay?"

I shook my head. "I think I need a drink—a strong one."

He slid his arm around my shoulders and ushered me toward the bar. I felt bad about leaving Lucien and turned back to look at him, only to see him standing stoically beside the body. I stopped, considering walking across the bloody floor, but Christopher urged me on. "Give him a bit, Peter. Let him think while he has the chance to do it in peace."

We continued on to the bar, but as we neared the counter, I had to fight to stifle a whimper. There was an empty bottle of whiskey, and beside it was what looked to be a large chunk of meat. Christopher must have seen it at the same time, because he let go of me and moved more quickly toward the bar.

It took everything I had in me, but I forced myself to keep going forward. As I stepped up beside him, I saw the pieces of what looked like a human heart scattered about. One of the pieces had a knife through it, pinning it to the counter with a blood-soaked piece of paper attached. I studied the writing, trying to make sense of the blotchy ink.

The words, as I finally made them out read: *IOU. One bottle of Jack. One stake to the heart.*

Reading those words hit hard. Only a few months back, I'd have welcomed the death of another vampire. But things had changed. *I* had changed.

Christopher gathered up the pieces and walked behind the bar, attempting to pick up a dish towel, but couldn't seem to manage it without almost spilling the pieces of the heart to the floor. I sucked in my breath, clenched my jaw and walked around the counter. I got the towel that Christopher had been

pulling at and opened it up. He put the heart into my hands and began drawing the towel together, covering it up.

He took the cloth-covered organ and moved to place it carefully on the counter. "If you have any doubts whatsoever, now is the time to get out."

"I don't!"

"None at all?"

I shook my head emphatically. "Not a goddamned one."

Christopher smiled and moved to wash his hands. "I'm glad to hear that, because, Peter? Lucien's going to need you. Something appears to be starting, and he's going to need the support."

I nodded that I understood, looking back toward Lucien. Antoine was standing with him now, one hand on his shoulder, and they were talking quietly. Lucien kept shaking his head, as if in answer to whatever Antoine was telling him, and then he pushed Antoine away. I watched as Antoine nodded and walked toward us.

Christopher set a glass half-full of Scotch on the bar in front of me. "Here you go. Calm your nerves, settle your stomach."

I downed most of the liquid as Antoine walked behind the bar and slid his arms around Christopher. "How is he?" I asked, looking to Antoine.

Antoine rested his head on Christopher's shoulder and sighed. "I think he would be better if he would just let it all go—rant and rave and get it all over with, but he's fighting it. Christopher and I are going to take a short walk. Maybe that will help."

Christopher started to object as Antoine pulled him away from the bar. Antoine gave him a stern look, and I knew that he was telling Christopher something that wasn't meant for my ears. Christopher reached out and squeezed my shoulder as they passed me. "Prepare yourself, Peter. I can't soothe your senses when I'm not here. In a few minutes, they will be all yours again."

"Thank you, Christopher."

He nodded and continued walking on with Antoine. A few moments later, the door slammed shut leaving Lucien and me alone in the club. As much as I hated the thought of walking through all of that old, thick blood, I couldn't stand the thought of Lucien hurting and going through this alone. I turned and made my way across the floor, ignoring the wet slapping sound my boots made with each step.

I walked up behind Lucien and slid my arms around his shoulders, deliberately turning us away from the body. "You okay, baby?"

His hands came up, holding my arms close to him. A heavy sigh escaped his lips and he turned his head slightly, brushing his lips against mine. "Honestly?"

"Honestly," I assured him.

"I'm having a really, really hard time standing here in this place instead of killing anything and everything I get my hands on."

I nodded and hugged him more tightly. "I'd be worried more if you *didn't* want that."

"This was the donor that was at the source of the fight the other night," Lucien whispered, his voice sounding unsteady.

"Oh, shit," I said. "This is bad, isn't it?"

"As evidenced by the body before us? Yes, I would say that it is *bad*."

"I didn't mean it like that, Lucien."

"To harm a donor is a crime punishable by death. This? The more I try to put it as being about the fight the other night, something tells me that it was a shot at me more than anything else. Someone went to great measures to make this happen here, at my club, in *my* territory."

"Hunters?"

He stood silent for a moment, then shook his head. "I don't know. All I know is that it should have been prevented."

"What could you have done to prevent this?"

"There is no way that he should have been tortured for as long as he was without me knowing it! Even though he was only a donor, he was still bound to me." Lucien shrugged away from me. "I should have felt that he was in trouble! Maybe if my head hadn't been up my ass—or in *your* fucking head—I might have sensed it!"

His words cut deep, and it took a lot for me to let them go. The hard fact was ... he was probably right. What had it cost him—or Joshua and the donor before us, for that matter—for Lucien to be so deeply involved with me in the past few days? Or months. Hell, Lucien had told me himself how he'd essentially been neglecting his duties as Master for a long while. I didn't know anything that I could say that would make any of this any better.

"I don't want you to have to go through this alone, Lucien. And I'm here the second you need me," I said softly, sliding

my hand into his. "But I'm not so sure that I'm the one you need right now. Deal with this as you need to, and know that I'll be here for you when it's over."

A hard look settled over his face, but he nodded.

I squeezed his hand and turned to walk away. As I did, I caught sight of Xander coming through the door of the club. Instead of coming toward me, he stayed where he was. As I reached him, he took my hand and backed out the door, pulling me along behind him.

"You okay?"

I rolled my eyes. "I wish everyone would stop worrying about me and how *I'm* doing. Lucien is the one..."

"I know, I know," he said. "But if you're going to be sticking around here, you need to be okay. Otherwise, you need to go back to the house ... or something."

"Or something? What the fuck is *or something*? Is that your way of saying you want me out of the way?"

Xander bit at his lip. "I don't mean anything by it, Peter. But shit, we all know how you felt about..."

I grabbed him by the jaw and forced him to look me in the eyes. "I would watch your tone if I were you," I ground out.

Xander gave me a heated look, his eyes flashing a golden hue before settling back to the dark amber color they normally were.

"Never forget that I could rip you to pieces," he spat.

"Alexandre!" Caleb yelled, grabbing Xander by the throat and throwing him to the ground. I didn't know when he'd arrived, hadn't even seen him walk up, but he was pissed. "You forget your place!"

Xander snarled as he got to his feet. "My place is with Lucien, not this ... !"

"Say it," Caleb growled. "I fucking dare you."

Xander glanced at me before turning his full gaze back to Caleb. "Whore," he whispered, drawing the word.

Caleb attacked him, then and they both hit the ground, rolling in the gravel as they each tried to gain purchase. Xander roared as Caleb grabbed him by the throat and slammed his head against the ground. I started for Caleb, to pull him off, but arms came around me from behind. I tried to shake them off, but they held me so tight I didn't have a chance. "Easy, Peter," came Eric's voice next to my ear. "You get too close right now and either one of them could hurt you."

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

Eric shrugged. "We were called."

I looked around after hearing the 'we', only to find that the parking lot was suddenly full of people. When I pulled away again, Eric reluctantly let me go. He grabbed my hand, tugging me with him as he stepped back. "I don't know about you, but I don't feel like having my guts ripped out again any time soon."

"What?" I turned my attention back to Caleb ... and what used be Xander.

In Xander's place was a huge black werewolf, looking straight at me. The look in his eyes was deadly, and it reminded me of the incident at the club. I stumbled back and another set of arms caught me, setting me back on my feet. I

was about to run, when Eric's voice slid easily through my mind. *"Don't run; he's only testing you."*

I closed my eyes, concentrating hard. *"I can't do this, Eric. I..."*

"We will not let him kill you."

"Oh, that's comforting. So he can only maim me?"

"You can do this, Peter. You must or he will never respect you—never understand his place with you. Violence and sex are all he understands."

"I don't want to be a fucking werewolf, Eric," I knew it sounded like begging, but fuck! I didn't give a shit how I sounded.

Eric chuckled, and it annoyed me so much that I opened my eyes, only to find Xander stalking toward me. *"You can't catch what he's got. Xander was born this way; he wasn't turned."*

Xander was on all fours, almost directly in front of me, when a huge guy stepped between us. His long black hair was in dreadlocks and he was dressed in some sort of uniform. When he spoke, it was heavily accented. Spanish, maybe. "This isn't a fair fight, Xander," the man said in a commanding tone.

"And what *is* fair for the human whore?" Xander growled, his voice gravelly in animal form.

Whore. I hated that fucking word. I rushed forward, in spite of myself, trying to get at Xander. For some reason, the thought of him ripping me to shreds was lost in that one word. The man before me held me back easily, though, and Xander laughed at my predicament.

"Silver is right," Eric said, stepping between Xander and me. "Even in human form, this isn't exactly fair."

"First blood," Xander spat, slipping easily back into human form. "First blood and I bow."

"I accept," I blurted out suddenly. "First blood and he bows to me."

Eric nodded in agreement. "But it stops after first blood..."

Eric's words were cut short as Xander lunged at me, knocking me to the ground. I hit hard, but was able to use his momentum to roll him off me. It was a move that he seemed to expect; he grabbed me, rolling me right along with him. I landed on top, though, straddling him, putting me at an advantage. I decked him, expecting to see blood. I expected too much.

I swung again and again, but he blocked every single blow. He arched his hips up, catching me off-guard, throwing me off him. I ended up on my back again, my head slamming hard on the gravel. Stars danced before my eyes, and I did the only thing I could, blocking the blows to my face with my arms.

My vision started clearing, and I tried to push him up off me. Something cold and metal touched against my arm and I felt for it again. A belt. Xander got in a good blow to my jaw, but I managed to get the buckle of the belt loose. I jerked hard and the belt came off easily, surprising the hell out of Xander. He looked down momentarily and I rose up, wrapping it around his neck.

He roared and rolled us, but I held tightly to the belt, determined to get the tip through the end. How I managed

between all of the rolls and blows, I'll never know, but Xander soon ended up on his knees with me over his back pulling the belt back hard, angling his neck at a painful angle. I ripped his shirt off to the side, revealing his neck and shoulder.

"Nooo...!" Xander roared.

I bit down hard at the base of his neck, blood filling my mouth. I didn't swallow, just let it run down his neck and shoulder, staining his light-colored shirt a dark crimson. I let him go after a few moments and leaned forward, pressing my lips to his ear. "I *despise* the word whore."

A hand touched my shoulder, squeezing gently. I glanced up to see Eric with a stoic expression on his face. It was only then that I noticed the shocked faces of the crowd gathered in a circle around us. I released Xander immediately, rising to my feet.

"Are you okay?" Eric sent.

I swallowed hard, the taste of blood both sweet and coppery. Was I okay? Shit. I wasn't sure I knew the answer to that question myself. But I had to be okay. I'd fought a werewolf and had not only survived—I won. I let out a deep exhalation before nodding curtly.

Something brushed against my legs, and I looked down to see Xander on his knees before me, head bowed. It still pissed me off the way he'd been glaring and making cutting remarks since we'd met. I grasped a handful of his hair and jerked his head back so that he had no choice but to look at me.

"You *will not* disrespect me," I growled.

"I will not disrespect you," he agreed softly, his eyes shifting as vampires began circling around us.

"Get up," I said quietly. "Get yourself clean and stay out of my sight."

The crowd parted suddenly, and Lucien stepped forward, the expression on his face less than happy. He stalked over to me and pulled me up into his arms, licking the blood from my chin and lips before kissing me soundly.

"Fighting with him was stupid and careless."

I pulled away, licking and teasing at his lips. *"He was being an ass."*

Lucien growled, attacking my mouth again, shoving his tongue down my throat. *"We'll talk about it later. Now ... Are you ready to be introduced?"*

"Might as well, now that I've given them a show."

Lucien pulled away, brushing his lips over mine repeatedly, as if afraid to let me go completely. I finally turned my head away slightly, shuddering as he kissed and teased along my cheek and the back of my neck as he stepped around me. I laughed, leaning into him as his arms came around my chest. He hugged me tightly and cleared his throat.

"Due to events beyond our control, the club is inaccessible for the night."

Murmurs of alarm and disappointment went through the crowd, and Lucien held a hand up to quiet them. "But ... I have made some last-minute arrangements and we will continue this at the mansion."

"Blood provided?" someone asked.

Lucien nodded. "There will be a small supply, but you are urged to bring your own donors. We will continue with the meeting and introductions there."

"Oh, my God. All of these people in our house, fucking and feeding. That's just ... scary."

"Not scary." He nuzzled against my neck, "Fun; one huge orgy right in our backyard—and I've got *you* to share it with."

* * * *

I sat in the limo, waiting for Lucien to lock up and make a few last minute decisions on what needed to be done to secure everything for the next twenty-four hours. The bodies had already been taken away, with Lucien giving a warning that care needed to be taken with their handling. A cleaning crew had arrived soon after, and I'd watched out the side window as the workers had gone back and forth from the club to the trucks, their suits stained with blood.

The door opened on the opposite side of the limo, and Christopher ducked his head inside. "Lucien still inside?"

I nodded. "Just finishing up."

"Mind if we wait with you?"

"No." I shook my head adamantly. "Get your asses in here and stop asking stupid questions."

Christopher smiled and stepped back, letting Antoine get in first. They sat together across from me, both looking a lot more serious than they had during the ride to the club. Christopher leaned forward, studying me for a moment. "How is Lucien?"

"He seems to be okay," I said. "He's getting things done, directing people around left and right. I think he's a little miffed with me at the moment, as he ordered me to the car to wait for him."

"Ordered you?" Antoine chuckled.

When I didn't laugh, Christopher reached out and put his hand over mine. "He's just overwhelmed right now. Things are shit and he wants you in a place where he knows you're safe."

"Bullshit," I said. "He's pissed at me for fighting Xander."

"More like relieved that you've still got a beating heart in your chest," Antoine said. "Really, fighting with a werewolf? Not a good move."

"What the fuck was I supposed to do? Xander's been jealous as fuck ever since I stepped into the club. I've been nothing but nice and he's..."

"Not been able to find his place," Christopher broke in. "He's always been Lucien's pet."

"Pet or not, I *will not* be called a whore."

Christopher started to speak again, but the door to the limo opened and he sat back, nuzzling against Antoine, acting as if we'd not been talking at all. Lucien slid in and closed the door behind him, but didn't move to sit beside me. I glanced at him questioningly, but he just sighed and sat near the door, staring out the window.

The tension in the car on the drive home was palpable, and I couldn't help noticing the way Lucien kept tapping his fingers against the door impatiently. Upon pulling into the circular driveway, Christopher and Antoine wasted no time in

baling out, saying that as soon as they fed, they'd join us at the gathering.

Lucien nodded, watched them disappear through their front door, and then turned his glare on me. I met his eyes defiantly, and he growled. "Inside. I will not have this discussion outside."

"Assuming that it's going to be an actual discussion," I snapped.

Lucien grabbed my hand tightly and pulled, and I had no choice but to walk behind him—or be dragged. Which sort of reminded me of a caveman pulling his mate back to the cave by their hair, making me chuckle.

"Oh, you think this is funny?"

"No," I answered, even as another chuckle escaped.

He growled even more then, leading me through the corridors until we finally arrived at the bedroom. Lucien slammed the door behind us, making it creak ominously. Oh, yeah, he was pissed.

"Might I ask what the *fuck* you were thinking?"

"When?"

"When you somehow thought that fighting with Xander was a *good* idea!"

"Oh ... *that*!" I grinned, rolling my eyes. "Save the jealous shit, Lucien."

"Jealous? You think I'm jealous?"

I shrugged, heading for the bathroom to clean up. "I don't know what you are—besides pissed—but you're not going to get anywhere by pushing me the fuck around."

"Don't walk away from me, Peter!"

I continued on, but caught sight of myself in one of the mirrors near the bathroom and stopped, seeing my reflection for the first time since the fight. I had a good-sized bruise on my jaw-line and some pretty nasty scrapes from the gravel on my arms, but no actual cuts. I found that amazing as hell. My eyes traveled to my clothes and I grimaced.

The shirt was ruined, which kind of ticked me off. The pants might have been come-fuck-me-pants that were just a touch on the uncomfortable side, but the shirt? I'd loved the way it had fit, the way it had felt against my skin. Now, there were rips and tears and bloodstains—Xander's bloodstains—and it was totally unsalvageable.

Damn. I sighed and pulled it over my head, tossing it into the bathroom. I realized then that it had either grown silent, or I'd been ignoring Lucien completely. I turned to look at him, and he frowned, starting toward me. "Have you heard a word I've said?"

"Me? No." I held my hand up, shaking my head before walking away again. "Not gonna talk to you when you're ranting and raving, acting like a spoiled child who didn't get his way. *I* ... am going to clean up."

"Goddamn it, Peter! Stop walking away!"

"Walking," I said in a singsong voice.

And then I wasn't. I was face-first into the wall, just outside of the bathroom, Lucien at my back, his growls loud in my ear. "You will stop and you will listen to me. You will hear every goddamned word I have to say if I have to tie you to the bed and force it through your stubborn, idiotic fucking head."

I tried to push away from the wall, but he grabbed my hands and pulled them behind my back. I sighed in defeat and sank against the wall, realizing there was no way out of this. "Fine. Let me go."

"No," he snapped. "You lost the privilege of having this be fair when *you* acted like a child and walked away."

"Oh, now I'm the child? You're the one who's pissed off 'cause you can't get me to stay still long enough to yell at me."

His head dropped to my shoulder and he sighed, easing his grip on me. "What you did was stupid and careless..."

"Haven't we been here before?" I asked. "When I fed Eric and..."

"That has nothing to do with this, Peter!"

"It has *everything* to do with this!" I yelled in my defense. "Damn it ... you've got to step back and let me breathe!"

He let go of me suddenly and turned me around. There was less anger in his eyes and a hell of a lot more pain. "I didn't mean breathe like..." I shook my head. "He called me a whore, Lucien..."

"Who called you a...? *Xander* called you a whore?"

I nodded. "I just couldn't let it go. It was like something inside of me snapped and I wanted—needed—him to know that I wasn't going to sit back and take it."

"You should have come to me," Lucien said.

"Why? So you could take care of it and he could continue doing the shit behind your back?"

"Xander has never acted like this before." He sounded weary.

"You've never had me before."

"No ... I haven't." He pressed his fingers beneath my chin, tilting my head back to meet his gaze. "And I'd really, really like to keep you. It's not the fighting; it's not that at all. There is much of that in this world. What scares me the most, is who—what—you're fighting with."

"You still pissed at me?"

"I'm relieved as fuck that you're okay. He could have ripped you to shreds, had you for dinner, and not felt a damn bit of guilt over it later."

"Pissed?"

"Incredibly." He crushed his lips to mine, kissing me hard, his tongue demanding entrance. I opened to him immediately, but instead of continuing the kiss, he pulled back. "And for the record, if you do this shit again, I'll kick your ass myself."

"Yes, *Master*," I whispered teasingly against his lips.

He slid a hand between us, teasing at my dick through the material of my pants. The moment he squeezed, I lost the inability to think or breathe. "Kind of like the way that sounded. Say it again."

I shook my head. I wasn't so sure I wanted to get into the power-play games that came along with that word. "No, Lucien."

"Just between you and me, baby," he said softly, his hand sliding down the front of my pants, fingers playing over my filling cock. "And just for play ... you know you're my equal."

"But you like hearing it?" I groaned as his thumb teased at my slit.

"From between those beautiful lips?" He leaned in and kissed me before pulling back slightly. "Makes me think of fucking," He drew his tongue across my lips, "Sucking..."

"Just the word ... Master?"

"Gives me images of you, on your knees, sucking my cock..." Lucien stopped abruptly and turned his head slightly as the door opened. "What is it?"

"I'm sorry to interrupt, Lucien; I have some information on Joshua."

Caleb. Had to be important. I lifted Lucien's hand from my pants and kissed his palm, drawing my tongue along his fingers. "We'll finish this later."

He caught my hand before I could pull away completely and kissed me softly. "Love you, Peter."

I smiled against his lips. "I know."

* * * *

"What happened to you at the club?"

"I got word from one of the scouts that a body had been found in an alley ... near Rave. Morgue had already been there, but word on the street was that there was a huge hole in the victim's chest. Thought it was worth checking out."

"And?"

"It was Joshua."

I heard Lucien sigh, and then his office chair creaked. I peeked out to see him sitting in the chair, arms crossed over his chest, moving the chair back and forth with his feet. His brow was furrowed as if he was deep in thought, but it was

almost as if I could feel him reaching out in desperation, searching for ... something.

He glanced up at me, the look in his eyes tired. *"I'm sorry; I'm trying to stop."*

"It's okay to lean on me, Lucien."

"I know. But before I do, there are things you need to understand."

He broke the connection with me so suddenly that I had to steady myself against the doorway. The feeling I'd been getting from him was gone, and he was back to discussing things with Caleb. After getting my bearings again, I moved to the sink and began to wash up.

It wasn't long before I realized that the only way I was getting clean was in the shower. I had dirt, blood and tiny rocks in my hair—and even down my pants.

When I walked out of the bathroom, Lucien was nowhere to be seen. Caleb was reclining on the bed, propped up on his elbows, licking his lips as he watched me dry off. "Where's Lucien?" I asked, ignoring the way he'd begun to rub his crotch.

"Had to take care of something. I'm supposed to stay here and keep you out of trouble until he gets back."

"I bet." I headed to the closet for more clothes.

I found a pair of leather pants, identical to the ones I'd been wearing before, and pulled them off the hanger. Caleb was suddenly behind me, chest pressed to my back, his hands searching and roaming beneath the towel.

"Come on, Peter." His breath tickled my neck. "Touch me..."

As tempting as it was, I pushed his hands away and started pulling on my pants. Caleb watched patiently, but when I started out of the closet, he stepped into my path.

"Do I displease you?" he asked, his voice hushed.

"Displease me? Hell, no," I said. "But I'm not about to get into a war for positions."

"There would be no war." He seemed confused. "Why would you say that?"

"This shit with Xander for one..."

"I am *nothing* like Xander. Unlike him, *I* know my place, and I know exactly who it is that I serve."

"Right." I nodded. "Lucien. And I'm not about to go fucking this up with him because I can't keep my dick soft. Things already happened with Eric, and Lucien was fucking pissed."

"I'm not Eric." Caleb smiled. "And I think you're forgetting one other detail in that. He was pissed because Eric nearly fucking killed you."

"No, he was jealous."

"I don't believe that Lucien was jealous in the way you are thinking. It wasn't about you fucking around with Eric, but the fact that if you'd had to be turned, *Lucien* wouldn't have been the one to do it."

Thinking back to the argument between Lucien and me in my kitchen, I knew he was probably right. But still ... Sure, we'd talked about playing together and sharing when he fed, but this? This was totally different; this was playing individually and us being totally okay with it. And truth be told? I really wasn't okay with him playing without me.

I pushed past Caleb. "That may be, but this isn't happening."

"What isn't happening?" Lucien asked as I walked into the bedroom.

He was leaning against the corner post of the bed, ankles crossed, his thumbs tucked into the waist of his pants. "You been out here listening?"

"No," he answered evenly. "If I'd been listening, I wouldn't have asked. What's going on?"

"He's afraid to play with me," Caleb said from behind me.

Lucien lifted an eyebrow. "Really? Why?"

"After the shit with Eric? Oh, we're definitely talking about that kind of thing first."

"Caleb is not Eric. Caleb is..." Lucien paused, watching as Caleb crawled across the bed, making himself at home.

"Caleb is ... special."

"Oh, I gathered that. But..."

"Caleb, love? Give us a few minutes here and go let everyone know that we're about to begin."

Caleb rolled and stretched on the bed, his shirt riding up to show a long, jagged scar down the middle of his belly. Before I could get a good look, though, he was up off the bed and walking to the door.

"Hurry, Lucien," he said. "You promised them blood, and I can guarantee you that most of them came tonight without feeding."

I waited until Caleb shut the door behind him before speaking. "You know what? I think that the first thing we need to do is have you tell me about you and Caleb."

"Not much to tell." Lucien shrugged. "He's mine."

"Knew that. How long have you been fucking him?"

"Seventeen years, but..."

"Fucked him while we were seeing each other?"

"*Were?* I was under the impression that we still *are* seeing each other and that we're going to be seeing each other for a long, long time to come."

"Just answer the damned question," I demanded.

"No."

"No?"

"No. I have not fucked him since you and I began seeing each other. Matter-of-fact, the only action I've had in these past few months is with my own hand. Happy?"

"Yes, I am. Now, let's go make an appearance."

He frowned at me, shaking his head. "Peter?"

"Yes, baby?"

"Are you going to play nicely with Caleb?"

"Very nicely." I laughed, stepping forward to take his hand. "We'll talk more about this later. At the moment, my curiosity has been sated. Come on, I hear there's a party going on around here somewhere."

He tugged on my hand to stop me from walking. "Peter? Love? You might want to consider a shirt and shoes first."

Chapter Fifteen

I'd found a spot in a corner of the ballroom—out of the way of people dancing, fucking, feeding—trying to rest between introductions. I guessed that I'd been introduced to some two hundred people in about an hour and a half. Needless to say, I probably wouldn't recognize any of them by the end of the night. Well, except for the one couple who'd been fucking when Lucien introduced us.

I'd not been able to resist touching, and I'd come away with the sound of some hot blond's moan as he came permanently etched into my memory. Fuck, he was hot. And needy. And ready to do it all again if Lucien and I'd had just a few more minutes to spare. But someone had come to him with an issue, and he'd let a moment of play go to take care of it.

Simon appeared beside me, leaning in to whisper in my ear. "Peter? Mr. Ballard is wishing to speak with you. Do you have a moment?"

"Jack?"

Simon nodded. "I told him you were busy, but I would see if you could spare a moment."

I wasn't exactly looking forward to another fight with him about how Lucien wasn't right for me and how I was making a huge mistake. I sighed heavily, getting to my feet. "Where is he?"

"He's in the kitchen. Would you like me to bring him to you?"

I shook my head. "That's okay, Simon. I'll go to him."

"Very well," he said, giving a curt nod.

We walked to the kitchen in silence, mainly because the music in the house was so loud that we couldn't have heard each other speak anyway. Just before we turned the corner to go into the kitchen, someone called out Simon's name. He excused himself to find out what they wanted, and I continued on.

I walked into the kitchen to find Jack standing near the refrigerator, arms crossed over his chest as if he were afraid to touch anything. I walked a little further into the room before speaking. "Jack?"

He jumped and turned toward me before rushing over and throwing his arms around my neck. As he hugged me tightly, he let out a sigh of relief. "I was so afraid you wouldn't see me."

I pulled back, holding him at arm's length. "Well, if you're here to dig in even further about Lucien, then I'm not going to be seeing you for long."

"About that," he said softly. "I'm sorry for being such an ass about it all. I did to you what other people did to me when I met Mike. I had no right to judge or try to tell you what was right for you."

"You trying to warn me off Lucien wasn't the only thing that pissed me off. Ten years that I've known you, Jack. That's a hell of a lot longer than the time I had a vampire phobia."

"Had?"

"Jack," I said in a warning tone. "I'm not playing."

He sighed. "When you started working at Rave, I liked you—really liked you. And so did Mike. We liked you so much, though, we were afraid that something like 'hey, he's a vampire and I'm his dinner' might scare you off. Then? The further along it got, the harder it was to just spring it on you, you know? We kept saying we'd tell you when the time was right, but after a few weeks, months, and then years? It didn't even seem to be an issue. Especially not with our schedules. And then the incident at the club happened, and well, we decided it was better to keep it quiet."

"We shared everything," I said, shaking my head. "What I'm wondering now is what else have you lied about? What else has been conveniently forgotten?"

"Nothing," Jack said. "I swear to you, Peter, there's nothing else!"

"Mike works?"

"At the club, for Lucien; he was lucky to get such a good position so soon after a new Master taking over."

"Which is why you two spent so much time there."

He stepped in close, biting nervously at his lip. "I'm sorry, Peter ... for all of it. I *need* my friend back. I've missed you!"

"Don't lie to me again," I warned. "Lies of omission—are still lies."

"I swear, I won't!"

As much as it'd hurt to have everything kept from me that way, I missed him, and I wanted him back in my life. I leaned in and pressed a kiss to his lips. "I've missed you, too, Jack."

He let out a small gasp of surprise, and instead of returning the kiss, he pulled away, stumbling as he tried to step back. "Damn it, don't do that, Peter!"

I lifted an eyebrow. "Do what? What the hell is wrong with you?"

He turned away, shaking his head, steadying himself against the counter. "I don't want to cause trouble. Oh, my God, if he were to see that..."

"Jack, what the hell is wrong with you?" I asked, stepping up behind him. As I started to hug him, he tried to shrug away. "Talk to me."

"Fuck! I am so far beneath you at this point..." he murmured.

"Beneath me?" I asked in confusion. Then an image of Jack on his knees before Lucien flashed through my head and I suddenly realized what he was babbling on about.

I closed my eyes and let out a deep breath, concentrating hard on Lucien. It was always easier when he started this shit first. *"Lucien Delacroix? I demand your presence in the kitchen. Now!"*

"I did nothing wrong," Lucien sent back a few seconds later. *"I swear."*

"Just get your Master ass in here."

"Patience, my love; I'm coming."

"We're gonna get this settled, right here, right now," I said, resting a hand on Jack's shoulder. He flinched, but I squeezed gently in reassurance.

I knew the exact moment that Lucien walked into the room, without even having to see him. "Lucien, my love,

maybe you can help me to understand this little issue I'm having with Jack."

"I will do my best," Lucien said, moving to stand beside me.

At Lucien's voice, Jack turned and fell to his knees bowing his head. Lucien looked at me and raised an eyebrow. *"What is this?"*

"This ... is what I'm hoping you can help me understand. He was fine, same old Jack. We talked, we made up, but he freaked out when I kissed him, and every time I touch him he freaks out just a little more, saying something about being beneath me?"

Lucien's brow furrowed in concern, and he crouched down on the balls of his feet, touching Jack on his shoulder. "What seems to be the problem, Jack?"

"I know the penalty," he whispered.

"That is not how I run this coven," Lucien said evenly.

"Do you know what he's talking about?" I asked.

Lucien nodded. "The old Master—Malik—ran the coven under a very heavy hand. It was very much run by a hierarchy of positions and stations. To be of a lower station and interact, however simply, with someone of a station higher than yours—the penalty was death. The deaths were public and long and very drawn out. If the offense was made by a human servant, like Jack, the vampire he was bound to would be put to the same punishment, thus resulting in two deaths instead of one. There are those in the coven now, who were under the old regime, that still have moments like this at times."

"But you're not like that."

"No, but when some things are ingrained into your head—a certain way—it's very, very hard to forget them." He shifted on his feet and pressed his fingers beneath Jack's chin, tilting his head back. "Jack is the last person I expected this from," Lucien said, almost inaudibly. "I will fix this."

"I want him back—normal."

Ten minutes of Jack with his head bowed and Lucien with a look of utter concentration led to Jack passing out on the floor. Lucien rose, shaking his head. "He needs some rest, but he'll be good as new tomorrow."

"Will he remember all of this? Us talking and all?"

Lucien nodded. "For the most part. Some of it might be a little fuzzy, but there's nothing I can do about that. Any time we toy with the mind, there are consequences that can't be avoided."

I pulled him close, sliding my arms around his shoulders. "Thank you, Lucien."

"Not only is he your friend, Peter, he is mine. I do my best to take care of my people."

"I know you do." I smiled, pressing a kiss against his lips. "Help me get Jack to a room?"

Mike's familiar voice floated softly through the room. "I'll take him."

"Mike!" I turned, rushing toward him, wrapping my arms around his neck.

"He said he was coming to talk to you." Mike looked at Jack, curled up on the floor, shaking his head in disbelief. "I never would have expected this."

"Believe me. I certainly didn't either."

He pushed me away gently. "I'm sorry for not telling you about me myself. It just got easier as time went on..."

"I know," I said, pressing my fingers his lips. "Jack and I *did* get that far. Still hurts like hell, but I understand."

Lucien's arm slid around my waist as he stepped up. "Mike, you're welcome to stay here tonight. There are plenty of rooms available in the east wing."

"I don't want to be any more of a burden," Mike said hesitantly.

Lucien pulled Mike in with his free hand and leaned forward, pressing a tender kiss to Mike's lips. "No burden at all, my child," he whispered. "Simon is getting you a room ready as we speak."

"Thank you." Mike looked at me. "Don't be a stranger, okay?"

"Not gonna happen." I smiled at him. "Need help with Jack?"

He shook his head. "We're fine. Go on ... celebrate."

Lucien urged me toward the door, and as we walked out, Lucien sighed. "You and I need to talk, before any sort of ceremony takes place."

"Didn't we do that already?"

He shook his head. "No, not this. This? Was what I was supposed to talk to you about the first night we slept together."

I closed my eyes and let out a long sigh. "Can we stop with the bad news already?"

"That first morning, when Xander *serviced* you? Do you remember how you felt then?"

"God, I wanted to fuck anything and everyone in sight," I said. "Xander said it had to do with ... your blood. I never did find out anything more."

Lucien nodded. "I didn't manage to tell you that day, as you were so very ... wanton."

"You do that to me, baby. Make me want, make me need."

"But that's just it," Lucien said. "It's a certain part of me making you feel that way."

"That part is good, but I'm pretty sure it's *all* of you that makes me feel that way."

Lucien shook his head in disagreement. "Do you know what an incubus is?"

"A cunning little bitch that fucks people in their sleep, draining them through their orgasms?"

"That is a succubus, Peter, the female form of what I am. Incubi are male."

"You fuck me in my sleep?" I laughed. "So not necessary, baby; you can fuck me any time."

Lucien growled, rolling his eyes. "Peter, this is serious, and you need to know it all before you make any sort of commitments or future plans."

"Lucien, baby..." I went to him, catching his face between my hands. "We've been through this already. My future is with you. Whatever this is? We'll deal with it—together."

"I can feed from you as we fuck; can feed just from the sexual energy in the clubs; hell, I can feed off you just getting horny. Being around me, consuming my blood? It can

and will make you do things that you never, ever would have dreamed of before—basically eliminating those inhibitions that keep you from doing stupid things. Antoine is an incubus, and any vampire created by him inherits the trait. It is the same with me—and my own vampires." He sighed and pulled my hands away from his face. "Still think we can deal with that—together?"

I opened my mouth to say something, anything, but found that I had no words. Lucien stared at me expectantly, and I bit at my lip. "That's a little much to take in at one time," I finally said.

"I was afraid if I stopped talking I'd never get a word in," Lucien grumbled.

I let go of his hands, moving across the corridor. I sat down on the floor, leaning against the wall, trying to think it all out. The part about losing the inhibitions had been a definite yes. I'd lost those the moment he'd walked onto the dance floor at Rave the first time. "Did you feed from me as we danced that first time?"

"No," he said softly. "But I think I fed from you in the dream."

"You think?"

"With that first dream? I can be sure of nothing."

There was nervousness in his voice, and I swallowed hard, not wanting this to go wrong. "It's weird ... that you fed from me without me knowing it. But I understand that you have to feed in order to survive. So you've got more than one way to feed. That's ... okay."

"I didn't think you'd have a problem with that part."

"It's not that I have problems with the rest. It's that I have so many questions. And ... I can't help but have this fear that nothing was real. That nothing was real because it was that part of you influencing everything."

"I've done a lot of shielding, Peter."

"It's why you're so comfortable with sex and feeding," I said, my thoughts becoming verbal. "Why you're so okay with me playing, because you essentially *play* all of the time."

"Peter, I..."

"No," I said, looking up at him suddenly as I got to my feet. "I'm just trying to fucking understand. Okay?"

"I cannot change who—and *what*—I am. It is simply ... impossible."

"Honestly? I wish you'd never told me this. I'd rather not have the questions behind every single thing we do or say."

"I will not keep things from you, Peter. Even if it's to ease your mind. You will know it all and accept it, or..."

"That is not an option," I said, my gut clenching at the thought of not being with him. Then I wondered if that was a part of it, too, needing to be with him so much it hurt. I shook my head, realizing I didn't give a damn. "I still stand by you, by the decisions that I've made."

"The questions will plague us at every turn."

"No. You know why? Because I'm not going to believe that you and I were—are—the result of some *incubus* part of you. What we have is good and right, and is everything and more than I could have hoped for."

"Peter..."

I stepped up, sliding my arms around him. "And don't tell me that it isn't," I growled against his neck. "Don't you fucking dare!"

A throat cleared nearby, and Lucien and I both jumped, startled. When I saw Christopher and Antoine, I let out a small sigh of relief. I certainly didn't want anyone else hearing this. As Antoine walked toward us, though, the look on his face was serious. "We were nearby and..."

"I could feel Lucien," Christopher interrupted. "Could feel him hurting ... and sick."

"And we came to see what was up," Antoine told us. "Catching your conversation."

"You've been listening?" I asked. "That is so totally ... rude."

Antoine shrugged. "I've not often been called nice."

"I'm fine," Lucien said, looking at Christopher and Antoine. "If you want to go ahead to the ballroom, we'll ... uh ... I'll be there shortly."

I jabbed him hard with my elbow. "We will be there shortly."

"Not until you hear what we have to say," Christopher said. "We went through a similar situation years ago. When Antoine and I bonded, I had no idea that he was an incubus as well."

"He freaked," Antoine said.

"Shut up, I'm getting to that," Christopher said, looking to Antoine, then back to me again. "I freaked because I didn't know if everything I'd felt for him was actually *for* him, or *because* of his incubus."

"And?" I asked, growing impatient.

"We soon found out that the more of his blood I was exposed to, the less his incubus had an effect on me. Essentially, I developed some sort of immunity. Sure, I still wanted him, needed him—even craved him—but it was just that. It was *him* that I wanted."

"I've had Lucien's blood," I said.

"We shared blood for the first time months ago," Lucien added. "I healed a cut on his finger."

"And the building of immunity started even then." Christopher smiled. "Trust me, I've gone through this every single way possible—tested it and retested it—and the results were the same every time."

I let out a sigh of relief before glaring at Lucien. "See? I refuse to believe that what we have is the result of some ... whatever it is that makes you an incubus!"

Lucien stared at Christopher. "Are you sure of this?"

"Absolutely." Christopher replied. "And the only reason we interfered is because I wouldn't have anyone go through what Antoine and I did needlessly. Not when we could help. Now come on! We have a party to attend!"

Lucien stepped forward and pulled Christopher into an embrace. "Thank you."

Antoine cleared his throat. "I'm so glad we could be of service. Christopher? Lover? You promised me eye candy. I would like to call your attention to the ballroom."

"Impatient ass," Christopher muttered under his breath before smiling at Lucien. "Hurry along."

"We will." Lucien slid his arm around me as he watched Antoine and Christopher disappear back down the corridor.

"Peter? There is *one* more thing."

"Lucien ... no," I whined, afraid that it was going to lead to some other long discussion of things I never wanted to hear.

"Yes," he said curtly. "It's just a simple question, but one that will drive me insane if I don't ask."

"What?"

"Do you have an aversion to living longer?"

"That's a stupid question, Lucien," I grumbled, grabbing his hand and trying to pull him down the corridor. "What do you expect to hear? No? That I'd love it if I didn't live long at all? And that I wished to die to leave you here alone?"

"I only ask, because the bonding ceremony will extend your lifespan ... considerably."

"What are you doing; making me your human servant?"

"No, not quite. I just don't want to ruin your chances of being turned later on. Should that be something you choose, of course."

I stopped and turned, pushing him into the nearest wall. "I swear to God, if you don't shut up, I'm going to give your mouth something to do."

* * * *

It had taken a while for us to get back to a mood that was tolerable for the party. Every time I looked at Lucien, he'd seemed to be worried about something else. Three growly conversations later, I realized that he was having the equivalent of cold feet. Except in reverse. Instead of me being

the one to second-guess everything, he was doing it for me—even going so far to think up new ways for me to get out of this with him. That incubus? It wasn't long before I was wishing it'd make a damned appearance already.

While Lucien talked to a couple about the possibility of the vampire turning his human lover, I found a chair and parked my ass, grumbling. I just wanted this to be over and done with so Lucien would stop questioning everything and we could just move on.

Caleb knelt in front of me a little while later, grinning. "What's the matter with you? Looks like someone pissed on your favorite pillow."

"Nothing," I grumbled, staring at the back of Lucien's head as he spoke.

Caleb settled himself at my feet, his head resting in my lap. "You are ... frustrated; something isn't going quite the way you're wanting it to."

I looked down at him, raising an eyebrow. "What is this? Caleb's Psychic Network?"

"Mmhmm." He nuzzled his way up toward my crotch. "Whatever you want it to be."

I could feel my frustrations unraveling at his touch and when I spread my legs, he worked his way between them, wrapping his arms around my hips, laying his head against me. When he made no move to make it any more sexual, I reached down and ran my fingers through his hair slowly, just enjoying the contact.

"I see my worry stone found you," Lucien murmured next to my ear.

I turned my head, my lips brushing across his cheek. "Are you free?"

"I am. Shake him off and come with me."

I cupped Caleb's cheek. "All right, time to move."

"Already?" He groaned and got to his knees.

"Already." I leaned forward and placed a kiss to his forehead. "Thank you, Caleb. I needed that."

"I'm always here." He smiled. "Ready and willing."

Lucien took my hand and pulled me to my feet. "Caleb? Try to stay out of trouble."

Caleb batted his eyelashes, grinning, the look on his face utterly mischievous. "I will do my best. But you know that trouble always finds me first."

Lucien looked at me, shaking his head. "I hate to give him that."

We walked to a set of stairs, and Lucien remained silent, just holding my hand as we climbed them. The nervousness I'd felt from him earlier seemed to have dissipated and he was my old Lucien again. As we stepped up on the landing, he pulled me close. "I'm sorry I was so difficult earlier."

"You should be." I slid my arms around his shoulders. "You've been driving me insane."

He nuzzled against my neck. "Love you, Peter. Don't want you to think that I've tricked you or held things back from you later on down the line."

"Oh, baby," I said, hugging him tight. "Sure, it's all going to take some adjusting to, but in my heart, I know I'm doing the right thing. This is what I want, and I need you to believe

that I'm doing it oh-so-willingly. Gonna have a lot of years together—you and me."

He caught my face between his hands. The look of love and utter devotion in his eyes nearly brought me to my knees. "Once it is done, it cannot be undone."

"I know."

Lucien nodded and let go of me, turning me to face the railing. It was only then, I realized, that the music had stopped and hundreds of faces were turned up toward us, watching, waiting. With one hand low against my back, Lucien gestured out toward the crowd. "When you take on the burden of me, it is inevitable that you take on some of the burdens of my people as well."

I took a deep breath, blowing it out slowly. I hadn't been nervous before, but now it was beginning to creep through me. As I looked down upon the expectant faces, the enormity of the situation took hold. I wasn't just bonding myself to Lucien; I was being bonded to Lucien and the entire coven.

"Are you all right?" Lucien whispered.

"Just ... freaking a little. I'll be all right, I swear."

"If you're not sure, this will stop," he said, pulling away from me slightly.

"No." I slid an arm around his waist and smiled. "I'm sure. I understand, now, why you were so nervous earlier. Sorry for being an ass about it."

He leaned in and nipped at my ear. "How 'bout I just take it out on your ass later?"

My body tightened at his words. "Oh, Lucien ... don't. Not now. You start that and we'll be fucking up here in front of everyone."

"Now that idea has merit."

I jabbed him hard with my elbow. "Come on, let's do this, yeah?"

"Very well." Lucien nodded. "Simon?"

Before I could ask what he needed with Simon, Simon appeared beside us pushing a small cart covered with a white linen cloth. On the table was a knife with a double-edged steel blade and an intricately carved pattern on its wooden handle. Along with the knife, there was a small goblet and a very large bowl, the bowl full of dark, crimson blood.

Lucien took my hand, smiling as he pulled me to stand in front of the table. "We must hurry; before the blood begins to cool. Ours will make it stronger."

He arranged the cup so that it was near us and picked up the knife. "It will be deep and it will hurt like hell."

"I'll be okay," I said.

Lucien handed the knife to Simon. "Hold this until it is time."

Simon nodded, but made no move to leave. I shifted my feet, nervousness making my legs shake. Lucien took my right hand in his left one, holding it tightly. "Blood. For centuries upon centuries it has been considered a sacred, powerful thing. It has been spilt in times of war and in times of peace, for causes both noble and perverse. But for us, blood is not only what we need to survive, it is what cements and signifies the most sacred and powerful bonds of all time.

I have called you all here tonight to witness such a bond. Most of you have met him, mingled with him, begged him for his touch already..."

There was a murmur of laughter through the crowd, and Lucien winked at me before continuing. "Peter has ... without a doubt, made my existence much more than tolerable in the past few months. Except for a few moments of ... *stubbornness* on his part..."

I reached up and pulled at one of his nipple rings through his shirt, grinning. "Watch it!"

"...our time together has made me step back and believe that anything is possible. Which brings us to the ceremony tonight." He paused, clearing his throat. "It has always been said that a Master never shares. If that is the case, then I'm about to break that rule. I already share my life and my love with Peter Hayes..."

"Delacroix," I whispered.

"Peter ... Delacroix?" He chuckled and continued on, "But tonight, I share my coven as well."

Gasps and murmurs of surprise went through the crowd. "But he's human!" someone cried out. "You expect a human to..."

"Silence!" Lucien roared, turning to face the crowd, leveling his gaze on one person toward the back. "It matters not whether he is human, donor, a human servant, or vampire. Do not tell me that you are questioning my decisions."

"No, Master," the same voice replied. "I do not question you."

"It is a good thing," Lucien growled, turning back to me. He squeezed my hand, smiling. "Normally, a bond between us would be done in private—and one might say we've bonded quite well already—but this ceremony officially places you at the head of my table and as joint head of my coven. You are my lover, my friend, my equal in all things. I cannot be anything other than what I am, but everything that I am—I give to you freely."

Tears burned at my eyes with his words, and I struggled to blink them back. I could never be as eloquent and as poignant as he was, but I just couldn't stay silent. "I love you just as you are, Lucien. I wouldn't have you any other way."

He held his hand out to Simon, who was still standing beside us. Simon placed the knife in Lucien's hand, silently, and then stepped back off to the side. Lucien kept his fingers entwined with mine, but slid the knife carefully between our hands. "Don't pull away and don't let go."

"Never," I said confidently.

"Then so shall it be," Lucien said.

He turned the knife just a quarter of a turn so that the sharp edges rested against our hands. The blade bit into me just by the pressure of Lucien's hand on the other side. He grasped the handle of the knife, tightened his fingers against mine, and pulled. I didn't feel anything but a cold, sharp sting. At first.

As Lucien guided our joined hands over the goblet, it began to burn and throb like hell. But I refused to flinch away, watching as our blood combined and filled the goblet quickly. Lucien slid his free arm around me and pulled me

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by Jourdan Lane

close, lowering his voice. "Like the blood in the goblet below, mixing and becoming as one, we cannot be separated."

"Two halves of a whole, Lucien."

"A bond that can never be broken," he whispered. "A bond of friends, lovers..."

"Soul mates."

Chapter Sixteen

I stood on the balcony, watching the crowd below. Once the final dip into the bowl had been completed, the bowl had been taken away. The lights went down, the music came back up, and I could actually feel the sexual charge growing stronger in the room. Lucien had a last minute thing to wrap up, but assured me that he'd be back as soon as possible. I'd sent him off with a kiss and a promise of more when he returned, making myself comfortable in one of the large chairs on the landing.

But now I could feel him in the room—somewhere—and couldn't help wanting to be with him. I started down the stairs, but stopped immediately when I saw Lucien two steps down from me. He had a predatory look on his face and I winked, backing up the stairs.

"Where do you think you're going, love?"

"Back up? I'm not sure at the moment whether you want to fuck me or eat me."

"I've told you before; if you want me to eat you—you're in the wrong fairy tale."

I rolled my eyes and turned, attempting to run up the stairs. I didn't make it far. Lucien grabbed my legs and pulled them out from under me before pinning me, one knee between mine and a hand at each wrist. "Oh, please, don't bite me," I said, doing my best not to giggle as I feigned fear.

Lucien growled in my ear. "Oh, I'm gonna bite you; suck you; lick you..." He thrust his hips against my ass. "Fuck you."

I managed to pull a hand out of his grip and slide it behind me, cupping and squeezing at him through his leather. He was already hard and I didn't bother to suppress my moan. "Yeah? Gonna fuck me right here? On the stairs?"

"Oh, no." He wrapped an arm around my chest and hauled me up to the landing. He flicked his tongue against my ear. "Don't you think this will be better?"

"Oh God ... Lucien," I gasped as he licked and nipped his way down my neck. He untucked my shirt from my pants and slid his hands up my chest, finding the steel rings in my nipples. As he pulled at them, I pushed back against him. "Here's ... fine."

"Is there an exhibitionist in you, Peter? Look down into the crowd; do you think anyone is watching us up here?"

I had to force my eyes open before I could look anywhere. But the thought of just fucking right out in the open, of being seen, made my dick lurch. I knew the moment that Lucien realized it, because he growled and shoved my pants down quickly, wrapping his long fingers around my cock. As I peered down below, I reached down and stilled his hand, thrusting into those slickened fingers.

And people *were* watching, subtly, as if they were afraid to turn their full gaze up to us. They looked out of the corners of their eyes mostly, with quick glances through half-lidded, sex-dazed eyes. Scanning the crowd, my eyes rested on a couple I'd passed earlier but hadn't been introduced to. They were making out, stroking and kissing lazily, one with long, blond hair, the other with hair resembling black satin spilling over his shoulders.

"Ah." Lucien chuckled knowingly. "Ian and Drake. I thought you might like them."

"You didn't introduce me, though," I said with a pout.

"Have you never heard ... that the *best* ... is always saved for last?" His fingers slid down the cleft of my ass and circled teasingly around my hole. "Look at Drake—hair black as night, eyes almost as clear as diamonds, his body long and lean. Look at the way he writhes and moves now, his eyes rolled back in his head in such extreme pleasure as Ian stretches his hole with his fingers. Do you see?"

Oh, fuck, yes, I could see. The sight before me and Lucien's teasing had my heart nearly pounding out of my chest. His words alone were almost more than I could handle, and his steady stroking had my belly tight and my breathing hard. "Lucien, please..."

"The night Ian and I brought Drake over, Drake was wanton, needy. He let himself go so completely, giving us his blood and his body. We feasted on him for hours, come and blood mixing together so deliciously, and then we fucked him. Both of us. Together. Two cocks sliding in and out of one beautifully stretched hole."

Lucien pushed two fingers into me, hard and deep, and my knees buckled. But I needed more. I needed to feel his cock sliding in and out of me, claiming me. I turned my head, panting, struggling to get out one single word. "More!"

His fingers left me quickly, and his cock was suddenly in their place, pushing into me in one single thrust. Light flashed behind my eyes at the burn, but it only lasted a moment. I

spread my legs a little farther apart, grinding hard against him.

"That's it, Peter. Take what you want," Lucien growled.

I grabbed hold of the banister for leverage and did just that, fucking myself on his thick cock until my legs began to shake. "Finish me, Lucien," I begged. "Please!"

He grasped my hips tightly, fingernails biting sharply into my flesh. "Lose the shirt, Peter," he grunted.

I pulled it up and off, but was shaking so much I dropped it over the railing. Lucien's hands slid up to my nipples, pulling at them, rolling them hard between his fingers. He kissed and licked and bit his way across my shoulder and up my neck. By the time our mouths met, the kiss was rough and hungry, possessive.

Moans, growls, grunts and pants came together, and I didn't know anymore which one of us was making what sounds. My cock banged hard against a baluster and I wrapped my fingers around it protectively. But the contact was too much. My muscles tightened around Lucien, and he tore his mouth away from mine, crying out, thrusting hard and fast. I was right there. Right fucking there and afraid Lucien would actually come before I did.

I jerked hard on my cock, stroking in time with his thrusts and came, seconds later, semen shooting between the balusters and flying through the air toward the crowd below. I looked over just in time to see Caleb standing right beneath us, my shirt in one of his hands, my come on his tongue and a mischievous grin across his face.

Lucien roared as he came, holding me tight against him as he filled me. I closed my eyes, leaning back into him, just savoring the moment—everything else forgotten. It wasn't until he placed a gentle kiss below my ear that I realized he hadn't bitten me, hadn't fed. "You didn't take blood."

"You've given quite a bit of it in the past few days." He nuzzled against my neck, sighing in contentment as he slid out of me. "Need to let your body catch up."

I turned and pressed a kiss to the side of his head and jumped when Caleb suddenly appeared beside us. "Christ, Caleb! Don't do that!"

"What are you up to?" Lucien asked, rising up to look at Caleb.

Caleb grinned, letting my shirt fall dramatically to the floor. He nodded toward me. "He ... dropped something."

Before Lucien could ask, Caleb slid his arms around Lucien's neck and kissed him deeply. Lucien devoured Caleb's mouth roughly, trying to get every last taste of me from Caleb's mouth, and I couldn't help but laugh. Caleb was certainly an original. I moved up close behind him, nipping him hard on the neck. "How sweet of you to bring it back up here."

Lucien growled again. "Sweet. So fucking sweet."

Caleb cried out and bared his neck, though I wasn't sure just *who* he was baring it for. He hadn't been in Lucien's arms but seconds and he was already shaking and trembling as if on edge. I slid my hands down the front of Caleb's pants, finding him hard and the inside of his pants soaked with precome. "Ooh, Lucien, baby ... he's so fucking wet."

"He's been watching us," Lucien said. "Watching us fuck up here, the entire time, waiting for you to come."

"He's talented." I worked my fingers around Caleb's cock. "Oh shit," I gasped, my fingers brushing against a metal ring at the head. "Oh ... he's ... I wanna see it."

Caleb whimpered, unzipping his pants and pushing them down his hips. "Please ... don't stop."

Lucien's eyes met mine over Caleb's head and he smiled knowingly. *"Touch him, taste him, whatever you wish, but don't let him come. He's about to get a lesson in self-control."*

"You are cruel, lover." I grinned, and turned Caleb around to face me.

I said nothing to Caleb, just dropped to my knees before him. He had the most beautiful Prince Albert piercing I'd ever seen. And his balls? Oh fuck. There was a line of tiny rings going down his sac. I leaned forward and ran my tongue along the line of rings and Caleb's knees buckled.

Oh, I liked that. I could spend hours just licking him to get that response.

I pulled back, letting my eyes get their fill. The ring of his PA was wet and glistening with precome. I flicked my tongue along the ring first and tugged gently with my teeth before sucking in just the head of his cock. Lucien's hand touched insistently at my shoulder and I pulled off slowly, rising to my feet before kissing Caleb chastely.

"You have a beautiful cock, Caleb."

"Th-thank you," he choked out.

"Oh, no, thank you for sharing it with me. Lucien? How about you and I retire for the night?"

"I think that's a fine idea," Lucien agreed.

I reached down and grabbed my pants, pulling them up, but leaving them undone because I just couldn't stuff my dick back into them. I retrieved my shirt from the floor and as Lucien and I started down the stairs, Caleb finally spoke up.

"M-Master?" he stuttered, his voice still shaky with need.

Lucien paused and turned to look up at Caleb, keeping his face entirely serious. "Oh, yes, Caleb; wait for me in my chambers. You will be dealt with there."

And with that, Lucien took my hand and tugged, encouraging me down the stairs with him. We walked in silence as we headed down one of the corridors. It wasn't until we rounded the corner for the kitchen that Lucien let go of me. "You should eat something."

"Eat something?" I chuckled. "I was right, you are cruel; poor Caleb."

"Yes ... poor Caleb," he mused, toying with a lock of my hair as he moved to walk around me. "So, so mistreated."

I lifted an eyebrow as he made himself comfortable on a barstool and put on a look of innocence. *Lucien* was up to something. But I had no doubt that I wasn't going to find out what it was until I did, in fact, eat. I walked to the refrigerator, opening it up to look for something simple to throw together.

* * * *

I wasn't prepared for what I saw when Lucien and I walked into the bedroom. The curtains were all pulled back and secured at the four corners of the bed, leaving the bed in

plain view. Caleb—naked, beautiful—was on his back, legs and arms spread, secured by restraints. His eyes were closed, body trembling, cock hard and leaking precome in a steady line across his right hip. I don't think you can prepare for things like that; you just react. And fuck did I react, my cock filling, pants suddenly constricting.

As I stepped up to the foot of the bed, I reached out and slid a hand up the inside of Caleb's calf. He whimpered, body going taut, eyes flying open. He looked toward me and bit at his lip hard, drawing blood. "So pretty, Caleb," I whispered, tossing a look back at Lucien. "God, Lucien ... look how pretty."

Lucien moved in behind me, pulling my shirt up over my head. "He looks very *needy*, to me."

I shuddered as Lucien's fingers brushed my nipples, tugging slightly on the rings before they moved on to my pants, working quickly at the zipper. My pants slid down around my ankles, kept on only by my boots, and Lucien's hand cupped my balls.

I reached behind me, surprised at finding nothing but skin everywhere I touched. Lucien shifted and his hard cock slid between the cheeks of my ass. I caught his hips, grinding back against him. "Why don't you help me with my boots, baby? Get me naked."

Lucien nipped my shoulder. "I think I can do that."

He turned me slightly and knelt before me, taking my cock into his mouth. My knees buckled and I had to grasp onto his shoulders to steady myself. As he sucked and licked and

teased at my slit with the tip of his tongue, his hands worked the laces of my boots.

I just barely managed to keep from fucking his mouth, letting him work and suck at the same time. But then my laces were free and he was still going at it. "Fuck, yeah, Lucien," I groaned. "Suck me."

Caleb pulled at the restraints, craning his neck to try to get a better view. His cock was jumping, and with each moan or hum that Lucien made, Caleb whimpered. I slid my fingers through Lucien's hair, fucking his mouth in quick, deep thrusts, and Caleb fell back against the mattress, hips rocking up to meet air.

Lucien pulled off me a few moments later and helped me out of my boots and jeans. He looked up at me, grinning. "Caleb likes to watch, doesn't he?"

"I'm not convinced how much he really enjoys it."

"Then we should keep going," Lucien said.

"Oh, yeah," I said, crawling up over the foot of the bed.

I licked and nibbled my way up Caleb's legs, letting my hair tease him as I bit at the insides of his thighs. His body trembled, muscles tight; tiny sounds and whimpers of distress becoming louder. I continued on, ignoring his cock and balls—which got me a growl of disappointment—moving to his navel. Every muscle in his belly was tight as I licked and sucked at the ring in his navel.

"Please, Peter!"

"More?" I asked, tongue trailing straight up the line of his belly. I was half-tempted to follow the path of the scar, but decided against it, especially not knowing how it got there.

I sucked in his left nipple, teeth clamping down at the peak, feeling metal beneath the skin. "Sexy," I murmured. "Pretty."

Caleb cried out and the bed shook hard as he pulled against the restraints. I moved to his other nipple with a grin, his whimpers and pleas music to my ears. His hips were arching up, searching so desperately for the slightest bit of contact.

"Don't you dare come, Caleb," Lucien whispered.

I tilted my head up to see Lucien straddling Caleb's head, holding his cock and balls close so that Caleb—who was craning and stretching his neck, tongue extended, searching for a taste—couldn't have access.

"What's the matter, Caleb? He won't let you suck him?"

"Please, just a taste ... just one!" Caleb cried.

"I'd let *you* suck me, Peter. Maybe a little instruction would do him good."

I crawled further up and straddled Caleb's belly, leaning forward to kiss Lucien's hands as he covered himself. "You saying that Caleb needs to learn how to suck cock?"

"Oh, no, he knows." Lucien let one hand fall away and slid the other through my hair. "No one sucks cock quite like you do, though, my love. Caleb could do well to learn your technique."

"Mmm ... Glad you appreciate me."

I flicked my tongue against his slit, teasing before sucking in the head, just savoring him for a moment.

"Oh..." Lucien moaned. "You have *no* idea."

I gave an appreciative hum and Lucien thrust forward suddenly, the head of his cock bumping the back of my throat. I angled to take him deeper, relaxing my throat so that I could work it around him. He called out a line of 'fuck me's' and 'suck me's', before begging me to stop because it was too much.

I rose up, kissing Lucien, biting and teasing at his bottom lip. "You taste good."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," I whispered, sliding my hands up his chest to toy with his nipple rings.

"Peter," Lucien groaned and pushed me back, smiling. "Give Caleb a little. He can only take so much of your humping before he comes. And it's not his time yet."

As he pulled away, I looked down at Caleb. He was in tears, pulling hard against the cuffs that held him. I felt guilty for humping and rubbing my cock along his belly without even realizing it. I sank down over Caleb, brushing my lips against his before sliding my tongue between his lips. "How 'bout a taste, Caleb?"

"Yes, oh, God ... yes," he moaned, tongue sliding eagerly against mine.

A few moments later, Lucien was sliding his cock between our lips as we kissed. Caleb grinned and the tongue that had been searching so desperately before made contact with Lucien's cock. The way that Caleb eagerly sucked him in made me smile, my cock and balls suddenly aching from the rush of blood.

I licked along the length of Lucien's cock, tongue dueling with Caleb's for more. Caleb soon pulled away, as best that he could. "Can I suck you both?"

I didn't have to be asked twice. I shimmied up Caleb's body, knees at his armpits. Hot, wet heat took me in and I groaned, sliding my hands up to Lucien's neck, pulling him in for a kiss. Caleb alternated between sucking and licking at each one of us, and then sucking us both at the same time as we pushed between his lips. Caleb's mouth was like fucking heaven; no way in hell did he need any lessons on technique.

After a while, I looked down at Caleb, who seemed to be at peace just sucking at us, getting that contact. We were going to have to get this show on the road, as it wasn't going to be Caleb going off first if we didn't. I sank down over him, pushing Lucien away to kiss Caleb tenderly. Lucien chuckled, but sat back, stroking himself lazily as he watched.

"So pretty," I whispered. "You be my pretty?"

Caleb nodded eagerly, straining up for more kisses.

"Anything ... please, just don't stop."

I slid down between his legs, moving that pretty cock out of the way. I licked at his balls, teasing every tiny ring as I made my way to his hole. The way he was spread and restrained, though, there was no way I was going to be able to do anything other than look. Eyeing the cables, I wondered if there was a way to keep Caleb restrained, but to get his legs up.

"Lucien? Can we adjust these? Get him open?"

"We most certainly can."

Lucien moved off the bed, and hit a switch on the wall, near the head of the bed, and the cables for the restraints began to move. When everything stopped, Caleb's legs were bent at the knee, restraints still attached at the ankle. My eyes immediately went to his ass. Oh. Fuck. Me.

He was plugged.

I realized then why he'd been so fucking on edge. Sliding down, I licked at his balls, tongue teasing lower until it met the stretched ring of muscle around the plug. Caleb's body bowed and he cried out. "Oh, shit ... oh fucking shit!"

"Don't come, Caleb," I said softly. "Not yet. Soon, baby, I promise."

Lucien handed me a towel and the lube before moving up to lie beside Caleb. He stroked his fingers back and forth low against Caleb's belly, his voice against Caleb's lips soft and soothing. Caleb's body relaxed almost instantly, and I set to remove the plug. Once it was out, I pushed it aside, grabbing the bottle of lube.

I coated my fingers in the slick substance, kneeling between Caleb's spread legs. I slid two fingers into him, testing him. He rolled his hips and let out a long moan into Lucien's mouth. I curled my fingers up, searching for that special spot, and when I found it, Caleb screamed in pleasure.

Lucien sat up slightly, trying to get a better view. As my fingers worked at Caleb's ass, Lucien's eyes grew dark. It wouldn't be long before Lucien would have to have both his cock and his fangs buried somewhere. The thought made me shudder and I lost the rhythm that I'd had. Caleb groaned and I blew out a quick breath, concentrating just on him.

My fingers found his gland again, stroking and stroking until his body was trembling, and the bed was shaking.

"Caleb? Look down here at me."

Caleb looked down, eyes meeting mine. "Please..." he begged softly.

"What do you want, Caleb?"

"To come."

"For me?"

He nodded quickly. "For you ... I want to come for you."

"That's good, because *I* want you to come for me. But I want you to look at me. Look into my eyes and don't look away. Can you do that?"

He sucked his bottom lip in, biting down hard enough to draw blood, but nodded. "Yes!"

I worked my fingers faster, my eyes never leaving those beautiful brown eyes of his. "Give it to me, Caleb. Let me have it all."

"Gonna come," he panted. "Oh, fuck ... gonna come!"

"Come for me, Caleb."

His body went tight, every muscle clenched as he came. A few moments later, his body relaxed completely, aftershocks going through him every few seconds. I moved to release Caleb's ankles as Lucien released Caleb's arms. Once free, Caleb rose up on his elbows, shaking his head.

"I swear, I'll be naughty more often if this is what it gets me."

I grinned, looking at Lucien. "Are we done yet?"

Lucien shook his head. "Oh, no, we're just getting started."

Caleb's eyes went wide, and he looked from me to Lucien. "Oh, thank God you stretched me with the plug first."

"You know I have my reasons." Lucien moved to lie back against the pillows. "Come on, Caleb. Don't be shy."

Caleb grabbed the lube and moved over to straddle Lucien's hips. "Oh, not shy. Just not quite steady yet."

I grabbed the lube from Caleb as I moved up behind him. "I'll take care of that, baby."

Caleb groaned as I got him ready, ass pushing back eagerly for more. I coated Lucien just to get the lube off my hands and guided Lucien's cock to Caleb's hole. He took Lucien in easily, and I worked my fingers in alongside Lucien's cock, just working, stretching Caleb. Before long, Caleb's hips were just snapping, demanding more.

Caleb tossed a look back at me. "Want you, too, Peter."

I growled and slicked my cock up, carefully trying to push my way into him. He was so tight, so hot, his body both tense with need and anticipation, yet relaxed at the same time, just letting Lucien and I take care of him. Every time I moved, the sensation was pure torture; Caleb's tight heat, Lucien's cock, right there beside mine, hard, just pulsing.

Caleb groaned, trying to rock between us, the sensation too much too soon. I grasped his hips tightly, head dropping to his shoulder. "Don't move, Caleb..."

He whimpered, body starting to tremble. "Please, Peter..."

I blew out a few quick breaths, trying to get my body to slow the fuck down. I didn't want to come—not yet; I wanted to enjoy this, wanted Caleb and Lucien to enjoy this.

As soon as I got control of my body, Caleb seated himself fully. I smacked him hard on the ass. "I told you not to move!"

Caleb hissed and groaned, letting loose a long string of unintelligible words.

Lucien chuckled as he moved his hands to my hips, down my thighs. "Careful, Caleb likes a little pain with his pleasure."

"Oh, is that right?" I'd have to remember that.

"It's not p-pain," Caleb stuttered. "'s..."

"Just like it rough?" I asked, thrusting, testing him—testing myself.

"Oh fuck! Yes! Just like that...!" Caleb cried out. "More! Don't stop, just..."

"Not stopping," I assured him, one hand moving over his chest to find those rings, the other dropping to his cock.

Lucien's movements matched my own, then he began pausing, alternating his thrusts with mine. Not only did that have Caleb melting between us, it had me flying; that hard, slick cock rubbing against mine inside of Caleb's tight heat.

"Beautiful," Lucien murmured. "Just ... beautiful."

One hand left Caleb's chest as I reached for Lucien. I needed to touch him, to run my fingers over every part of him that I could reach. He growled in approval, his fingers digging hard into my thighs and ass as he tried to pull me closer. I peered over Caleb's shoulder to look at Lucien.

He was watching us both in awe, looking between Caleb and me as if he couldn't believe that this was really happening. I leaned forward, cupping at Lucien's neck to

bring him in for a kiss. Caleb met us halfway and the three of us were soon caught in a three-way kiss that went straight to my cock.

Lightning shot down my spine and I moaned, speeding up my movements. I wasn't going to last, not when it was this good, this intense. My fingers began to move along Caleb's shaft again, sliding up and down, catching at his ring on the stroke up. He moaned and panted and keened, his body finding a rhythm of its own between us. Caleb took his pleasure as much as he gave it and Lucien growled, pulling me harder against them both.

Caleb tore his mouth away from the kiss and cried out, his body going taut. Lucien and I kept up the rhythm and Caleb cried out again, damn near screaming as his body seemed to ride one continuous orgasm. I found the bend of his neck, sucking hard before biting down. Caleb and Lucien both roared out in pleasure, and as Caleb's blood filled my mouth and his seed filled my hand, I came.

I shuddered as Lucien kept moving against me, seeking his own release, cock hard and unforgiving against my sensitive flesh. Lucien's heat soon mixed with my own and I sighed in relief, thankful that he'd finally come; any longer, and I'd have been hard again.

Caleb's body went lax between us and I blinked hard, trying to focus on him. "Caleb? You okay?"

Lucien laughed, the sound growly and breathless. "He's all right, baby. We didn't break him, but it seems we put him out."

I slowly moved out of Caleb, fingers finding where he and Lucien were still joined. "Damn, Lucien ... I can't tell you how incredible this was. The feel of you, of him, of us together, inside of him..."

"There are no words for this," he said as he lifted Caleb from him. "No words at all."

I nodded in agreement, and Lucien and I moved Caleb onto the bed between us. Caleb's eyes were closed, lips parted just slightly, oblivious to what was happening. Damn. He was one of a kind. I smiled, placing a kiss to his temple before lying on my side to face Lucien.

He was facing me, but his eyes were closed as well, body completely relaxed. I curled up against Caleb and reached out, sliding my hand over Lucien's hip. His hand covered mine and squeezed.

"Love you."

"Love you, too."

* * * *

Sated, exhausted, loved, Caleb slept between us. My fingers curled low across his belly, moving slowly back and forth. I wanted to get to know every part of Caleb's body—what he liked, what made him feel so good—but I shied away from the scar. It was jagged; a zigzag pattern stretching from his sternum to just above his cock. Whatever had happened to him had been horrible and no doubt traumatic. And he'd been human. Had that been how he became a vampire, I wondered?

Lucien's fingers brushed mine, and I looked up, meeting his eyes above Caleb's head. Lucien leaned in, pressing a gentle kiss to Caleb's brow, looking at Caleb as he spoke to me. "When I came here, I was discreet. The Council knew that things were fucked here, but they also wanted to make sure that nothing was left to chance, that nothing that they'd been told had been a rumor or a huge glorification of something trivial. I cloaked and shielded once I got here; coming and going, talking with members of the coven on the side.

"Everyone had a different story to tell, but it all came down to one thing: they were all terrified. Vampires—immortal beings with superhuman strength and powers—terrified of one man. Any doubt I had about killing him quickly dissipated. I knew that, even though I never wanted the coven, I had to do something to save it. Caleb ... Caleb was human when I met him; beautiful, loving, strong. He wasn't innocent, not by a long shot, but he was pure. His heart and soul were as clean as fresh-fallen snow."

"And you fell for him," I said softly.

Lucien seemed to think about that for a moment, then shook his head. "Yes and no. It was never romantic between us; was never going to be anything more than very close friends ... with benefits. He and I both knew that."

"But you loved him—still love him."

"Does it bother you? To know that I love him as much as I do?"

"I don't expect you to stop loving him because you love me. It's different, I understand that. Just as my love for Jack

is different from the love I have for you." I shifted slightly, getting more comfortable. "And honestly? I can see exactly why you feel the way you do for Caleb. I love him already and I haven't known him nearly as long."

Lucien sighed. "I've always encouraged him to find someone, but I've come to the conclusion that he's happiest where he is right now."

"And that may not ever change," I said. "I'm okay with that."

Lucien reached out to trace my lips with his thumb. "If you are ever *not* okay with it, be sure and speak up. As much as I love my people ... and Caleb; you come first."

I kissed his thumb before he could pull away, nodding. "Tell me more about Caleb, baby. What happened to him?"

"Caleb had been an occasional donor for a friend of his; Ethan. For them, it wasn't about feeding and sex and the high that comes with it—it was about Ethan's survival and Caleb doing what he could to help. He was caught feeding Ethan one night, and Malik took a quick interest in him. The next evening, he sent his men out to find Caleb and bring him back to the dungeon where he proceeded to ... *play* with him."

Lucien paused, his face scrunching up as he seemed to remember the details. "Malik wasn't just a sadist, he was fucking insane. Let's just say: Malik was as intrigued by the inside of the human body as he was the outside."

"Oh, shit," I whispered.

Lucien nodded. "By the time I found the dungeon, Malik was naked, hard, and elbow-deep inside Caleb's belly. The things that Malik had done to him—was doing to him, even as

I burst into the room ... to this day, I can hear the screams, Malik's twisted laughter. Rage doesn't even come close to describing what I felt that night. The beast inside of me took over and by the time I was finished, fifteen vampires lay dead at my feet.

"And then I heard a moan. After everything that Malik had done to him, Caleb was still alive; hanging by a thread, but alive. I patched him up as best I could and rushed him to the nearest hospital. He spent over a week in intensive care, but he wasn't getting any better. His body had been introduced to so many foreign, dirty things.

"I managed to get him lucid for only a few moments, long enough to ask him if I could save him. He squeezed my hand and begged me not to leave him. I disconnected him from the tubes and wires and brought him home. His transition was far from easy over the next few days, but he made it. And here he lies, seventeen years later; scarred, but still beautiful, still loving, and still so very strong."

I let my fingers trace the path of the scar. "How the hell do you recover from something like that?"

"With a lot of fighting," Lucien said softly. "He hated me for a long time after that. Not because of what had happened or because I brought him over; no, he hated me because I babied him. I kept him too close, terrified that if I let him out of my sight again, something would happen."

Caleb shifted, stretching a little. His eyes came open slowly, and he looked from me to Lucien, then back at me.

"What'd I miss?"

"Just a little pillow-talk," Lucien said.

Caleb's brow knitted in concern as he wiped a stray tear from my cheek. "He told you, didn't he?"

I hesitated, but finally nodded.

Caleb sighed and closed his eyes as he lay back on the pillow. "Please don't treat me differently because of this, because of what you know about me now."

"Not gonna treat you differently, Caleb," I said, rolling over, sliding between his legs. I held myself up with one hand near his head, the fingers of my other hand sliding through his hair. "Gonna kiss you, suck you, fuck you ... love you just like I did earlier. Only thing that's different now? I know where you got the scar."

Caleb opened his eyes then, hopeful. "Promise?"

"I promise you, pretty," I whispered against his lips.

He pushed his tongue between my lips eagerly, his hands sliding low on my back, pulling me close as we kissed. There was no hesitation from him at all, no worry that he was doing something Lucien wasn't going to approve of. Caleb soon pulled away. "Pretty your name for me?"

"We can find something else."

"No," he said quickly. "I like it. Makes me feel ... well, pretty."

"You are, baby." I smiled down at him. "And don't you forget it, either."

Caleb grinned and turned his head toward Lucien, who was lounging beside us, watching with amusement. "Oh, Lucien, can we keep him?"

Lucien laughed, pulling me off Caleb and into his arms, cuddling me close. He nipped at my shoulder, sliding one of his legs between mine. "I guess he'll do."

"Very funny, boys."

* * * *

Lucien and I were sitting in the kitchen, having breakfast—if you could call it that in the evening—when Christopher poked his head into the room. "Hey, Lucien? Got a second?"

"Yeah, what's up?" Lucien asked, grabbing the newspaper and pulling it close.

Christopher came into the room, leaning against the door frame. "Antoine and I are going to be here for a little longer. The Council wants to wait and see how this with Joshua and the incident at the club pans out."

Lucien rolled his eyes up at Christopher. "So you're babysitting me, huh?"

"No, baby." Christopher smiled. "Not babysitting, just waiting to make sure it's not hunters moving through."

"Whatever you say," Lucien said as he turned his attention back to the newspaper.

There was a brief moment of silence before Christopher cleared his throat. "If you need us to stay off-site ... we can get a room."

Lucien grunted, but didn't answer. I finished chewing the bite I'd just taken and looked up at Christopher. "It's not a problem for you guys to be here. As long as you want to stay, we're glad to have you."

Christopher chewed at his lip for a moment, then nodded. "Thanks, Peter." When Lucien didn't offer up anything else, Christopher cleared his throat again. "Well ... have a good night."

"You, too," I said, smiling until he left the room.

When he did, I kicked at Lucien beneath the table. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

"I don't need a fucking babysitter," Lucien grumbled. "And that's all they're fucking doing here now; watching, waiting to see if I can handle it all; waiting to see if I fuck it all up."

I raised an eyebrow at that. "You did not get up on the right side of the bed."

"Fuck the right side of the bed. I'm the Master of this goddamned city and I don't need them coming in to tell me how I should be doing things." Lucien paused, guilt and regret passing through his eyes. "Fuck. I'm sorry. I just..."

"Got up on the wrong side of the bed," I said, finishing his sentence. "That's okay, baby. I'm gonna take you back to bed and make it right as soon as I finish with breakfast. Okay? Gonna make it all better, make you scream."

Lucien blinked as if he didn't know what to say to that. He finally just laughed. "Just fucking eat, would you?"

I grinned. "Be easier if I wasn't having to calm the beast."

"I'll show you beast," he threatened.

"Oh, read your damned paper." I laughed, shaking my head. "I'm trying to *eat* here."

Lucien settled, reading through the business section of the newspaper. I took my time eating, watching Lucien as I did. I thought of Christopher and Antoine, being together here,

loving and getting used to waking up with each other, then having to leave that all behind to go back to their stations in New York—wife, coven ... their kids. I shook my head at it all, knowing I could never do it.

"What?" Lucien asked.

I looked up. "What ... what?"

"What are you thinking about?"

"Did you ever stop to think that maybe Christopher and Antoine *want* to be here? That maybe they readily agreed to the Council's wishes because they're not ready to be separated again by going home? I mean ... fuck! I can't even fathom what they go through back in New York."

He shook his head. "I couldn't live like that."

I nodded. "So, maybe you should go find them and apologize for being such a dick, huh? Let them know that even though you don't want a *babysitter* from the Council, you do welcome them here for as long as they want to stay. Don't make their days here together shrouded in guilt."

"I suppose this is a fine example of how you're my better half," Lucien grumbled.

I smiled. "Yes, baby, it is. Read your paper and I'll gloat in silence."

"There's something I've been meaning to talk to you about," Lucien said as he turned a page. "And before you say no, just hear me out."

I pushed the eggs around on the plate with my fork for a moment before looking up. "And that last part means that I'm not going to like it at all. Spit it out, Lucien."

"I want you to leave Rave."

"No."

"I said hear me out," Lucien said, pushing the newspaper away. "Don't be stubborn about this."

"I'm not being stubborn." I shrugged. "I'm being independent. What did you think? That I was going to move in here and become your *kept* toy? I have news for you, baby ... not gonna happen."

"You know I expected no such thing," Lucien grumbled. "If you'll shut up and stop being defensive for one damned second, I'll tell you *why* I'm making this request."

I took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. "Fine."

Lucien reached across the bar and pushed my plate out of the way before taking my hands in his. "This is not a matter of being kept, at all. This is a matter of safety and security. Not just for you, but for the rest of the coven as well."

"What do you mean?"

"You're a target now, Peter. Any and every fucked up rogue coming through here searching to win a powerbase will see you as a way to get to me—to the coven. Any hunter searching to eliminate us all will find you and follow you wherever you go because *you* are closest to the Master."

"What do you expect me to do? Sit up in the office at the club while you work, bored out of my fucking mind? I don't think so," I said. "Now, if you want me to work the bar, work the door—something—then I'll give it some thought."

"Peter..." Lucien sighed and sat back, shaking his head. "You still do not understand your place here."

"My place is with you."

"Exactly. Beside me, ruling, making decisions—not acting as if you are less than you are by *working* in a club that you now own half of."

"I didn't work for any of that, Lucien."

"And why would you have to? Tell me what it is that you gain by continuing to work?"

"Money?"

"And what do you need money for?" He gestured around the room. "Everything you could possibly need is right here in this house. Anything you could possibly desire, is yours, you have but to say the word."

"That's just it, Lucien. I don't want to have to rely on you for everything. I wanted you, not your *empire*."

"This *empire* is what I've busted my ass to build and maintain for the past seventeen years. I never, in my wildest dreams, imagined that I'd actually have anyone to share it with." Lucien stood, leveling an angry gaze on me. "And now that I have, he doesn't want it. I have news for you, Peter; the *empire* is part of the fucking package. Deal with it."

Lucien turned on his heel and headed for the door. I stumbled, trying to get out of my chair to catch him. My fingers grazed the material of his robe, but fell short of actually reaching him. "Lucien, don't go!"

He stopped, but didn't turn around. "I'm just going to the bedroom, Peter. Shall I call it mine and get you the room across the hall? I mean, if you want to pay rent, I'm sure we can..."

"Shut up," I said, moving to stand in front of him. "It's just that ... I've worked hard all my life, struggling just to get by."

If I didn't work, bills didn't get paid. Hell, the only reason I work—worked—every fucking night at Rave was so that I could pay the bills *and* buy groceries. And now? Having all of this around me? I feel like I should pay *something*. I didn't get into this for a free ride."

"If I thought, for one single moment, that you were here for money or a free ride—you wouldn't be here. *Please* ... just accept what I've given you and what I want to share with you."

At the pleading in his words and in his voice, I backed down. "So what is this? One of those, 'what's mine is yours and what's yours is mine' deals?"

"That's exactly what it is."

"But I don't have anything."

Lucien stepped forward and pulled me into his arms. As he placed a kiss to my forehead, he told me, "That is bullshit. You have ... you. Now, are we going to argue about this for the rest of the evening?"

"No," I grumbled. "We're not going to argue."

"Too bad," he sighed woefully. "I'd thought to change your mind in a more deliberate sort of way."

"Well, I might be able to find *something* to argue with you about."

Chapter Seventeen

I stared at the empty bedroom, wondering where the fuck Caleb was. He'd called from the club early in the evening to say that he'd be over with paperwork. Two hours later, he still hadn't shown up. It wasn't like I had anywhere to go, as I'd quit Rave almost a month ago, but I couldn't help the anxiety. I'd showered as the clock ticked on, expecting him to join me when he finally got here, but had finished my shower alone. I sat on the bed, naked, my skin still beaded with water, dialing the number for the club for the fifth time.

I got the voicemail again, and though Lucien's voice gave me a bit of relief, Caleb not answering the damned phone was inching my anxiety back up a few notches. I was half-tempted to call Lucien's cell to have him give Caleb a mental boost, but stopped short of actually dialing. Lucien was at a Council-sanctioned meeting with Christopher and Antoine, and I wasn't sure whether interrupting would be a good thing at all.

Probably not.

I tossed the phone across the bed and lay back, concentrating hard on Lucien. I pictured him in my mind, visualized the bond between us like a cord, following that cord as a guide. A loud knock sounded at the door, though, and everything seemed to shatter. I rolled off the bed, grabbing a robe nearby. As I opened the door, I wasn't prepared to see Xander, who was kneeling before me.

"What do you want, Xander?"

"To talk. Th-that is, if you're not busy."

Xander's presence in the past couple of weeks had been scarce. I'd seen him in the house, but he'd always shied away, looking away instead of looking at me. I stifled a groan and touched his shoulder. "Get up; come inside."

"Thank you," he said nervously, following me into the room and shutting the door behind him.

I sat in the leather chair at the desk, sighing as Xander stood at the door, unmoving. "Sit somewhere, Xander."

He walked slowly across the room before dropping to his knees before me, still silent. "Come on, Xander. Spit it out. I've got a meeting with Caleb—that *he's* already late for."

Xander looked up at me oddly. "I don't know how to say this without sounding like I'm being a whiny bastard. I swear that's not what I'm aiming for here."

"Just say it and we'll work the details out later, huh?"

He nodded and cleared his throat. "You were right. I was jealous of you coming here. Insanely jealous."

"I knew that," I said.

He nodded again, quickly. "I fought for my place at Lucien's side, for so many years, always trying to be good enough and to earn his respect."

"Something tells me that you didn't have to fight very hard for that, Xander. I might not have been around for long, but I know Lucien. He's fair and he gives respect freely when it's given to him first."

"This isn't coming out right." Xander sighed, reaching out and brushing his fingers along the inside of my calf.

"Xander, stop." I managed to stifle a groan, but my voice was growing tight, as were my balls. "Sex will not tell me anything."

"Touch me, Peter," he whispered, leaning closer.

I closed my hands around the arms of the chair, squeezing tightly. His words tugged at something deep in me, and I tried like hell to push it away. But when he leaned even closer, pressing his cheek against my knee, I found my hand reaching out to him. As my fingers slid through his long, dark hair, he sighed, almost as if in relief.

He tilted his head back and bright amber eyes met mine. "I have craved your touch—your scent—since that night. I've wanted to come here so many times, but couldn't bring myself to actually do it."

As much as I tried to tell myself, and Xander, that I hadn't thought of him at all—I couldn't. I had asked about him, worried that I'd done something to irreparably damage the relationship between him and Lucien. Lucien had shrugged it off, saying that Xander would be fine, but I still hadn't been sure. Now? Touching him seemed to bring a relief I hadn't known I needed.

Xander smiled softly. "You feel it, don't you?"

I pulled my hand away and shook my head, the whole thing freaking me out a little. "What am I supposed to feel?"

He pulled his shirt off and bared his neck to me. "Look, Peter!"

At the base of his neck where I'd bitten him there was a scar. By its shape and markings, there was no doubt that it came from a bite. But that wasn't possible. Not from me, at

least. "You're a werewolf, Xander. You didn't get that from me."

"You don't think I played it from every angle?" he asked, shaking his head. "Something else happened that night, Peter; something besides you declaring dominance over me."

I stared at the mark on his neck before reaching toward him. The moment my fingers touched the mark, warmth washed through my entire body. I slid to the floor and leaned forward, pressing my lips against his neck. Xander shuddered and cried out, and I wrapped my arms around him protectively, pulling him against me.

"I don't know how that happened," Xander choked out, "but I'm..."

"Mine," I said softly, unable to ignore the possessiveness I felt when he was in my arms.

His head dropped to my shoulder and he groaned. "I'm a disgrace to my people because I cannot lead, I can only follow. The only place I felt truly at home—was here; Lucien treated me as one of his own. I don't know how this happened between us, but please ... don't send me away."

"I'm not sending you away."

His body relaxed against me, and his hands slid slowly around my waist. He turned his head slightly and licked a long, slow line up the side of my neck. By the time he got to my ear, I was hard, my balls heavy. "I can't tell you how many times I've wished that you had finished me that night."

"I believe I did."

Xander parted my robe and slid down my body, swirling his tongue around the head of my cock before taking me in

completely. My hands found his head and held him in place as I thrust slowly. And then his mouth was gone and I looked down to see him on his back in front of me, pants around his ankles. His cock was hard and heavy, bouncing against his belly as he kicked off his boots.

I heard myself growl as he turned onto his belly, putting his ass in the air. "What do you want from me, Xander?"

"Make me yours," he whispered, hand sliding back to coat his hole with his own saliva. "Do what you didn't do that night. Fuck me, mark me ... keep me."

The robe dropped from my shoulders and I moved closer, wetting two fingers in my mouth. I slid my fingers into his ass in one smooth, quick movement. Xander cried out and pushed back against me and I found myself smiling. I leaned back and reached for the desk drawer, pulling it open and retrieving a bottle of lube. I scissored my fingers, opening him up, squirting a good amount of lube right into his hole. He gasped and I pulled my fingers out, sliding my cock into that tight hole.

And he was hot. So fucking hot it was like fire around my cock. "Oh, God, Xander ... !"

"Fuck me," he cried out.

Something inside of me seemed to snap and I growled, shoving hard into him. I fucked him hard; so hard that that the pounding of my hips against his ass was leaving an angry red mark; so hard that we were moving across the floor. So hard, but still not enough. I wrapped a hand in his dark, silky hair and jerked his head back forcibly.

"Turn over," I growled, pulling out of him suddenly.

The moment his back hit the floor, I spread his legs and buried myself inside of him. My hands found his hair, fisting into it, using it to pull him into me. It was like I couldn't get enough of him; couldn't fuck him hard enough, deep enough. I just wanted to come. Just wanted to fill him, mark him. The moment I thought it, I paused, opening my eyes to look down at Xander.

His eyelids were heavy, bottom lip pulled between his teeth. His eyes opened slowly, bright, almost golden, beautiful—and I smiled, knowing that I could fuck him into oblivion or fuck him tenderly, and he wouldn't give a damn. There was no expectation from him at all, just total willingness to open himself to me completely.

I bent my head, catching the ring of his left nipple between my teeth, tugging. He writhed beneath me, arching his hips against mine, whimpering. I moved over to the right nipple, bare of any piercings at all, circling my tongue around it before pulling it between my teeth.

"This one is mine," I said, nipping him hard enough to draw blood.

Xander's entire body bowed and I began fucking him again, deliberately, keeping my pace hard and steady. With one hand still fisted in his hair, I pulled his head back to expose his throat. I licked and sucked my way to his mouth, teasing at his lips before sliding my tongue between them. He moaned as my tongue sought out his, and I growled in approval.

My free hand slid between us and I wrapped my fingers around his cock, jerking him to the same rhythm I was

fucking him. His moans got louder and louder as I worked him, and I soon found my mouth at the base of his neck. I sucked on the skin, right at the scar, and Xander jerked, his cock pulsing.

"Do it, Peter," he panted. "Oh, God ... I'm gonna..."

It was as if a bolt of lightning hit with his words, traveling down my spine and up through my balls. I pounded my hips into him, holding him impossibly tight to me. My teeth sank into his flesh at the site of the scar, drawing blood, just like the first time. Xander keened and writhed as hot, sticky semen coated my hand and belly.

His ass was so tight against me as he came, pushing me over that last little bit. I shoved into him, my body jerking hard. I fell against him, my dick still pulsing in his ass. My lips found his—bloody, sweet—and I kissed him tenderly before pulling back to meet his eyes. "You are mine, Alexandre."

* * * *

"Who was that on the phone?" I asked as I came out of the bathroom, drying off for the second time.

"It was Caleb. He got held up by someone from the security company at the club. He said to tell you that he'd be here in about fifteen minutes." Xander looked at his watch. "Odd time for a security company to be coming out, don't you think?"

"What time is it?"

"Eight-thirty."

"Haven't they come out to meet Lucien at night?" I asked.

Xander shook his head. "It's always been one of us taking care of the security. I'm not sure I remember them ever coming out after hours."

I slid on a pair of black leather pants. "Hmm, maybe it has to do with Lucien wanting to upgrade the system. That's the reason he closed the club for the night and it was also one of the things Caleb was bringing papers on tonight."

Xander slid off the bed and handed me a black, stretchy T-shirt. I caught his hand and pulled him to me, looking down at the new barbell in his right nipple. The piercing kit had been sitting on the counter as we waited for the water in the shower to get warm. I'd been a little nervous about doing it while trying to come down from that post-bonding, post-fucking high, but it had turned out perfect. "Pretty boy."

He blushed and nuzzled against my shoulder. "Yours."

"It's gonna take me a while to figure this all out, Xander. In the meantime, if there's anything you need—just ask."

Xander nodded and pulled away, moving back to the bed to retrieve his clothes. He'd managed to get his pants and his boots on before the door swung open violently. Lucien stood in the open doorway, growling. He looked from Xander to me, inhaling sharply, scenting the room. "What have you done, Peter?"

"I finished what was started the night we fought. Funny, no one thought to tell me exactly what it was that happened between Xander and me."

"Nothing happened," Lucien said, slamming the door behind him. Instead of coming for me, he went straight for Xander.

"Don't touch him," I said evenly.

Lucien paused, glaring down at Xander. "You came to him while I was gone, after I warned you to stay the fuck away from him. You disobeyed a direct order."

Xander cringed, falling to his knees. "I had to. Had to make things right. Had to..."

Lucien raised his fist, but I called out to him as I moved toward them. "Lucien, no!"

His eyes darted toward me, his teeth clenched. "Do you realize what you have done? You have bound yourself to the very werewolf that would have killed you rather than fight for first blood, just to get you out of the way."

"And I understand his motives ... now. I trust him, Lucien."

"Trust?" Lucien laughed bitterly. "Wolves cannot be trusted. They have no honor, no sense of loyalty. Hell, that's been proven here, tonight. He will give up one Master for another because it suits his needs!"

"I didn't give you up," Xander choked out. "You cast me away."

Something passed through Lucien's eyes, and I realized that something had taken place between them since the fight. "What did you do, Lucien?"

"He could have killed you that night, Peter!"

"Lucien..."

Lucien crouched down before Xander as he spoke to me. "I was angry when we spoke. I told him that I wanted him gone. Losing you was—is—a risk that I'm *not* willing to take. Xander knew my wishes for him to drop the hostility he felt toward you before he fought you."

"Lucien, baby, all Xander wanted was a place in *this* world ... in *your* world. He knew that anything he was going to get, he had to fight for. He fought for a place at your side and then I came along. I'd have been jealous as fuck, too, truth be told."

Lucien studied Xander for a moment and then rose to his feet. "Stand up, Xander."

Xander rolled his eyes up to me, questioning, and I nodded. "Go ahead."

Xander rose up, keeping his head bowed. Lucien's eyes went immediately to the barbell and he lifted an eyebrow. "You have been busy, my love."

"It was what I wanted."

"I see that," Lucien said as he leaned in to examine Xander's neck. "What happened here, Xander?"

"It's the mark from Peter's bite," Xander said softly.

Lucien ran his tongue along the mark, and Xander and I both shuddered. He licked at his lips as he pulled away. "Very, very interesting. We will have to report this to the Council, you know. Make it completely official."

"Lucien?"

He held a single finger up, pausing me before I could say anymore. "Pants down, Xander."

Xander didn't ask, just shoved his pants to the floor. Lucien took hold of him and pushed him gently over the foot of the bed. "Who do you belong to, Xander?"

"Peter," Xander answered, shakily.

Lucien turned his head to look at me, smiling. "*Own him to the very best of your ability, Peter. Get a plug.*"

"We're okay?"

"We're more than that. We just have a few more details to work out."

He winked and I grinned, practically running toward the dresser. I opened the box with the plugs, all of them lined in a row according to size, grabbing one from the middle. The moment I turned around, Lucien screamed and fell to his knees. I dropped the plug and ran to him, trying to get him to look at me.

"Lucien! Talk to me!" I demanded. "Open your eyes and look at me."

He shook his head violently and pulled away, vomiting up blood. I'd seen something similar happen to him before, with Joshua, but this was so much worse. "Come on, Lucien! Talk to me! Who is it?"

"C-Caleb...!" he choked out. "It's Caleb!"

A wave of pain and nausea went through me and I doubled over, feeling like I'd been run through the chest with a telephone pole. Blood poured from my nose and mouth, and I wiped at it awkwardly with my hands, only for more to come. I grabbed a towel from the floor and began wiping it all away, but then it stopped, as suddenly as it began. "Fuck! What the fuck is going on?"

Lucien gasped and grabbed at my hands, panting hard. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm trying to hold it for the both of us. We need to get to Caleb."

"He's at the club," I said, getting to my feet and pulling Lucien up.

Lucien turned to Xander. "Get the team, Xander. Get Christopher!"

Xander bolted out of the room, and Lucien started for the closet, staggering near the dresser. I caught him, sliding an arm around his back to support him. We went through the closet and Lucien pushed the button for the panel to slide back. "As much as you can carry comfortably, Peter."

"Fuck comfortably," I said, leading him into the room. "This is Caleb—our Caleb. Whoever did this to him will die, slowly, painfully."

Lucien nodded, and reached for a vest, his fingers lingering before he reached for one right beside it. "Caleb always dressed here. We'd talk about strategy as we armed ourselves..."

"Is he dead, Lucien?" I asked softly, so afraid of his answer.

"In seventeen years, I have always felt him. He's always been right here." Lucien clutched at his chest, shaking his head. "I cannot feel him. If he is alive now, he may not be for much longer."

At his words, I slid on a vest and began picking up knives and daggers. I strapped holsters to my chest, hip, and thigh, and slid a gun into each one, putting spare ammunition in the pockets of the vest. Lucien did the same, but grabbed a sword from a case in the corner. He held it by the hilt, testing its weight before sliding it into a scabbard down the middle of his back.

Lucien led the way out of the closet and the bedroom, and as we stepped into the hall, we came face to face with

Christopher. Antoine and Xander were right on his heels, fully dressed in battle gear, the look on all of their faces grim. Christopher stopped before Lucien and pulled him into his arms, holding him tightly. "I'm so sorry, baby."

"I need you there, Chris ... just in case."

"Let me grab my bag."

Lucien nodded and reached for my hand. "We'll be in the car. Hurry."

Xander walked with us at a distance, but Lucien stopped, waiting for him to catch up. When he did, Lucien grabbed Xander's hand, pulling him close. "What about the team, Xander?"

"They're assembling now, heading to the club in the tactical truck. Would you rather me ride with them?"

"No, Xander." Lucien kissed the side of his head. "Your place is here."

* * * *

The ride to the club had been anxious and hurried. Halfway there, Lucien had another spell of sickness and nausea. He'd begun to shake and sweat, and blood had begun to seep from the pores of his skin. By the time we reached the club, though, it had passed, leaving Lucien a little worse for wear. As he climbed shakily out of the car, I realized that he'd need to feed again. Soon.

We went to the front door of the club, finding it standing wide open, part of the handle and hinges still attached to the frame. It had been locked. The double doors leading inside

were closed, and when Lucien pushed them open, music—loud, pulsing—reverberated through my entire body.

Lucien cringed and I knew the volume was almost more than he could handle. He was growing weak, seeming to be drained from some unknown source. I slid a hand up his back, just letting him know that I was there. Lucien studied the interior of the club from where we stood, shaking his head. Tables and chairs, broken, lying in pieces; glasses and bottles of liquor shattered; there'd been a hell of a fight.

"I know he's here. I can feel him..."

I pushed at his back, urging him on. The moment we rounded the corner to the dance floor, Lucien nearly went to his knees. The entire floor was lit up, just like the time before, but this time ... this time, the body was chained to a table. And it was Caleb's.

We ran toward him, Lucien getting there first. By the time I reached them, Lucien was already on the table, crying out in pain as he tried to pull the chains off. I pushed his hands away, yelling, trying to get my voice over the music. "Don't touch the chains, Lucien! I'll try to get them off!"

Lucien turned his attention to Caleb and began talking to him, caressing him, kissing him, and then screaming for Christopher. Over and over again. Lucien's screams drove me on and I yanked and pulled and twisted and finally managed to get the chains off from around Caleb's arms. The ones around his feet and legs, however, would not budge.

The music stopped and Christopher appeared beside me, ripping off the remaining chains as if they'd been made of paper. "Stop him!" Christopher yelled, nodding to Lucien.

"Nothing can be done until I cleanse him. He's only going to weaken himself more."

I looked up only to find Lucien trying to feed Caleb from his wrist. I went to the head of the table and pulled Lucien's arm away, shielding Caleb's face as Lucien tried to feed him again. "Lucien, baby, he needs Christopher's help first!"

"He's alive!" Lucien cried.

I looked down at Caleb for the first time, unsure if the body before me could be anything other than truly dead. Caleb's eyes were open, but they were milky colored, almost white. His throat had been slit and he was covered in blood. The chains that bound him were obviously silver, as he was burned in every single place that they had touched him. But that was all pretty much superficial.

The wounds that had done the most damage? A huge gaping hole in his chest and a cut the entire length of his belly, following the same jagged path as his scar. Throwing knives were embedded in quite a few places along his body, making it look as if someone had stood the table on end and used him for target practice.

"Let Christopher work, Lucien," I said, tears falling steadily down my cheeks as I watched Christopher remove knife after knife from Caleb's chest and belly.

Caleb moaned weakly, the sound odd and distorted. His lips parted and he tried to speak, but nothing came out. Nothing could. At least until his throat was healed and put back together. Lucien bent down, kissing along Caleb's brow. "Keep holding on, Caleb. I've got you."

"You're going to need to feed, Lucien, or you won't be able to hold him for much longer," Christopher said pointedly.

"Hold him?" I asked, looking to Lucien. "He's what's draining you?"

Lucien nodded, caressing Caleb's face softly. "I cannot let him go, Peter."

"I can't either," I said. "But tell me what's going on. Let me help you as much as I can to get him—you—through this."

"Caleb's body must be cleansed of the silver or he will never heal. I need to be able to sustain him during that. Right now, he's clinging to the thread that connects us, and that's the only thing keeping him here."

"Why don't I feel it?" I asked. "Caleb and I are bonded as well."

"Because I'm shielding you from it. To feel the full effects of it would kill you."

"My blood or Xander's?" I asked, nodding that I understood. "Which will help you more?"

"Both; I'll take from you first. Let Xander direct the team in what they need to do—get them started."

I knew that Xander was already out there, working on things. Hunting. I could feel his frustration, his worry, his anxiety. But I could feel the beast inside of him, too, stirring, restless. I tried to send him my reassurance, visualizing my arms around him, sending that image as I'd done with Lucien so many times.

Lucien touched at my shoulder and I jumped, my eyes flying open. "Are you all right?"

I wasn't so sure of that, myself, but I nodded and pulled him to me, baring my neck. "Feed."

He struck instantly, white-hot pain shooting through me. I clenched my jaw tightly, groaning and clutching at him as he drank deeply. The pain soon became a dull ache and when Lucien finally pulled away, I staggered. Lucien kept me from falling, but passed me over to Antoine.

"He needs..."

"I'll take care of it," Antoine said, lifting me up and carrying me toward the door.

I was woozy and a little nauseated as we walked toward the door. Antoine was talking to me in a soothing voice, telling me to just relax and that he'd get me fixed up. The next thing I knew, I was lying on a soft surface, unable to even open my eyes. I swallowed hard, knowing I'd been here before, hoping that I wouldn't be as sick waking up as the last time.

* * * *

I awoke feeling an unfamiliar body pressed to mine. Which was odd, because I was at home. The arm around my waist was light against me. Whoever it was, was awake. I shifted slightly, looking behind me, meeting Antoine's violet-blue gaze. "How are you feeling?"

How was I feeling? I wasn't quite sure of that myself. My brain was a little foggy, but the only pain in my stomach was hunger and my head didn't feel like someone had tried to split it in half. "Okay, I think. Hungry."

"Good. Let's get you up and get you fed."

I sat up slowly, trying to blink back the fog. No. We weren't at home. We were at the club. Caleb. I cursed, crawling like hell to get off the bed. "Shit! Where's Lucien? Caleb? How long have I been out?"

"You've been out a few hours," Antoine said, sitting on the edge of the bed, sliding his boots back on.

I looked down, realizing I was still fully dressed. Well, minus the weapons. "And Caleb?"

"You missed the better part of his screams. But he'll make it. Of that, I have no doubt. Your weapons are on Lucien's desk, your boots are here by the bed, and your food is on the way."

I stopped and took a deep breath, letting myself relax just long enough to feel. Xander was gone, but Lucien was still here. I followed that connection to Lucien, pushing hesitantly. "Lucien?"

"I'm here, baby," he sent back. *"Stay where you are. I'm coming up the stairs now."*

The door opened a few moments later, Lucien standing in the opening, looking tired, but much better than he had before. I ran to him, throwing my arms around him. "Caleb?"

"He's resting," Lucien said, holding me tight to him. "We're working on getting him fed, slowly. How are you feeling, baby?"

"A little foggy. And guilty that I was in here sleeping while you needed me."

"No, I did that to you, Peter." He pushed me away enough to meet my eyes. "I needed more than blood. I fed, even as you slept."

"Energy?" I asked.

He nodded. "That's why you feel so shaky and so weak. As soon as you're able to take from me again, you'll feel better."

"Xander didn't feed you?"

"Don't worry, love; our wolf fed me very well before he left." He smiled as he looked up at Antoine. "Thank you for staying with him, Antoine."

"Any time," Antoine said. "But next time? I'd hope to be in bed with him under much, much better circumstances."

Lucien shook his head. "I think our bed is full enough as it is."

"So I hear," Antoine mused as he walked out, shutting the door behind him.

Lucien drew me close again. I slid my hands beneath his shirt, seeking that skin-on-skin contact. "How are you, Lucien? Really?"

"I'm so fucking tired," he said against my shoulder. "But this night is far from over."

"You need to feed again," I said, peppering his neck and shoulder with kisses. "I can feel it—see it."

"More donors are on their way, I'll feed from one of them."

"Can I see Caleb?"

Lucien nodded, pointing toward the bed. "Boots first; floor is still a mess."

* * * *

Caleb had been moved to one of the couches in a dark corner that was turned away from the rest of the club, and given pillows and blankets to make him more comfortable. I

stood at the foot of the couch, not wanting to disturb him; he looked so peaceful as he slept.

"Well, don't just stand there," he murmured, peeking up at me from beneath the blanket he was wrapped in.

"Hey." I moved to kneel right in front of him. "How you doing, pretty?"

"Not feeling pretty." He cupped my neck to pull me closer. "Lay with me?"

I looked back at Lucien, and he gave a nod. "I'm going to find out what's taking your food so long, Caleb. Don't get too comfortable."

I grinned and kicked my boots off, glad that I'd left them unlaced. Caleb held the blanket up shakily and even though I knew he'd been healed, seeing that beautiful body of his whole again made my throat tight. I took off my shirt and my belt, not wanting him to feel the harshness of it, and slid onto the couch beside him. He curled up against me, head pillowing on my chest.

"You're so warm," he whispered, clinging to me.

His body was like ice, and I shivered, wrapping the blanket tighter around him. "Gonna get you warm again, Caleb. I promise."

He placed a gentle kiss against my chest. We lay silent together for a long while—kissing, touching, caressing, and cuddling—when he finally cleared his throat. "You know, ever since I accepted Lucien's gift, I wondered if—somehow—I lost my soul in the process. But after this?" He paused, sinking against me a little more. "I know that I still have it, because I felt it slipping away."

"Caleb, honey." I kissed at his brow, holding him close. "I hate that you had to go through this to believe it for yourself."

His face contorted in pain and sadness. "As bad as it was? It gave me the answers I've needed for a long time."

"Have you talked to Lucien about what happened yet? About who did this?"

"Not yet." He whimpered and clutched at his stomach. "It's not going to go over well. I knew one of them. He was..." Caleb's body bowed suddenly, and he cried out in pain.

Lucien and Christopher rushed over to the couch and began examining him, and then Lucien bared his neck, pushing Caleb's face to it. Caleb sank his fangs in instantly, drinking deeply. A few minutes later, Caleb fell back on the couch, groaning, clutching at his stomach again. I looked up to Lucien for answers, and he put his hand on my shoulder. "It'll take a few more feedings for this to subside. He'll be fine before he sleeps at dawn."

"It's not safe to stay here," Caleb murmured. "We should go ... now."

Lucien sat on the arm of the couch, running his fingers through Caleb's hair. "We'll leave as soon as we get you fed at least once more, and as soon as I get an update from the teams."

"You sent out teams?" Caleb asked, his body growing tense.

"What is it, Caleb?" Lucien asked.

Caleb closed his eyes. "River."

Lucien growled and stood, clenching his fists, and I lifted a brow in confusion. "What river?"

"Not what ... who," Lucien told me. "*River* was a part of this?"

Caleb nodded mutely.

Lucien turned on his heel suddenly and stalked to the door, pulling it open. The entire thing came off when he pulled, though, and he threw it to the ground, roaring out in anger. The door skidded across the floor and came to a stop just in front of the bar. Caleb buried his face in my chest, shaking his head. "This is gonna be so bad."

I had a feeling that it was going to be nothing but bad until this River person was found. Looking up over the back of the couch, I noticed two younger-looking guys standing near the door, talking quietly. "Caleb, baby? I think your donors are here."

He rose up a little and looked at the two guys. "That would be them. Good stock."

I got up from the couch, hopping around to slip on my boots. When I got them on, I grabbed my shirt and crouched down, bringing Caleb in for a kiss. "I love you, Caleb. Know I've never said it, but I want you to know that, okay?"

"Oh you've said it; over and over again in the way you treat me."

I kissed him again and pulled back, smiling. "I'm going to go talk to Lucien. Feed so we can get you out of here."

As soon as I walked away, the two donors made their way over to Caleb. Christopher was at the bar, drying his tools and repacking his big black bag. Antoine was standing next to

him, hip resting against the counter, a grim expression on his face. I took a deep breath and exited out the open doorway that Lucien had made.

The night was cool and clear, and I couldn't help shivering as I slid my shirt back on. I looked around for Lucien, but didn't see him anywhere in the parking lot. He was close, though; I could feel him. I walked a little further out, calling his name, hesitantly. "Lucien?"

"I'm here," he said, his voice deep and growly.

I looked to the line of trees and caught a shadow of movement. I moved toward him slowly, unable to see much in the dark. "You don't sound so good, baby."

"I don't feel so good either."

I found him sitting on a large rock, his back against a tree. I walked around behind him, sliding onto the rock as I wrapped my arms around his. I pulled back a little, instinctively checking his temperature. "Why are you so hot, Lucien?"

He didn't answer, just sighed and pulled away. "Is Caleb feeding?"

"I just left him to it," I said, sliding down to sit next to him. As much as I felt that what had happened with Xander was meant to be, I couldn't help feeling guilty over not talking to Lucien about it first. After a long bout of silence, I cleared my throat. "About this stuff with Xander, I'm sorry."

"Why would you be sorry about that? He is yours—has been yours since you marked him that very night. I should have told you."

"But I should have waited for you; at least talked to you first, and not have you come home to find that I've fucked someone else. That's not how I want our relationship to be."

"I understand how it works when you're bonded to someone—and even more when the bond is there, but incomplete. If it had been anyone else, though, I might not have been as understanding."

"It wouldn't have been anyone else, Lucien. Don't want you to think I can't keep my dick in my pants."

"You can't," he said, sounding amused. "And I quite prefer you that way."

I bumped his shoulder hard with mine. "Be serious."

He wrapped an arm around me, pulling me close. "I only worry that you are getting too deep into this life too quickly."

"I don't see a problem with that, unless you think that I'd want to leave at some point."

"Would you still want to be here if I weren't?" he asked softly.

The thought of Lucien not being here sent chills over my body. I'd never seen him with such a grave expression on his face. "What's going on, Lucien? What aren't you telling me?"

He gave me a quick glance. "Did Caleb tell you of River?"

"He only said that this was going to be bad. That wasn't much news—it already *is* bad."

Lucien nodded. "Well, it's about to get worse."

"Tell me about River, Lucien."

Lucien sat back on the rock, folding his arms across his chest. "Caleb always hated him; said he didn't trust him. I passed it off as jealousy, River became my third, and my

world subsequently got a lot more complicated. Things were pretty good for a while—or so I thought. He spent most of his time terrorizing Joshua and Caleb behind my back. I was going through my own shit at the time, though, and by the time I realized River was out of control, it was too late."

"So River just left? Went his own way?"

"If only it were that easy." He sighed. "I should have killed him for the crimes that he committed, but I just couldn't. I showed him mercy and I banished him instead."

Shit. This was not good at all. "Do you think River is responsible for what happened to the donor ... and to Joshua?"

"At this point? I would say that is a very logical assumption. But I don't think he's alone in this. He's come and gone through my territory without me feeling any trace of him at all."

"It's not because of me being around, is it?" I asked.

"No, babe," he said before taking my hand in his. "Having you here—home with me—has solved that problem."

I squeezed his hand gently, leaning into him. "What are we going to do about River?"

Lucien was silent as a car pulled into the parking lot. When Eric got out with a large bag in his hand and headed inside the club, he said, "First? You're going to eat and I'm going to feed again, just to be safe. After that? We see what the team has to report back. It's basically a waiting game right now."

"You gonna let me go out with you and the team?"

"You mean I have a choice in whether or not to let you go?"

"No. I was just asking to be polite."

Lucien grabbed me and rolled us off the rock. I braced for the fall, but we landed softly on the ground instead. Lucien laughed at my shocked expression. "Fooled you, didn't I?"

I pulled him down for a kiss, wrapping my legs around his, hips snapping up. "Yeah? And maybe *this* was what I was hoping for."

"Your food's going to be cold," he moaned against my lips.

"Food can wait," I gasped as one of his hands slid down the back of my pants. "Need you, more."

"I was hoping you'd say that."

Chapter Eighteen

When we walked into the club, Caleb was lounging between two barstools, naked, save for his knee-high black boots. The look on his face was playful, and that alone sent relief coursing through me. Caleb stood, hand on his hip, shaking his head. "What *the* fuck? I nearly get murdered by psycho-vampire-boy-from-hell, you two are out fucking and sucking in the trees, and I don't get so much as an invitation? I see where *I* rate."

I couldn't help but grin, admiring that beautiful ass of his as he turned and walked to the bar. "So glad to have you on your feet, Caleb."

He paused half-way around the counter and lifted an eyebrow. "I do *just* as well on my knees."

"Don't tempt me, or we'll never get out of here," Lucien said. "Where are your clothes, Caleb?"

Caleb poured himself a drink, red and thick, and put the bottle back into the refrigerator beneath the counter. "What? You think River coaxed me out of them nicely?"

"I was supposed to bring them," Eric said, drawing my attention to a table nearby. "I fucked it up, but hey, I brought food."

"Thank you, Eric," I said.

"And what should I do? Though, I'll tell you now, I have no problems going naked."

"We have problems with you going naked," Lucien said.

"My spare clothes are in Lucien's trunk. I think they'll fit you well enough to get you home."

"Yes," Lucien said. "Give him your spare clothes."

I glared at Lucien. "Which means that *you* have to wait to rip my clothes off me until I get another spare set in the car."

Lucien shrugged. "It is not my fault that you tease me to the point of madness when we dance."

"I hate to interrupt the reflections here, but I'm not going home," Caleb said as he walked to the edge of the bar, hands on his hips again. "One more feed and I'll be good as new. Christopher said so himself."

I looked around, realizing then that Christopher and Antoine were nowhere to be seen. "Where *is* Christopher?"

Caleb rolled his eyes and pointed up toward the office. "Everyone is fucking tonight but me, apparently."

"How long have they been up there?" Lucien asked, grinning.

"Just before you two came in," Caleb said, looking at Lucien intently, as if waiting for an answer. When Lucien didn't say anything more, Caleb cleared his throat. "Lucien?"

Lucien looked at Caleb, his brows knitting in concern. "I don't think it's a good idea for you to tag along. Not this soon. If something were to happen to you, I..."

"So, the bastard wins, huh? He gets to think that he managed to kill me. Or that I'm still afraid of him? Fuck, Lucien! Can't you understand that I *need* to go? That I *need* to do this?"

"Can't you understand that I need you *not* to do this? Caleb, I..." Something passed through Lucien's eyes and he broke off. "We'll see. Let's see what we're up against first, okay?"

Caleb studied Lucien for a moment before nodding. "That's better than a flat-out no."

"And I believe you can count on one hand the number of times I've told you no over the years," Lucien said, his tone reprimanding, even if his words weren't.

"I'm sorry," Caleb said softly.

Xander and Silver walked into the club before anything else could be said, both of them seeming uncomfortable walking into the midst of tension. Silver looked to Lucien, but Xander looked past him, looking right at Caleb. He took in Caleb's naked form, and it was as if I felt his heart skip a beat. Caleb smiled, winking as he turned back toward the bar, and I felt the flutter again—stronger the second time.

Xander looked at me then, eyes wide as if he'd just realized that I knew what he was thinking—feeling. It took a lot, but I resisted the urge to laugh, and gave him a warm smile. He looked away for a moment before apparently remembering that he'd come to the club for something other than to ogle a naked Caleb.

"Lucien?" Xander paused, holding up a metallic-colored stick of some kind. "I've got some video feed for you to look at."

"What did you find?"

"River," Silver answered, his voice deep and rough. "Followed the bastard's trail all the way back to his hiding place."

"Clear trail?" Lucien asked.

Xander nodded. "Either he knew he'd be followed, or he was careless, thinking that he was in the clear."

Lucien looked a little worried. "Xander? Run up and get the laptop from my office."

Xander started toward the stairs, but made the mistake of tossing another look back at Caleb. Caleb, at the moment, was bent over, screwing with the laces of his boots. His ass was spread, balls hanging low, and just damned inviting. Xander stood staring, breathing coming hard and fast, licking at his dry lips.

Lucien glanced back and forth between Caleb and Xander before looking to me. I just shrugged. Hell, I didn't know when Xander had developed this sudden crush on Caleb. For the most part, all they'd ever done was fight and argue and get snappy with each other. Lucien turned his attention back to Xander. "Xander? The laptop?"

Xander turned ten shades of red at being caught and he ran up the stairs, getting to the door just as Christopher and Antoine were coming out. Lucien bumped me with his shoulder. "What's up with our wolf, baby?"

"I don't have a clue," I said quietly. "Other than Caleb's got him stirred up something terrible."

"They don't even like each other half the time."

"Don't have to like each other to fuck."

"True. But if they make me miserable?"

"You know, I'm sure there's something I could do to keep you occupied enough not to care."

Lucien laughed. "I love the way you think."

"What is wrong with your wolf?" Christopher asked as he and Antoine neared us.

"Horny," I told him, leaving them alone while I went to the bar to inspect my food. I pulled a heavy, metal plate out of the insulated food carrier it'd been in. It was still warm; almost too hot to touch. My stomach growled as I lifted the lid and the scent of steak and broccoli hit. And baked potato, too. Damn. Simon was a god in the kitchen. I reached in to see if he'd sent a fork and a knife. He had. And he'd managed to send salt and pepper, and all kinds of stuff to garnish the potato with.

Caleb sat down beside me on a barstool, still naked, his cup of thick, red liquid before him. I fixed up my potato and was just about to start eating when a loud thud sounded a few feet away. I looked up to see Xander trying to get untangled from a table that he'd overturned, blushing profusely.

Caleb laughed wickedly to himself, and it was only then that I realized that he was sitting with his legs spread wide open, right in Xander's line of view. I smacked him hard on the ass and he yelped, turning to face me quickly. "What was that for?"

"You're being cruel, Caleb," I said as I picked up the knife and cut into my steak. "If it's mutual, fine—but stop it with the teasing."

"I wasn't..."

"Caleb," I warned.

"Okay, so maybe I was. A little."

"So it's not mutual?" I asked.

"Now, I didn't say *that*," he defended himself quickly. "I don't know what the fuck it is, just that when he looked at me

like that a bit ago? I was ready to spread it all and let him fuck me right then and there."

"I find it hard to believe that in seventeen years, the two of you have never fucked. Not as close as you both are to Lucien."

"Xander? Well, he ... it was always like he was jealous, you know? Like he was fighting for a spot when he already had one." Caleb shrugged, taking a sip from his glass. "Wonder how he fucks?"

"Beautifully." I shuddered pleasurably, remembering.

Caleb nearly choked, leaning close. "When the fuck did this happen?"

"Earlier this evening," I said. "Just sort of ... happened."

"Ah, that whole bonding thing."

"You knew?" I asked.

"No, not really; I suspected, but Lucien wouldn't confirm or deny it," Caleb said. "So ... you think I should go for it?"

"I think you should do whatever you want to. But I guarantee you this: if you make Lucien and me miserable? You'll both have hell to pay. And Caleb?"

"Yeah?"

"Put some clothes on; your ass is distracting me."

* * * *

I sat at the table beside Lucien, listening to him plan and organize. Xander and Silver sat next to each other across from us, drawing up maps and pointing out where the highest levels of activity were. They'd marked the warehouse, which was only two blocks from my old apartment building. The

warehouse had been abandoned for the entire time that I'd lived in the area.

Christopher and Antoine had begged off on going out with the team, but said that if Lucien needed either of them to call and they'd come as soon as possible. Eric drove them home and Caleb rode along just so that he could grab his own clothes. He bitched that even though my leather pants fit him, they didn't fit him *right*.

"Go home, feed, and get reorganized," Lucien said. "We leave in an hour, which should give us just enough time to take care of this before dawn and get back home."

Silver looked up at Lucien from across the table. "We need to be discreet. There were some cops in the area that were a little more than interested."

Lucien shrugged. "Then I guess we'll go on foot, then; pair off and keep to the shadows. I don't care to spend another night in the hands of the authorities."

I raised an eyebrow at that but kept silent, not wanting to ask in front of Xander and Silver. Silver nodded and stood before reaching for the maps, rolling them up. Xander sat for a moment after Silver walked away, and looked at Lucien. "You need to feed anymore? I can get you another donor."

Lucien shook his head. "No, I've fed enough. Did you eat something after I fed from you?"

Xander's eyes shifted as if he was uncomfortable for some reason, but he finally nodded. "I had a ... large meal."

"Very good, Xander," Lucien said in approval. "You've needed that for a while."

Xander gave a curt nod and stood before heading over to grab his equipment that he'd set on one of the tables. He followed Silver out of the club and I nudged Lucien with my elbow. "What was that all about?"

"He changed and *then* he fed."

"As in ... *changed*?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how lovely."

"Knew you'd appreciate the details." Lucien stood. "Come on, babe. We need to get the club secured and closed up while we wait on the team. They'll be back shortly."

I got to my feet, looking around. The place was a fucking mess. Sure, people had come in and cleaned up the blood and all, but things were still broken and overturned and so out of place. I had to force myself to move and not just sit down again. Lucien disappeared into the supply room and came out with tools in hand a few minutes later.

"Come on, baby. It won't take long. I promise."

"I know. Kick my ass if I slow down too much, huh?"

Lucien handed me the toolbox. "I've got to get some plywood from out back. Why don't you start by taking the hinges off the door that I flung across the floor?"

I looked at the door and shook my head. "Shouldn't that be *your* job?"

"Do *you* really want to carry in the plywood?"

"Dude, weren't you supposed to be getting plywood or something? Why are you still standing there?"

Lucien grumbled and turned on his heel, walking out. I bent and retrieved a screwdriver out of the toolbox and set to

work removing hinges. I was just finishing up as Lucien came back in. He and I set to work and in a short time, we had the club closed up and secured. We were standing in the parking lot, staring at the boarded-up entrance, when the tactical team's truck pulled up.

The truck had been bought at auction and had—at one time—belonged to an actual SWAT team. The team had painted it black and had customized it to fit their needs. The back doors opened up and Silver leaned out. "You guys want a ride or do you want to walk it?"

"Ride," I said quickly.

Lucien nodded in agreement. "Ride, but we'll walk the remaining twelve blocks to the warehouse."

I climbed in, Lucien following right behind me. We sat on one of the benches on the inside of the vehicle where I proceeded to try to latch myself to him over all of the weapons and equipment we were both carrying. As much as I wanted River's head on a platter, I just wanted to go home, to curl up in bed and pretend that everything was okay for a few more hours.

The truck stopped and the engine shut off sooner than I expected. Lucien said a few words to Xander and Silver, and when we opened the rear doors to the truck to get out, there were a few more team members waiting to load up with equipment from inside the truck.

Lucien and I left them to readying themselves and started off toward the warehouse. It was odd to be back in my old neighborhood and not be on my way to or from work. We

passed the club a couple of blocks later and Lucien nudged me with his elbow. "Do you miss it?"

"Nah, not really," I said. "I mean, for a while I missed seeing Jack all the time, but since he's spending more time at *our* club, that kind of makes up for it. The best thing I ever got at Rave? Was you."

"That's funny." Lucien smiled at me. "'Cause the best thing I ever got at Rave? Was you, too."

"I guess we're even, then."

We fell into a comfortable silence as we walked and my mind started to wander. My mind turned back to conversations and things that had been said earlier in the evening; the thought of Lucien spending a night in police custody still had my imagination going haywire. "You never told me you spent a night in custody." I tried not to sound accusing.

"Somehow I knew you were going to ask about that," Lucien said as he adjusted his vest.

"So spill it already."

"It was the first time I'd gone out on my own after coming off on the serum. I made a kill, a rogue, and I was hauling him away to dispose of him when two patrol cars blocked me into an alley. They all yelled for me to drop my weapon—and the body—and for me to drop to my knees. I told them that I'd done nothing wrong, that the body I had wasn't human."

"You actually told them that?"

Lucien nodded. "I had no reason to lie. I made my one phone call, to the Council, and waited until they talked to the right people and dealt with things. The only thing was, they

put me in a regular holding cell. I was running out of time. They knew *exactly* who I was—I could read it in their thoughts. Officers taunted and gathered as dawn approached, wanting to see the show."

"Oh, Lucien..." I reached out and slid my hand through his.

He squeezed it tightly in return. "I am indebted to the Council for their ability to be both quick and threatening. I was released just in time to die as dawn broke. Right there, in the middle of booking."

I couldn't contain a chuckle. "Bet that gave them a show."

"As I heard it from Xander, most of the officers knew what was happening, had been expecting it. There were a few others, however, mostly desk clerks, who'd never even seen a vampire before. They really had a hard time with that and I'm sure that, to this day, they're still made fun of for panicking over a dead man."

"Why did you go with the cops in the first place, Lucien? Couldn't you have just fled? I know you're fast enough."

"As Master, they knew my face. If I had run, they would have eventually captured me anyway. I was trying to be honorable."

"And it got you dead in the middle of booking."

"I didn't say there weren't flaws in that. I'm older now, a little wiser in the ways of what I need to do in order to keep the peace. I *won't* be caught again."

As we neared my old apartment building, I stopped, tugging at Lucien's hand. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing's wrong," I said, stepping up close. "Just need a moment. We're almost to the warehouse. Everything going to be all right tonight, Lucien?"

He looked off down the street before sighing heavily. "I cannot promise that it will all be okay. I can only promise that I will do everything in my power to make sure we deal with River quickly and efficiently."

I leaned forward and pressed my lips to his. "Love you. Want everything to be over with. Want to wake up with you tomorrow night and not do a damned thing but lay there and love you and talk to you."

"Talk to me?"

"Talk to you," I whispered against his lips. "Love talking to you, baby."

Lucien cupped the back of my neck and drew me back in for a long, tender kiss. "I'm going to ask you to fall back with Eric and Caleb when we get to the warehouse. It's nothing personal, I just..."

"Don't worry, I'm really not up to fighting much tonight. I'm going to let the professionals handle it."

It was the truth; I really wasn't up to it. I'd taken from Lucien as we'd fucked in the woods near the club, and my body was fine, but my mind was exhausted. Oh yeah, better to drop the macho shit, and just admit I wasn't feeling so hot.

"You are being unreasonably cooperative tonight." He urged me to start walking again.

"I'm tired, Lucien. I'm man enough to admit it instead of trying to play hero. Don't want someone getting hurt or killed because of me."

"You could have stayed at the house, Peter," Lucien said sympathetically.

"I couldn't have stayed there if I tried."

Lucien shook his head as we continued along in silence. He paused before we rounded a corner and signaled out across the intersection. All I could see were shadows. There wasn't any movement, but I knew our guys were there. I could *feel* their presence, prickling along my skin, giving me goose bumps. What used to scare the shit out of me comforted me more than anything now.

Eric and Caleb appeared beside me as Lucien walked on ahead. I watched him for a moment and then reached out, searching for Caleb's hand. His slid into mine first and he squeezed. "It won't take long, Peter."

"One can only hope," I said as we started to walk.

I could feel the vampires around me more than I could see them, but I knew there were at least twenty of them. I wasn't quite sure on the number of werewolves, but I knew that there were at least a few. And if something happened? I knew more vampires and werewolves would come. Xander was up ahead near Lucien, but I could feel a few others behind us as well. We stopped suddenly and I realized then that we were at the warehouse. "What the hell?" Eric said, looking toward the building.

I looked up to see a shadow of a man perched in a second-story window. No, not a man; a monster. Caleb's hand trembled in mine, and I squeezed it tight, inching my body closer to his. "It's all right, baby," I whispered. "He can't hurt you anymore."

Caleb let go, tightening his grip on his shotgun. "He'll have a hole in his chest this time to match the one he gave me."

"Lucien Delacroix," River said from above, his voice dripping with contempt. "Still so predictable. Is the team for me?"

"You know very well that it is," Lucien said evenly. "Where is your Master?"

River laughed, the sound like nails screeching on a chalkboard. "He waits inside. Sure there's nothing *I* can help you with?"

"You could drop dead and save me the trouble."

"You wound me with your words, Lucien," River said as he landed on the pavement before us. His gaze landed on Caleb beside me, and he shook his head in disgust. "And you! You just refuse to fucking die?"

"Take me to your Master, River," Lucien interrupted. "Or we will deal with you now and find him ourselves."

River rolled his eyes and opened the door. "After you."

Silver moved in and shoved River into the warehouse. "Move it, you piece of shit."

River jerked away, hissing. "Don't touch me, you guerilla fuck."

Silver's movement was almost a blur, but River's cry of pain was sharp and loud. With the vampires in front of us, though, I didn't see what had happened; just Silver, kicking at River to keep him moving. Lucien stopped suddenly as we entered a large open area and looked up toward the ceiling.

A vile, wicked laugh sounded just before a figure landed on the floor. He rose up, squaring his shoulders. He was shorter

than Lucien, with short, jet-black hair and nearly black eyes. He wore dark slacks and a wine-colored silk shirt that made him appear more sophisticated than I knew he ever could be. "He said you'd come."

"Who are you?" Lucien growled. "And what brings you into my territory?"

The vampire before us raised a dark eyebrow. "I ... am Victor."

"Wow ... Victor. How nice. What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Actually, I was minding my own business, roaming from town to town, when River found me. He told me of great wealth and lands and of a coven that was due for a little—*reorganizing*. To put it simply, I could not resist the temptation."

"I suggest that you leave in the same way that you found yourself here. River, of course, will not be going with you," Lucien said.

Victor laughed. "I've found that I rather like it here. But I do have a question for you, Lucien. Where are your women? Everywhere I look there are men, and boys—pretty boys—but still boys."

"How I run my coven is my business," Lucien said calmly.

Victor sighed and rolled his eyes before flinging his arm out toward Lucien. Lucien stumbled back in surprise, shaking his head. He turned and handed his weapon to Xander and it was only then that I saw the line of blood across his face. But no one had touched him at all. What the fuck?

"Oh, shit," Caleb whispered. "They're not gonna make it in time."

"Who? What's happening?"

Sudden movement along the walls of the room drew my attention away from Caleb. Thirty or so vampires now guarded the entrances, exits, and windows of the warehouse. It seemed that we were surrounded and that we'd walked willingly right into a trap. So much for letting the professionals handle it. I drew the pistol from my hip holster and kept it pointed at the ground, but ready.

I was confident in Lucien's ability, but I was worried about how this was all going to go down. I spared a glance in his direction. He and Victor were standing about five feet apart, staring at each other. This didn't look good at all.

I inched closer to Caleb, whispering, "What's going on, Caleb? Talk to me."

"Lucien thinks Victor is issuing a challenge, but the words haven't been spoken yet. Not sure why not."

"What are we waiting for?" I attempted to send back. I'd never been able to do it with anyone but Lucien comfortably.

"Christopher and Antoine. They have to witness it."

"They have to witness Lucien kill another Master?"

Caleb looked at me sadly. *"No, but they have to be here to witness Lucien lose. A challenge is a fight to the death. If, by some chance, Lucien doesn't gain the advantage? Victor will be Master here. And we are fucked."*

Fucked. Only way I wanted to be fucked was by Lucien himself. This was so not happening. I glanced around at the team. We looked like we'd walked out of the pages of some

kind of SWAT magazine. The vampires on the other side? They had nothing. Well, except for the fact that they were vampires and all that.

I sensed something moving above my head, but before I could look up, Eric grabbed my hand. "Don't look."

"Why are we just standing here?" I asked.

"We're waiting for them to make the first move. Once they do? We shoot their dumb asses."

I shook my head. "Man, Eric, I don't know whether to want you on my side, or want you to stay the fuck away until it's finished."

Gino tossed a look back from where he stood a few feet away. "He's very cavalier about it all, isn't he?"

I smiled and winked at Eric. "Wouldn't have him any other way."

"I say we all go home and fuck after this. Just one huge orgy." Eric stroked his hand down over his belly to his groin. "This shit makes me so fucking hard."

"Everything makes you hard, Eric," Caleb told him with a snicker.

"Oh, and you're one to talk?" I bumped my shoulder against Caleb's, grinning, still keeping my guard up in case any of the vampires took our show of bullshitting as not being ready to fight.

"Oh, oh, oh ... looky there," Eric said, nodding toward the west wall. "We're about to have us some takers."

Sure enough, the bravado had piqued their interest and a few of Victor's vampires were moving in, hissing and growling. Maybe I was getting cocky, but I wasn't impressed.

Not when we were packing IRSIL—irradiated silver—rounds. Those fuckers could stop a vampire or a werewolf quicker than anything I'd ever seen before. Well, I'd only seen it in videos, but I was sure that still counted. The training videos Lucien had made me watch to get familiar with all of the equipment had been very thorough. There was actual footage of the rounds being used on both rogue vampires and werewolves. From everything I'd seen? I was definitely a big fan.

"As soon as you hear the word 'now', drop to the floor, but keep your weapon drawn," Caleb sent.

I raised a brow at that, but nodded. My hand tightened against my pistol and I suddenly had the urge for something bigger. Like the shotgun I had slung across my back. The moment I started to reach for it, all hell broke loose.

One of Victor's vampires attacked one of ours, setting off a chain reaction of activity. Vampires moved away from the walls and more suddenly appeared on an upper level of catwalks. Okay. So maybe we were fucked.

"Now!" Lucien's voice thundered through the room, the sheer volume causing me to see stars.

I dropped to the floor as shards of glass began to rain down. Automatic gunfire erupted and I knew it was our guys. Well, hoped like hell it was our guys. As soon as the glass stopped falling, I looked up to see two of our werewolves on a single rappel line from the roof, back to back, guns blazing, casings raining down in place of the glass.

Vampires around us shrieked in panic and horror, seeming to be confused on whether to fight or flee. Most of them were

fleeing—until being stopped by an IRSIL round, that is. Some of them, however, were braving the gunfire to get to us. I looked over at Caleb just in time to see a vampire grabbing him up from the floor from behind. I rolled, and aimed, shooting the vampire right in the back.

The vampire screamed, dropping Caleb, who rolled, shooting him again in the head. "Stupid fuckers!" Caleb shouted.

A vampire landed on me, half of his face missing, trying to get at my neck. I cringed, pulling my pistol low, pressing it to his chest. I squeezed the trigger and the body became heavy against me. I rolled from beneath him, and kicked him away. More vampires were pouring into the room and I couldn't help but wonder where the fuck they'd come from.

I'd never thought the target practice Lucien had been letting me do would come in handy so goddamned quickly. I crawled over to Caleb—who'd just shot off two rounds into some vampire chick's face—wanting to keep him with me. He might have been a vampire and stronger than I could ever imagine, but I still felt a sense of responsibility. I spared a glance around, trying to get a bearing on where Lucien was, *how* he was.

A bright glint of metal at the north end of the room caught my attention and I breathed a sigh of relief when Lucien came into view. He was on his feet, moving fast and strong. He wielded his sword with the ease that I knew only a knight could. Some things Lucien would never forget. Some things made me proud as hell. Where Victor had gotten a sword to make it an even fight, I'd never know.

"Peter!" Eric screamed my name. "Behind you!"

I shot off a round as I turned. The bullet grazed the vampire's head, but didn't wound him. I squeezed off another shot, this time aimed well, and my gun clicked empty. "Fuck! I'm out! Caleb? Eric? Shoot this motherfucker!"

I dug in my vest, getting a spare clip, dropping out the old one, but the vampire just kept coming. I was too fucking scared to look away and lose sight of the bastard. Just as I got the new clip in and pressed my finger to the trigger, the vampire's head exploded. I looked around, knowing I hadn't shot.

Gino winked at me, laughing. "Try to keep up, eh?"

"Fuck you!"

Our two werewolves dropped to the floor and began unhooking themselves from their harnesses, still pulling off shots. Caleb moved over and urged me to my feet. He pulled at the strap to the shotgun across my back. "Shotgun time, baby; let's finish this."

I pulled the shotgun off my back and slid the pistol into the hip holster. I turned to say something to Caleb, but he was already moving off, pulling off shots. I followed him, wanting to stay as close to him as possible. There were only about thirty vampires left now, and our team was determined as hell to cut that number to zero as quickly as possible.

I caught up with Caleb and he pulled me close. "Back to back. Don't want these fuckers getting either of us, 'cause we're too busy looking out for each other!"

I nodded in agreement. Back to back, we made our way to the eastern wall. The rest of the team was busy doing the

same. I'd pulled off three shots, dropped two vampires, and had just reloaded when Caleb's hand brought the barrel of my shotgun down.

"That's it," he said. "Keep it at the ready, but I don't think there are any more to come."

I looked around the room; bodies littered the floor, the smell of blood and gunpowder thick in the air. Metal clanged against metal, drawing my attention to Lucien and Victor, still engaged heavily in battle. Lucien was covered in blood, but I couldn't see any visible wounds. Caleb nudged me with his elbow and pointed up toward a catwalk.

Antoine and Christopher stood watching the fight below, neither of them armed or dirty with the blood of battle. "What are they doing?" I asked.

"Same as we are; watching and waiting," Caleb answered, leaning his shoulder against mine.

I turned my attention back to Lucien and Victor. The fight was intense, and I could tell that they were both tiring. Lucien was pushing hard, though, a determined expression settled over his face. I could feel the connection between us, strong and steady. There was a slight pull to it—something I recognized immediately. Lucien was trying to feed.

Just as the realization hit, Caleb and Eric moved shoulder to shoulder in front of me, blocking me protectively. I dropped my weapon, closed my eyes, and opened the connection between Lucien and me completely. I sent him every bit of strength and encouragement I could. A few moments later, I felt Lucien—smug, satisfied—pull away from

the connection. I had to grab onto Eric and Caleb to keep from falling to my knees.

The clang of the swords stopped, and I heard a wail that sent chills up my spine. I opened my eyes just in time to see Lucien swing the fatal blow, Victor falling to his knees as his head rolled across the floor beside him. Lucien's sword dropped to the concrete and I pushed past Eric and Caleb to run to him.

He fell to his knees just as I reached him and I knelt down, drawing him into my arms. "You did so good, baby. I'm so proud of you."

Lucien pulled away, looking me over. "You look good enough to eat."

"Wrong fairy-tale, lover," I reminded him.

Lucien leaned forward, pressing his lips to mine. "Let's get our boys and get the fuck out of here."

I nodded and grabbed Lucien's sword before I stood, handing it to him. "What do we do about the bodies?"

Lucien looked around, eyes of the team members looking to him for answers. "Get our shit out, make sure we have *all* of our equipment—rappel lines, anchors, everything—then burn it down."

I looked up to find Christopher and Antoine, but they were nowhere to be seen. Xander and Silver walked into the room from one of the exits, holding a struggling River between them. "We found a straggler," Xander said, "Thought you'd want to decide what to do with him, personally."

"Ahh, yes ... River," Lucien mused. "Whatever shall I do with you?"

River spat in Lucien's direction, snarling as he tried to extricate himself from Xander and Silver. "Fuck you!"

Lucien's hand tightened on his sword and he let out a heavy sigh. "As much as I would *love* to take you home and let you die a slow and miserable death—I don't want you anywhere near my home again. So, taking that in consideration, I'm going to give you exactly what I should have given you the first time around."

Silver and Xander stepped away the moment Lucien swung the sword, in perfect, practiced synchronization. River had a moment of shock register on his face ... and it stayed there as his head made a loud, wet thud at Lucien's feet. Lucien kicked the head away and looked to me. "I do believe that's everything."

I looked around, nodding my head in agreement, until my eyes rested on Caleb, walking through the mass of bodies. If I didn't know any better, he was searching for something. "Not quite," I said, then turned to Caleb. "Caleb? Come over here for a second?"

He examined a body as he walked over it, but finally headed over to us. He came to a sudden halt as he saw River's remains. "Oh, fuck, yes..."

I threw an arm around Caleb. "Oh, fuck, yes ... the bastard's dead. Never again, baby."

Caleb turned and kissed me happily before moving to Lucien, kissing him thoroughly before pulling back, letting a sigh of relief escape. "Thank you, Lucien."

Lucien reached out and traced Caleb's lips with his thumb. "I'm just sorry I didn't do it this way the first time around."

"It's done now, that's what counts," Caleb said. "I'm gonna stay with the team. Burn it out."

Lucien nodded and took my hand. "Guys? Get it burned out and get the fuck home. Don't want any of you getting caught in the middle of daybreak."

The guys gave nods of agreement and set to work. Lucien tugged at my hand, urging me to walk with him. We exited the building cautiously, just in case the gunfire had drawn unwanted attention. I wondered why it hadn't, actually, because the fight had lasted quite a while.

"Because we've got one of our own working the switchboard tonight," Lucien told me. "She'll be out of there in about half an hour, though, so we need to hurry."

"You just have all the answers, don't you?"

"And you know you love it." Lucien smiled, directing me toward his car at the curb. "Looks like Christopher found my keys, after all."

"And provided curb-side service," I said. "Too bad we can't keep him around."

Chapter Nineteen

I awoke slowly, rolling away from Lucien to lie on my back. I'd slept plastered to him for the entire day; not moving at all, it seemed. My body was sore, but I think it had a hell of a lot more to do with the events of the night before more than anything else. I closed my eyes in an attempt to go back to sleep, but it wasn't happening; not with nature calling loud and clear. I grumbled and forced myself up out of the warm bed.

When I crawled back into bed a few minutes later, Lucien had moved. He didn't breathe when he slept, and his heart didn't beat. That had never freaked me out. What had, at first, were the little ways he'd move when he was supposed to be well and truly out of the control of his body. Now, it just made me laugh. I chuckled and pulled the comforter back over us both, snuggling against him.

I reached up and hit the switch for the light at the ceiling, wanting something that cast just enough light to study him by. I brushed my fingers against his face, tracing the tiny scar at his jaw-line. My fingers moved down his neck, his chest, his belly, touching and tracing each and every scar. I knew them all; had heard every story behind them. A lot of the stories had me in tears, but at times, it was a fine line in whether the tears were from laughter or sheer thankfulness that he'd made it through some of that shit in the past.

As my fingers traced his navel, brushing the barbell, Lucien's belly tightened. Oh, someone was waking up. I shifted and got on my hands and knees above him, kissing his

lips softly, working my way slowly down his neck, his chest, his belly; the same path my fingers had taken a short time before. This time, however, I didn't stop there. I continued on, down the trail of dark hair leading to his cock.

Which was damn near hard over the left side of his hip.

I smiled and moved on lower, placing a kiss to those soft, hairy sacs below. They wrinkled and drew up the moment my lips touched them, making me grin. Even out like he was, his body was still so fucking responsive. I settled between his legs, taking my time to explore him without the need for sex being right there waiting.

I licked and sucked at his balls for the longest time, just loving the feel and the taste of him in my mouth. By the time I moved back up, tiny beads of precome were rolling down over his hip where his cock lay. I took in just the head, drinking in that salty-sweet taste. His hips rolled up slightly, automatically seeking more contact.

"Time to wake up, baby," I whispered, following the trail of precome over his hip with my tongue.

There was a slight mental push, as if he were trying to communicate before he was fully capable. I tried to push back, but nothing happened. I moved up the bed and retrieved a bottle of lube, opening it up. I was going to need it. Deep down to the bottom of my soul, I knew he'd felt everything I'd done and he'd be wanting. I got myself ready and slid back over to him, spending a few moments at war with my body and my mind.

My body wanted him now; my mind wanted him awake. And then there was that part of me that insisted that he was

awake already, just not fully. After several minutes of whimpering and warring, I crawled back over him, straddling his hips. I took his cock in my hand and rose up before sinking down over that thick head.

Head rolled back, eyes closed, my breath caught and my body shuddered with nothing but pure fucking pleasure. I licked at my lips, moaning as I moved up and down over his shaft. "God, Lucien, wish you were awake," I murmured.

"I am," he answered, his voice unsteady and rough. "Have been ... sort of."

I reached back and grabbed the comforter, pulling it up over us both as I sank down over him. I kissed him softly, teasing at his lips. "Wanted you."

"Got me," he whispered, hands sliding feather-lightly down the middle of my back.

I gasped as my body responded to his touch, gooseflesh rising on my skin. "Oh, God, Lucien..."

He rolled us over gently, pulling out as he did. I whimpered in protest, but he just smiled and pulled the comforter around us, kissing me slowly and lazily. The kisses soon trailed down my jaw, the side of my neck, and back up to my ear.

"Love you," he whispered, pushing into me again.

I gripped his shoulders as my body bowed back, crying out as his tongue traced the hollow of my throat. His head bent lower and he sucked in one nipple, barely tugging at the ring before moving to the other. My hands slid down his sides to his hips, just feeling him as he rocked against me.

I could feel his touch everywhere—in my heart, my head, and my soul—just moving and rocking. Each kiss and caress sent shudders through my entire body, and Lucien's moans and sighs at my lips had me soaring. The pleasure just continued to build and build, and it wasn't long before I cried out, spilling heat between us.

But the orgasm just went on and on, and by the time Lucien's heat filled me, I was in tears, coming again. My body jerked and shuddered, and I found it too damned hard to open my eyes without my vision going blurry. Soft, butterfly kisses landed on one closed eye and then the other, a kiss at the tip of my nose, and by the time he got to my lips, I was kissing him back.

"Love you."

Pale blue eyes met mine as I finally managed to get my eyes open. Lucien smiled. "You know, I could get used to waking up like this."

"I'm not sure I'd survive it," I said, swallowing hard as another shudder hit. "Just ... Damn."

* * * *

We'd been curled up in bed for hours, watching TV. I was sitting between Lucien's legs, reclined against his chest, when there was a subtle thump near the door. Lucien and I both looked up as it opened and Caleb and Xander walked in. Xander carried a tray that could only mean food, making my mouth water and my stomach growl.

Xander set the tray at the foot of the bed. "Dinner?"

"Oh, God, yes," I said.

"Close the door, Caleb," Lucien said. "Stay a while."

Caleb closed the door, but kept his distance from the bed—and Xander. It seemed the dance continued, neither one of them wanting to get too close, but both of them practically humming with energy and want. I left any teasing to Lucien and tossed off the covers, crawling over to inspect my food.

I lifted the cover of the tray and found a hamburger and a separate plate of fruit and veggies. That was my Simon; keeping me healthy, keeping me tasty. I laughed at my own thoughts and looked up at Xander as I took a bite out of a carrot stick. He was watching me carefully, trying not to look as Caleb walked around to Lucien's side of the bed.

"What's wrong, my wolf?" I asked softly.

"A few things," he answered, reaching out to slide his hand through my hair.

I caught his hand and held it to my cheek, kissing his palm. "Kneel down so I don't have to look at you all the way up there." I waited until he did and looked him in the eyes. "You know I'm here, Xander. If you need to talk, all you have to do is say the word."

He looked down, but finally nodded. "I don't want to fuck up your night, but can we talk later ... in private? Won't take long, I promise."

"Can't talk about it right now?"

The look in his eyes was deathly serious as he shook his head. "No."

"All right," I said. "Midnight snack in the kitchen?"

Xander nodded, letting out a breath of relief. He leaned up and kissed me, lingering, breathing "Thank you," against my lips.

As Xander stood, I looked back at Lucien and Caleb. They were in what seemed to be a serious discussion, so I grabbed the tray and got up off the bed, taking it to the desk to eat. I turned to grab a robe, but Xander was right there with it already in his hands.

"Thanks," I said as I slipped it on. "Did you eat?"

He shook his head. "I'll eat later; not hungry just yet."

Xander wasn't hungry? Something was definitely wrong. There was no way I was going to be able to wait until midnight, wondering what in hell it could be. I grabbed Xander's arm and started walking toward the door. Just before we walked out, I looked back to Lucien, still engaged in conversation with Caleb.

"Lucien? Xander and I are going back to the kitchen for pickles and stuff. Be right back."

Lucien raised an eyebrow. "Pickles?"

I nodded. "Pickles and anything else I can find that soothes a craving."

"Chocolate," Lucien said. "And a bottle of red wine."

"Right." I pulled Xander out the door. As it closed behind us, I smiled at him. "Guess we're going to the kitchen after all."

We started down the corridor and Xander cleared his throat. "I'm sorry to bother you, but I didn't think this could wait for long."

I stopped just before we turned to enter the main corridor. "All right, Xander, just spit it out. Here is as good a place as any."

He pulled me in close, arms going around my shoulders, lips next to my ear. "I overheard Christopher and Antoine talking a few hours ago. Christopher wants to offer Lucien the serum again."

"What? Why the fuck would they do that?"

I tried to push him back to look at him, but he held me tight and continued. "They not only want it for him, but for the team members. They also want to take someone from here back to New York for a few months and teach them the formula for the serum so that it can be made here and not transported. Peter, I can't go through that again. I love Lucien, but..."

"Shh," I whispered, pulling the elastic from his hair, sliding my fingers through it. "Did you catch why they want to do this?"

He relaxed a little, leaning into my touch. "They have a *feeling* that things are going to get bad with the hunters again. The Council's apparently had reports of entire covens being taken out on the west coast."

"So they want us to be ready, huh?"

Xander closed his eyes, sighing. "But at what price?"

I wrapped my arms around him, hugging him tightly. I had no answers for that. Lucien himself had told me how bad things had been when he went off the serum. I knew that he'd killed several human donors and injured quite a few of the werewolves—Xander included—just trying to feed, and

the guilt of that had him locking himself in a vault, trying to starve himself sane.

"I'll talk to Lucien," I said softly.

Xander nodded and I pushed him away gently, sliding my arm through his. "Come on, walk me to the kitchen and get yourself something to eat. Thank you for coming to me, Xander."

"You're not mad that I listened to their conversation?"

I smiled. "Well, now, if you *hadn't* listened, we wouldn't have the heads-up, would we?"

* * * *

I left Xander in the kitchen, eating, and headed back to the bedroom; wine, chocolate, pickles, and ketchup in tow. Caleb was just leaving the bedroom as I got there, and I called out for him to hold the door. He grinned, seeming to be in a much calmer mood than he was when I left.

"Looks like you got your hands full," he said, leaning in to kiss me.

I chuckled against his lips. "I think you do, too."

"Shit! Does everyone know?"

I shrugged. "It's in the way you look at each other. Just fuck and get it over with, okay? If you want more, great; if not, then the urge has been settled and the questions will have been answered for the both of you."

He frowned. "That's the same thing Lucien said; his version was just much longer."

"Xander's in the kitchen. Be nice to him, though, or *I* will kick your ass."

"I'd rather you lick it," he smarted off as I walked past him into the bedroom, disappearing before I could reply.

Lucien turned from where he sat at the desk, peeling the skin from one of the grapes. "You know, you should have just taken the tray back to the kitchen so that you could have at least eaten it warm."

"It's a hamburger, Lucien. It'll keep."

"What is wrong with the wolf?"

"Could it be the same thing that's wrong with the vampire?"

Lucien furrowed his brow in concern. "He's worried with the security system at the club and the security company, too?"

"Should have known it wouldn't be that easy," I grumbled, setting the stuff in my hands down on the desk.

He took me by the hand and pulled me close before parting the robe and pulling me to sit on his lap. "Talk to me, lover; what is wrong?"

"Xander overheard a sensitive conversation earlier."

"And?"

"It was between Christopher and Antoine," I said hesitantly.

"Go on," Lucien said, tension creasing his brow.

"They intend to offer you the serum again—you and the team. They also want to take someone from here up to New York and teach him how to make the formula so it wouldn't need to be transported."

"I see," Lucien said after a few moments. "And I guess they think I'm just going to jump up and accept the offer?"

"I don't know, baby." I ran my thumbs across his brow, trying to keep him calm. "I know that they've discussed it with the Council and apparently have the okay to offer it. From what Xander said, the Council has had reports of entire covens being taken out on the west coast."

Lucien bit hard at his lip, a thin trail of blood running toward his chin. "I can't do it," he whispered. "Because eventually they'll think of another reason to stop, or take away the serum and I refuse to put anyone in my coven through what I went through. *I can't go through that again.*"

"I support you one hundred percent," I said, kissing his brow. Tears flooded his eyes and he laid his head against my chest. I held him tight, running my fingers through his hair. "We'll step up security, regroup, plan—we'll be fine, baby."

"I know we will. Other shit just hurts."

"Come on," I said, sliding off his lap and taking his hand, "Back to bed. I'll relax you and ease your mind before Christopher and Antoine show up."

Lucien crawled across the bed and lay on his stomach. "This kind?"

"That kind," I said, grabbing the massage oil out of the nightstand. I dropped my robe and climbed up on the bed, straddling that beautiful, naked ass. With a generous helping of oil in my hands, I started working at his back and shoulders, following each and every muscle.

He sighed in contentment. "I love it when you do this."

"I love doing it."

At his nod, I continued on—working his back, legs, ass, and feet—until he was totally relaxed beneath me and I was

hard and leaking, little beads of precome mixing with the oil. Lucien spread his legs a little, angling his ass up. "Just like this, Peter ... please?"

I coated myself a little more with oil, continuing to massage him as I slid my cock back and forth between his cheeks. He moaned and rocked back against me, and after the fourth or fifth time, the angle was just right and I slid into that tight, hot heat. Lucien shuddered, fingers reaching back to slide over my right knee.

I dropped a hand to cover his. "Just relax."

"Am."

"Good."

I kept my pace slow and easy, paying attention to his moans and sighs, and the way his body rocked back to meet mine. I started back up at his shoulders again, fingers going deep into the muscle, slowly working down his back. By the time my hands made it to the lower part of his back, he was panting, ass squeezing me like a vice.

"Yes, yes, yes..." followed each thrust and pant.

I fought like hell to keep my movements steady, not wanting to throw him off, even though the head of my cock was about to explode from the pressure. His words and moans didn't help and I was soon filling him, thankful as hell that he was coming, too. He shuddered and sighed as I moved to lie beside him.

"Relaxed?" I asked, sighing.

"Mmhmm..."

"Wet spot."

"Don't care."

If he didn't care, I didn't either. I, of course, would laugh when he bitched about being stuck to the sheets later. I grabbed a blanket and pulled it over us, nuzzling against his shoulder. As I closed my eyes, I let out a sigh of contentment. This? Was good.

* * * *

A steady knocking at the bedroom door pulled me out of my sleep. Lucien was attempting to roll over, grumbling because he was stuck to the sheets. I laughed and threw the blanket off. "Let me get you something to clean that up with."

He nodded and rolled back onto his belly, shaking his head as he looked to the door. "Wait a fucking minute and stop the knocking!"

"Not one of our boys," I said as I went into the bathroom.

I heard him mumble something to the effect that they were smarter than that, which made me smile. Our boys, of course, would have come right in and crawled in bed. I retrieved a cloth and ran the hot water, getting it wet. As I walked back into the bedroom, Lucien looked back at me, reaching his hand out for the cloth.

"I'll wash up, you get the door. Robe first, please. Let's not give them anymore than we have to, huh?"

"Peeved?"

"Pissed."

"Good." I slipped on my robe, handing him his as he sat up.

I wasn't surprised to find Christopher and Antoine waiting when I opened the door. "What's up, guys?"

Christopher smiled. "You two busy?"

"Not at the moment," I said. "Need something?"

"We'd like to talk to you and Lucien about a couple of things before we leave in the morning. Now okay?" Christopher asked.

I shrugged, opening the door up. "No time like the present."

Christopher passed by me with a smile, but Antoine stopped and leaned in, as if scenting me. I rolled my eyes and pushed him away before shutting the door. I joined Lucien to sit at the foot of the bed as Christopher and Antoine remained standing in the middle of the room. I bit at my lip, knowing that this was going to get heated.

"Pull up a chair, guys." Lucien gestured around the room. "There are plenty."

"That's okay," Christopher said. "This won't take long. We have an early flight out and need to get packed."

"What's not going to take long?" Lucien asked.

"We're here to make an offer for you and your team to go back on the serum," Christopher said carefully.

"That's a very *generous* offer, but no."

"No?" Antoine asked, as if he hadn't heard Lucien right.

"No."

"Hear us out first," Christopher said. "There wouldn't be any transport this time, though, because we'll be teaching someone how to prepare and handle the serum. It would be made here, and the Council will provide the facilities. The..."

"No," Lucien said again. "No serum; not for me, my coven, or my city. No."

Christopher sighed. "Lucien, we understand how hard it was to..."

"Who understands?" Lucien growled, standing, fists clenched at his sides, "Certainly not the Council or either one of you!"

"I do know, Lucien," Christopher said softly.

Lucien closed the distance between him and Christopher, poking Christopher in the chest as he spoke. "Yeah? And how many people did *you* kill before you fucking got it right?"

Christopher looked away, shaking his head.

"How many, Chris?" Lucien prodded.

"None, but..."

"But nothing," Lucien snarled. "Put yourself in my shoes and live with what I've done—*then* talk to me about understanding."

"The Council would like for you to have the serum here, Lucien," Antoine said, finally speaking up.

"Is the Council *ordering* me to have the serum here?"

"If the Council ordered you, you would have no choice but to either accept the serum or..."

"Move on," Christopher added.

"Until I am ordered, by the Council directly, you can keep your fucking serum away from me and out of my coven. But you can bet, even under a direct order, I will fight it until I know that that it's safe enough for my team."

"I'm working on it, Lucien; I swear," Christopher said, his voice pleading.

Lucien took a deep breath and blew it out slowly as he looked at me. I smiled, nodding my head. *"I support you in whatever you decide, baby; one hundred percent."*

He smiled in return and then looked at Christopher and Antoine. "My answer is still no. If—and that's a huge *if*, the serum is proved to be more stable? We'll talk again. But I promise nothing."

Christopher nodded. "Well, I guess that's it, then."

"I guess it is," Lucien said.

Christopher and Antoine walked to the door, both pausing on the threshold. "We'll stop in before we leave."

Lucien nodded. "Be sure that you do."

The moment the door shut, Lucien huffed. "I have a feeling ... that eventually, the Council will indeed make it an order and we will be left with a host of other decisions to make."

"When the time comes to make them, Lucien—we'll make them. Together."

He dropped his robe and walked to the bed, crawling up to lay beside me. I rose up and let mine fall down my shoulders before snuggling up to him. We lay there for a long while, silent, fingers toying and playing and twining together.

Together. I couldn't get the word out of my head. I'd been promising Lucien that we'd do so many things, make so many decisions together, and suddenly I was wondering if I'd even be here at all when it was time for the decisions to actually be made. Sure, when we'd taken the blood bond, he'd said that it would lengthen my lifespan, but that sure as hell didn't mean indefinitely.

The thought of *not* being here made my stomach twist into knots. "Does it hurt?" I found myself asking.

"Does what hurt?"

"To be brought over," I said softly. "I mean, not the going part, because you've told me about..."

Lucien reached up and pressed his fingers to my lips. "Shh, you're getting all nervous, baby."

"I'm sorry; I just have questions ... things we've never talked about."

"And those aren't things we have to talk about," Lucien said.

"Yes, they are." He turned onto his side and I rolled to face him, pressing a kiss to his lips. "Talk to me; tell me my options."

"Stay just as you are."

"Well, that's all well and good, but there's that hidden clause that guarantees that I'm going to grow old and die."

"Do you really want to talk about this?" Lucien asked.

I nodded. "You've told me a little about how others were brought over, and I think I've pretty much got the gist of that down. Caleb mentioned something, though, about a human servant when he was telling me about Antoine. What is that?"

"If I made you into my servant? You'd essentially live as long as I did, have that telepathic bond with me, and you could feed me most of the time. You could still eat, drink, and go out in the daylight, but..."

"So, pretty much what I have now, just with a hell of a lot longer lifespan."

Lucien nodded. "I will be honest with you; I don't exactly relish the thought of you as my servant, Peter."

"It's just a word, Lucien."

Lucien shook his head. "In this world? Nothing is just a figure of speech or just a word. It is a station, and certain things would be expected of you because of that station."

"So, you'd want me as a vampire?"

"I didn't say that either." He sighed. "I want you, just as you are, Peter."

"I just want to be sure, Lucien, that I make the right decision when the time comes."

"And I promise you, baby, that if there are any decisions to be made, you will be well-informed and we will take it step by step. Together."

I smiled and nuzzled against his chest. "Want to be here with you, Lucien."

"You're my other half, Peter; my heart and soul—my soul mate. There's no tearing that apart."

Epilogue

"I think this is it," Jack said as he set the last case of vodka on the counter. "I just need to get it all stocked and the cases put into the stock room."

"Did the Scotch that Lucien ordered make it in?" I asked, flipping through the paperwork in front of me to locate the packing slip.

"It came," he said before I found the paper I was looking for. "Six cases, but not everything was the same. One case was packed super, super well and the bottles looked ... well, expensive as hell. I put it all in the stock room to keep it safe until I talked to you. I didn't think you guys wanted to stock the bar with any of that—certainly not at that price."

Oh. Lucien was going to be so happy. The Scotch he'd been waiting on for weeks, imported directly from the Macallan distillery in Speyside, Scotland, was finally here. I grinned and shoved the papers toward Jack. "No, no; all of that's Lucien's. I'll get a couple of bottles out to keep here at the bar, but I want his name on it ... or something. I'll do it later, though. First, I need to see Lucien. You said the cases were in the stock room?"

"Yep, in the very back corner, left-hand side."

I could hear Jack's laughter as I jogged to the stock room. Damn, it was good to hear that again; even better to have us back to normal—hell, better than our normal had ever been. There were no longer any secrets between us, and damn, if that hadn't made our relationship just soar on back to that cool, happy place.

Boxes, boxes, boxes everywhere; how in hell we were going to be ready to open in just another week, I didn't know. But we were doing it. Come hell or high water, The Den was going to be back in business and better than ever. We hadn't opened the club back up after the incident with Caleb. Even though Caleb had sworn he was fine, Lucien and I both felt that a change of scenery in the club was necessary. If not for Caleb, for us.

The club had been gutted—except for the office area—and redone in dark reds and browns, earthy colors, just like the office—with hardwoods and leather to complement. Our intent had been to keep it classy and for it to have more of a sensual atmosphere. It had worked; at least for me. Though maybe the reason for that was because Lucien and I had christened all of the new furniture after it was delivered.

At the original back wall of the club, exits and crossovers had been made, leading to a whole new expansion area that I'd affectionately named 'Iniquity'. We'd wanted to give the patrons who were looking more for the high-energy atmosphere a place to feel more at home. It now sported its own DJ box and a bar area to make things more convenient.

The ultimate in convenience, however, was the addition on the east side of the club. Ten private rooms were now available for patrons and donors who wanted a little more privacy for their fucking and feeding. Lucien had thought I was nuts, but when I brought it up at a coven meeting, the interest had been overwhelmingly in favor.

I finally found the boxes I was looking for, searching the open box first and finding exactly what I was looking for—a

decanter of fifty-year old Macallan Scotch. Oh, damn it was pretty; looking every bit as expensive as it had cost. Well, if a decanter of Scotch could look like it cost nearly four grand. Along with the other pricey Scotch samples and cases he'd ordered from the distillery, Lucien had ordered four of these precious decanters.

I grabbed a decanter, unwrapped it from all of the packing, and stood, making my way out of the stock room. As I passed by the bar, I gave Jack 'the look'. "No one comes up to the office until Lucien or I come down. Got it?"

Jack grinned. "You gonna christen the Scotch, too?"

"You're damned right we are," I said before heading up the stairs.

As I pushed the office door open, I cocked my head to the side. Lucien sat at his desk, grumbling and wiping at his pants. Without looking up, he asked, "What's up?"

"I am," I said, closing the door behind me.

Lucien looked up then, eyebrows raised in amusement. "Do tell."

"Well, you see? I have this problem."

I set the decanter down near the desk and unzipped my pants, pushing them down. My fingers pulled at my half-hard dick and Lucien sat forward. "I don't see a problem, at the moment."

I pulled my shirt up over my head and let it drop to the floor. "No?"

"No," Lucien whispered.

"I think you need to have a closer look." I kicked off my boots, stepped out of my pants, and sauntered slowly toward

the desk. I moved deliberately, showing off my cock and my ass as I shoved papers and books out of the way. Lucien didn't even blink as everything hit the floor with a dull thud.

"Show me," he said quietly.

It was a fight to keep my demeanor serious as I lay back on the desk. I pulled my feet up, resting them on the edge, spreading myself open right at eye-level for Lucien. My fingers teased at my balls before sliding to the sensitive skin behind them. I tapped my index finger against my hole. "You see this right here? It ... *needs*."

"And what does it need, lover?" Lucien asked, his eyes going dark.

"Needs you," I said, gasping as I pushed two fingers inside. "Needs you to fill it, fuck it ... own it."

Lucien growled and grabbed my legs, pushing them back farther. His tongue licked along my fingers, around the ring of muscle squeezing them. He fumbled in the top desk drawer for a couple of seconds, a lid popped open, and one of his slick fingers joined my two. My back bowed at the sudden burn, and Lucien's free hand rested on my belly, pushing me back down.

"Relax, Peter," he said soothingly, even as he pushed in another finger. "I cannot own it if you do not let me in it."

I whimpered, rolling my hips just slightly, hoping a different angle would ease the pain. Lucien's fingers curled at the same time, brushing my gland.

"Oh, fuck, yes!" I cried out, exquisite pleasure shooting up my spine.

"So beautiful, baby." Lucien moaned. "Move your fingers. Let me have it all."

I pulled my fingers away just as he slipped in a third, sucking in a quick breath. "All yours, Lucien."

He stood and bent over me, the fingers of his free hand making a fist into my hair. His gaze locked with mine, watching me as he fingered me, stretched me. I leaned up a bit, trying to stretch down to unzip his pants, but found his cock instead; hot, hard, leaking. My fingers slid around his shaft, pulling and pushing, palm giving friction against the sensitive head.

Lucien just melted, his forehead resting against mine as he thrust into my hand. I tightened my fingers and he growled, lips crushing against mine. I opened to him eagerly, sucking his tongue into my mouth as I began to roll my hips to meet his thrusts. He growled again and I pulled back slightly, licking at those sharp fangs.

He groaned and swatted my hand away from him, pushing forward. One quick thrust had me gasping for air, balls drawing up tight as he filled me. But he didn't move, didn't keep on, didn't thrust with abandon. He waited, smiling, knowing as only he could how much I loved this moment; full, stretched—claimed.

We met halfway for a kiss, Lucien pushing me back, kisses fluttering down my throat, up my neck, and toward my ear. I moaned as my body relaxed completely beneath him. "These moments are priceless to me, Peter," he whispered. "Do you know why?"

I nodded. "Want to hear it anyway."

He smiled, gathering me in his arms. "Because it completes the circle that is you and me."

"Romantic."

"Tell no one." He winked, sliding his tongue along my bottom lip. "Something like that could ruin my reputation."

"Mmm..." I chuckled, hands sliding down his back, pulling him closer. "You could be right. Less talk, Lucien ... please."

He nodded and kissed me, his tongue pushing between my lips to move against my own. Little sparks of electricity shot down my spine as he started to move, holding me close, pushing deep. The flared ridge of his cock brushed my gland, precome slipping from the tip of my own.

Lucien grinned knowingly and wrapped his fingers around me, stroking in rhythm with his movements. My eyes went wide and my hips snapped up, thrusting and rolling, muscles going tight.

His lips went to my ear, teasing, making me shudder. "Take it, Peter. Everything you need is right here."

I whimpered at his words, hips thrusting up hard to meet his every thrust. His moans of approval went straight to my cock and before I knew it, my muscles clenched tight around him, body shaking. I reached up and made a fist into his hair, pulling his head hard against my neck.

"Please, Lucien!"

He growled and bit hard, fangs sinking deep. The moment he began to feed, I came, coating his hand. His movements didn't stop, though, and I was soon riding that continual orgasm, crying out in pleasure so great it hurt. Nothing in this world should feel so fucking good.

Nothing so dangerous, at least.

I jerked again as another shudder racked my body and Lucien's heat filled me. His tongue pushed into my mouth, kissing me deeply, slowly, letting me taste. I sucked his tongue into my mouth, savoring the taste of Lucien and that coppery-sweet blood on the surface.

I had to restrain myself from biting into him and pulled away from his kiss, only to have him force me back to him, biting down hard on his own tongue in offering. I groaned and pulled him in, drinking him in deeply. After a few moments, he pulled back slightly.

"Craving getting stronger?"

I nodded, sighing as I closed my eyes. "Remember how it was just you, though?"

He nodded. "It's not anymore?"

I shook my head. "I find myself wanting a taste here and there of Caleb and Xander. And sometimes when Jack is standing at the bar, all I can do is stare at the beat of his heart in his neck and grit my teeth."

"I'm sorry, Peter," he said, biting at his lip.

"Hey." I smiled, reaching up to swipe away a spot of blood. "We knew it would happen—eventually. It just means that I'm going to have to make my decision sooner rather than later."

"You're taking this rather well."

"I knew what I signed up for from the beginning, Lucien. It's just having an actual choice that's driving me insane. But never mind that. I brought something for you." I reached back above my head, stretching to grab the decanter of Scotch from the small table.

He grinned as I set it on my chest. "I thought I smelled Scotch on you."

"See, I thought about just bathing in it..."

Lucien smacked me hard on the ass. "You bathe in my four thousand dollar Scotch and I will tie you to the bed and let Caleb and Xander both have you."

"That's not a very good deterrent, Lucien."

He winked as he pulled away. "Don't move; let me get a towel from the bathroom and then we'll see if the Scotch was worth the price."

I nodded and set the decanter off to the side. Lucien was back before I could manage to form another thread of thought, a warm, wet cloth sliding over my skin. He cleaned me thoroughly, dried me, and then pulled me up off the desk and onto his lap in the office chair.

He rolled over and grabbed the decanter and two tumblers from his desk drawer. He handed me both glasses and grinned. "Hold while I pour."

As the dark mahogany-colored liquid filled each glass, I inhaled deeply, just savoring the spicy scent of clove, various other spices, and citrus. I chuckled as Lucien took his glass from me.

"It smells damned fine, Lucien."

He nodded, swirling the liquid for a moment before he put it to his nose. He inhaled deeply and sighed. "Not as fine as you, lover ... but it's fine."

We touched glasses and I smiled. "To us, the coven, the club, and to the future."

"May it be all we ever dreamed of—and more," Lucien added.

I turned the glass up and took a sip, savoring the slight burn. So many tastes mingled together to give it a rich, smooth finish. Lucien smiled, licking his lips.

"You like?"

"Oh yeah, it's nice," I said, taking another sip.

This time, I didn't swallow. I leaned forward and pressed my lips to his insistently. He opened, moaning as the rich liquid flowed from my mouth to his. We kissed for a long while, tumblers set aside in favor of more touching.

Lucien finally chuckled, pushing me back slightly. "Careful, you're giving me ideas on how to be kinky with Scotch."

I grinned. "I love it when you get kinky."

Music started up in the club below, no doubt by Jack so that he'd have something to listen to while he worked. Lucien sighed, hands resting on my hips. "You think we'll be ready to open in a week?"

I nodded. "It seems like everything that can go wrong at the moment is—but we'll be ready. Caleb and Xander are both coming to help tomorrow night. We're going to set up the private rooms and get them stocked."

"You've worked hard, baby," Lucien said. "You make me proud."

"Gotta work for what you want, yeah? And now, I fucking dare some bastard to come fuck up what we've worked so hard for."

Lucien sighed. "You do realize that it's not a matter of *if*, Peter—it's when. You know how often the rogues pass

through here and hunters? Those fuckers are an evil that we haven't even begun to deal with yet."

"We're training, though, working with new weapons and security systems..."

"Shh," he whispered, pulling me close. "Happy thoughts right now, okay?"

I took a deep breath, breathing in the scent of him. "Yeah ... happy thoughts."

I settled in against him, just breathing him in, relishing his comforting touch. It was inevitable that things would change. I knew that. But for now, I just wanted to hold on to what I had, comforted by those I loved—and who loved me in return—knowing we were safe.

For now.

END

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