



R. R. Wilson

Crimson Wings

A Tempest in the  
Night

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Crimson Wings:

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## DEDICATION

*Thank you – to all my fans for the great emails. You brightened up my days and made me keep writing. To my sister-in-law, Thuy, for giving me awesome medical advice for A Tempest in the Night. To Katie Barbier of the Illinois Recreation Therapy Association. Your advice was immeasurable, and without your willingness to divulge the life of a Recreational Therapist Ilida would not exist.*

*Thank you, Matt and Jared. We had a tough year, and we pulled each other out of the depths of despair. I love you two.*

## Prologue

Alec Vladimir Sinclair-Wulf sat at the head seat of the Haemo High Council. The Council he inherited from his grandfather the previous King of Vampires gasped in amazement, shock, and disbelief. He knew it would get worse. He felt the collective shudder in the conference room. Nosferatus and the human looking vampires became ill at ease over the nomination.

“Daedalus Sqourakis will make an excellent Enforcer, and I stand by my nomination.”

“I second that nomination.” His wife, Tania Williams, the new Queen of Vampires, was his staunchest supporter and fighting partner. She agreed with his decision, even when he had doubts, and he had a few. But, he couldn’t forget how good it felt to fight along side his long-lost younger brother.

He shut out the stir of voices both mental and auditory in the room and thought back only a year ago, when they’d fought side by side against the latest rival group the Jacquerie...

Daedalus was sleek, bathed in black, and silently stalked and killed his targets like a panther hunting prey.

With his sword, a beauty of a weapon, he swathed his way through the rival vampires, dispatching the enemy without so much as a blink of an eye. To watch him was to watch someone awe-inspiring. He is beautiful, deadly, and cocky... Yes, he had that smile that said, "I can do it. Just watch me, but don't get in my way..."

Alec and Tania stood outside the abandoned church in Jamaica, Queens directly under the Long Island Railroad. She was on one side of the heavy, ornate door and he was on the other. Alec gave his wife a critical look. "You shouldn't be here," he whispered.

"I don't do the Stepford wife thing very well," she whispered.

She didn't. She liked to fight, and she was good at it. She liked getting physical. He'd discovered when he found her half-dead from a beating she'd received from an irate client's husband. She gave as good as she got, but she wasn't strong enough to defend herself totally. Her former job as a Battered Woman's Court Advocate had been demanding and dangerous. She reveled in it. Now as Queen she fights along side him, but at a terrible cost. She wants to have his baby, and he is terrified she'll die before that happens.

She raised her sword in the air, and the equivalent of a human heart attack came on.

The air rippled around Alec. Power flowed and danced over his skin. His brain tingled. From his third eye, he saw a figure in black racing toward them in a deadly charge. Tania is more vulnerable. She was closest to him and was aware of the coming attack. “Why don’t you let *me* handle this?”

Tania shook her head and raised her hand halting him. She’ll never change and she’ll never let him keep her inside a safe bubble.

With vampiric speed faster than any human eye can see, but detectable by vampires, the stranger jumped over their heads onto the brick wall above them.

Alec raised his sword at the stranger. The tip of it rested on the vampire’s esophagus. *If he falls, he’ll embed himself on the sword through the throat.*

Tania grasped his hand before he dangerously moved it. Blocks of thought flowed into his mind from her. *He’s on our side, Alec.*

*How do you know?*

Wickedly, the stranger smiled, and with his fingertips touched the pointed edges of Alec’s sword and pushed it to the side. Alec’s face almost cracked a smile at the stranger’s guts. *He’s entertaining, dead, but entertaining.*

With his gloved hands, the stranger grasped the molding on the doorway, somersaulted down

landing without a sound on the crumbling cement stairs. The cocky smile remained on his face. His hair, parted on the side, pointed in every direction. He was dressed in skin-tight black from neck to toe. A cowl wrapped his neck. A mask, maybe. Pleated armor material adorned his broad shoulders. The rest of him was covered in a black breathable flexible material. Where Alec's body was long and muscled bulk, the other's was long, lean, and powerful, with burly legs. "Hello, Tania."

"Your Highness," Alec reminded him, his eyes trained on Tania. She smiled warmly. Alec glowered at the stranger. His obvious attraction to his wife angered him. "Who are you?" Alec whispered.

"Alec, I'm hurt. Don't you see the resemblance?" he asked in hushed tones and feigned indignation. "I'm you're long-lost brother from Santorini."

"Daedalus?"

What held Alec riveted was the younger stranger's face. Though his piercing violet eyes reminded him of Radu, his face was Greek. His Romanesque nose, cupid-bow lips, cleft chin, and olive-skin made a startling effect. His close-thatched wavy, black hair combed over his forehead not so much for effect but for immediacy. All of his weight leaned to the left side, his body

curved towards the door. Alec marveled at his brother's feral beauty.

"Long time no see," Tania said.

Daedalus had never returned his letters. Alec had hoped he was still alive, and now he had his proof. "Good God!"

Daedalus merely smiled, lowered his head, and silently loaded two guns. "I hear you've been having problems with these jerks."

He was efficient with guns as well. In less than five seconds, they were both fully loaded. They were no ordinary guns. Bullets never slowed vampires down.

"Two of the newest members of the Haemo High Council are being held here," Tania whispered. "Upstairs in cages- probably starved to near death. Those ass—"

Alec cut his wife off. "Women should not curse."

Daedalus shook his head and sighed in a lazy, irritated tone. "You two should have security to handle this." With one powerful kick, the doors burst open. Gunshots rang over their heads.

The Jacquerie scattered like mice running from the exterminator. Daedalus ran towards them firing at anything that moved with deadly accuracy.

Alec swung his sword. Heads rolled.

Tania jabbed, puncturing bodies.



Alec caught sight of Daedalus' blur running up the stairs. He followed, willing to take a back seat to watch Daedalus in action.

*Alec? Watch your step. The floors are fragile.*

Startled Alec stepped back but not because of the floor. It was difficult for any vampire to communicate with him telepathically without him opening a pathway for them. Daedalus had breezed through his defenses as if he blithely walked through an open door.

*They're in here. Doors locked.*

Daedalus put his gun in the holster then unsheathed his sword.

*Ready?*

*Always.*

Daedalus kicked the double doors open. Two thugs ran towards him swinging swords. Daedalus sheathed his sword, produced six silver round star-like discs and tossed them at the thugs. They went down, bleeding out.

Tania came up behind him, ran to the hostages. They were in cages. Their eyes were sunk in—hollowed with pinpoints of light in the middle and their skin yellowed—starved of blood. Tania grasped the lock of one cage and bent it, breaking it in two. She did the same with the other. "The three of us will have to donate blood."

Daedalus walked forward making a gash in the inside of his palm. "I hope they won't mind getting furry," he said.

# BOOK ONE

## Chapter One

*A year later or thereabouts...*

Ilida Davis loved and hated these moments. Teenagers came here sad, addicted and lacking something to help them through life's obstacles. At Tilly Drug and Substance Abuse Rehabilitation House or Tilly House, where she worked, it was her job to help them pick up the pieces and give them the skills to beat their addictions. Every sixteen weeks she and the other therapists talked, played, counseled the kids and their families, and then let them go back into the frightening world to be tested.

It was necessary, but in that short time she bonded with them and it hurt to see them leave, as it did now. Ilida's exit session with Becca, a spunky young Jewish woman, had just timed out. Her parents were waiting and Ilida wanted to escort her to them.

In her orange, goose-down jacket, Becca fought

back tears.

Ilida held hers in as long as possible but ultimately the river flowed. "Oh shit! Becca, you're going to make me cry and I have my period."

The teenager's hazel eyes glazed over with flooded tears as she laughed. Ilida rushed over to hug her. Long, thick, brown ringlets enveloped her.

"You're going to do well," Ilida sniffed. "You'll finish the twelfth grade. So what?" She waved her hand dismissively. "You're graduating later than your friends. Big freakin' deal! Remember, they influenced you to get on drugs in the first place, so make new, positive friends. You have your whole life ahead of you now." Ilida blew then wiped her nose. She handed Becca tissues.

Then Ilida gave her the whole box. "Oh, here."

"Ilida, you keep doing that," Becca said smoothing her hair back.

"Doing what?"

"You're like my mom or something always taking care of me. I'm going to miss you the most."

She handed Ilida back the box of tissues. Ilida pulled more tissues out and blew her nose, then placed the box on her desk, knocking over her name plaque.

"I'm going to miss you, too. Remember, if you

have any problems, call me. And you'll be back, not to do this all over again, but as a counselor one day."

Her eyes were wide with fear and excitement. Ilida placed the fire back in her bones. Yes, the teenager was determined to make it and she would. But the young woman, soon to be former rehab resident, was still scared.

Ilida held her at arms length. She wasn't supposed to go this far. This wasn't ethical but Becca, like all the others, deserved a chance to live drug free. Just to live free was a privilege. The power was still there even if Ilida was lax in using it. "Listen to me. You will succeed won't you?"

Ilida's heartbeat matched the rhythm of Becca's. Her eyes glazed over. It was a subtle change. Something meant to work on the subconscious level and effective. "Won't you, Becca?" she pressed.

"Yes," Becca said in a monosyllabic tone.

"Now let's go to your parents."

Ilida released the hold on her mind. The teenager blinked then swayed on her feet.

"Whoa, Becca?"

"I'm okay. Got a little dizzy there."

"It's all the excitement. Come on. Your folks are waiting."

*Ugh!* The sunlight. The backs of her eyes ached. She squinted to block the light. It was just the

device to kick her headaches into gear. Becca ran to her parents. They embraced her warmly. Becca's mother mouthed a thank you. Ilida smiled back at her, happy that she could help Becca. They were waiting by their car, so were some of the friends Becca made at Tilly House and the other counselors, including Beverly.

Ilida stood back watching Becca for any residual signs of the hypnotizing--none where there. She hadn't lost all of her powers at least.

She smirked derisively. She *wanted* to lose them. Lose the powers, lose the headaches, gain normalcy. Oh, to not be a freak! Even then, the pain began to advance to the stage like an imperious actor who knows his craft and can't wait to show it off. She felt movement beside her.

"Where's your coat?" Beverly whispered so that only she would hear.

Beverly was an expert recreational therapist and requisite busybody but only when it came to Ilida's life. Since college Beverly had appointed herself Ilida's sex counselor, slash dating guru, slash, underscore, mother.

"I left my coat in the office."

Beverly took the mother thing seriously. She regarded her with squinty eyes and one side of her mouth turned up. "You're going to catch a cold."

"I've never had a cold in my life." It was true she'd never been sick with the cold or flu – never

missed a day of school or work. Was it another sign that she wasn't like everyone else? Or was she merely blessed with a powerful immune system?

"Sometimes you can be a strange chick."

Most of the time, she didn't want to hear that. "Gee, thanks a lot, Beverly."

Becca got into the car with her parents. The counselors and the remaining residents ran back into Tilly where it was warm. Ilida watched the car turn the corner and drive away. Her heart was happy but also filled with sadness knowing she would miss Becca. She rubbed her arms, feeling the cold now, and ran in behind the residents.

She hurried to her office and closed the door. She had three window shades to lower. As she approached the first window shade, she sensed her over-protective roommate coming closer. She recognized the blurred image behind the window of her door.

"Ilida?"

"Headache." She hoped Beverly would leave her alone, but that wasn't Beverly's style.

The door opened and Beverly stuck her head in. You could see her curtain of relaxed ringlets before her face. "When are you going to get checked out?"

"I will soon." Her doctor, her father, would only order a battery of tests for her then he would

catch onto why she was having headaches. Franklyn Davis would have no mention of psychic powers, not when it came to his daughter. That part of her made her father uncomfortable. After growing up under the “medicine is logical, paranormal is illogical and creepy” umbrella, she tended to shy away from her psychic powers.

“You told me soon last week, too.”

“Okay, I know. I just need to rest my head.”

And that wasn’t enough for Beverly. She crossed her arms, obviously unconvinced

“Oh my God! Please, Beverly.” Ilida could hear Beverly’s spiked heel boots tap the carpeted floor once, twice then she stepped back into the hallway and closed the door behind her.

Her shoulders relaxed. *Man alive! Thank you!* She pulled the remaining shades down; sat behind her desk and let her head drop. Folders and papers littered her desk, but she didn’t care. Nothing mattered when her head split open like this.

The rest of the day, she braced herself for the onslaught of pain. She had to eat lunch in her office instead of with her co-workers. She had to postpone the twenty-minute meeting with Thom.

Finally, by five o’ clock the headache appeared on stage with a vengeance.

\* \* \* \*



*What the hell?*

I sensed the intruders' presence in my home downtown, as flashbulbs went off outside the limo uptown. My hand paused on the limo's door latch. Quick anger took hold of me. I kept a psychic surveillance on my lair when not at home. Tonight I'd slipped up and left my lair unprotected.

My home is my refuge. Taking Brittany there will be a problem now. Humans and rogue vampires mix with bloody results.

Snapping out of it, I opened the limo door for her. Brittany's long legs gracefully swiveled to the left, then her designer-shoe-clad feet landed on the floor of the limo. It was a well-rehearsed show put on for the cameras every night since we'd been together. A show I was terribly bored with. I sighed, "Are you in yet?"

"I'm in," she said between her teeth as she smiled and waved to the paparazzi.

I opened my side of the limo and sat down. The flash bulbs continued to blind me through the tinted windows. I closed my eyes blocking the stinging lights. Soon, the car pulled away from the curb. Brittany's agile tongue nibbled my ear. I ignored her, preferring to look straight ahead of me. It used to get my cock harder than a hammer, but not tonight. My fingers tapped the gray armrest as I breathed in, inhaling her favorite

perfume. My lungs threatened to close.

Then I saw her arm.

Brittany moved the cuff of her furred sleeve up. Red dots the size of needlepoints spotted her skin. Without thinking, I grabbed the wrist closest to me, pulled the sleeve up. "Shit! You're taking drugs!"

"Not all the time!"

"Tracks on your arm say different. Heroin? Speedball?"

"No to both."

"What is it?"

"It's a new drug. Red queen."

"We should call it a night, Brittany."

"Come one Daedalus. It just gets me through the day."

"Get the fuck off my ear!"

She pulled her lips from my earlobe. I'd suspected it, but I wasn't sure. That's an excuse. I always knew. I could smell the chemicals coming off her. We have an open relationship. What she does with her life is her business, but... I wasn't going to go through this again.

"You need to get help."

"I can handle it."

"That's bullshit and you know it."

"Everyone in the industry does it," she said.

"Not everyone. Makeup artist haven't said anything."

“What for? They do it, too.”

I didn't think she noticed with all the posing she does for the paparazzi. Brittany Lane the lingerie model for Venus' Wardrobe was the model of the moment and drug addict. The camera's loved her. Women envied Brittany. I didn't love her. I loved her voluptuous body, even worshipped it until all hours of the night—almost every night for a year. *Brittany has to get help. I won't let that fuck with my conscious.*

That was as far as it went.

“You *love* your work too much.”

“I have to sell myself to my adoring fans.”

The flashbulbs continued to burn my eyes.

I continued to stare at the nightlife on the streets of Chelsea. Yellow cabs sped by honking their horns, young couples huddled together trying to keep warm, fashionistas did their usual posing at the light, and artists dragged their well-used portfolios, canvases and bags out of the local art supply store.

Gates came down on swanky magazine stores and clothing boutiques. Motorcyclists zipped by and in between cars, showing off loudly. They all seemed content with their lives, save me. “Yes, you sell yourself...every waking moment.”

Did she sell herself to get drugs? I signaled the driver.

“Where to, Sir?”

Annoyed, I flipped the intercom switch and spoke. "Drive anywhere, *please*."

"I thought my career didn't bother you, Daedalus," Brittany whined.

*How about some cheese with your whine, Britt?* "It doesn't. Women should make as much money as they can. It's your constant 'on' switch that is boring me to no end." I'd realized that Brittany's pimping to the public was not what I wanted to endure a night longer. I used to not care what she did. I didn't have to care. It was a "no-strings attached" relationship. Of late, Brittany was beginning to ask questions of me, as if I owed her an explanation. I hated complicated affairs. Or did I really want something more? It was a question for another day.

In a huff, Brittany closed her fur coat and said, "You've moved on, already. Wow! The ultimate playboy strikes again. And here I thought..."

"You thought what?" I rubbed my forehead annoyed with her and the relationship she was trying to force me into. A year was too long to be with her. I should have known that eventually she would want more. "We agreed it wouldn't get serious."

We said nothing for a few minutes until I heard the soft intake of her breath.

"I've been offered a contract with Maxiline Make-up. It's the biggest contract ever given to a

model. If I take it, I have to move to Paris for a year," Brittany said.

She worked hard and deserved it. Hopefully the job would keep her clean and I was thankful for the easy out. "That will set you up for life. Shall I drop you off at your place?"

Brittany sighed, raked her hand through her long, raven hair. "No, I'll meet friends at Orange instead."

For more drugs, obviously. I then instructed the driver to the restaurant on Twenty-Third and Seventh Avenue. Twenty minutes later, the limo pulled up in front of Orange.

I exited the car after the driver opened the door for my date and me. A long line formed outside the movie theatre next door to Orange. I faced Brittany hoping she would listen to reason.

The smell of chemicals emanated off her coat.

"I saw that woman come on to you in the club," she said, as she crossed her arms. "She ran her hands through your hair. She played with the cleft in your chin. Will she be your next conquest?"

"We're talking about you taking drugs."

"Keep your voice down!"

"Afraid someone will find out? You should be afraid."

"Meaning what?"

I motioned with my head toward the paparazzi running down the block. A black SUV sped by, the

driver hanging out of the window with his camera ready. "You're getting sloppy. You must have covered your tracks with make up all this time, right?"

"Shut up! People are watching."

Fear colored her eyes ice blue and pink stained her cheeks.

"I was so eager to get in your pants. You played me well, Brit."

She laughed cynically. "I'm supposed to go to rehab, for you? You don't even love me. Sure you've been a gentleman, but I don't think you realize how many women want you." She paused then turned back to me with sadness shadowing her eyes. "Damn it! It's my life, Daedalus!"

She was right about all of it. It was her life, but I couldn't let Brittany destroy herself.

"We'll go to your place, look in the phone book for a confidential rehab center."

She smoothed her hair back, angry that I'd found out her secret. "I don't have a problem,"

"Right. I'm done. Take care and good luck, Brittany." I couldn't string her along anymore, and with her drug problem... Hell no. She wanted more than I could and wanted to give.

I followed her gaze to the movie theater. Eager moviegoers shivered and danced in place while waiting to buy their tickets. I leaned forward and kissed her for the last time on the lips that so

many men coveted. I refuse to take care of a drug addict. I had an unpleasant experience with it in the past—not going there again.

I had to cut this short. This was as far as it was going to go. She'll never know I'm a vampire, psychic, and assassin. I wouldn't trust her with the information, so what was the point? Trusting had landed me widowed and hated.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

She shrugged. "I'm strong. I can handle it better than anyone else." Her cerulean blue eyes misted over. The wind blew runaway strands of her hair forward. "Good luck to you too, Daedalus. Maybe you'll find the one you're looking for." Her manicured nails touched the cleft in my chin. "God, I'm going to miss playing with that."

"You did often."

"Some lucky woman will snatch you up for life, and then I'll have to bitch slap her," she jested.

I saw the seriousness in her eyes. She could be possessive.

I found myself smiling at Brittany's joke despite my fears for her. She was heading down a dark road. The next fuck buddy I acquire will be on a six-month lease—no longer, no less.

Paparazzi leaped at us, taking pictures rapid firing questions at us.

This will be in the papers soon enough. My

brother will absolutely fume at that and I'll love it.

After seeing her to the door of the restaurant, I climbed into the limo and flipped the intercom switch "Head over to my house, now."

"Yes, Sir."

The limo pulled away from the curb as the flash bulbs alighted the window.

\* \* \* \*

"Go away!"

In frustration, Ilida slammed her file cabinet drawer. She opened the top drawer in her desk, pulled out a tall bottle of ibuprofen.

Tears ran down her face. This headache was more intense than last night, last week. Hell, someone was unzipping her skin trying to pull her head out, and she knew what it was. She knew nothing would really get rid of it until she learned how to use it. Nothing would get rid of the voices in her head until she asked her aunt to help her. She didn't want that. She wanted to be normal like everyone else. Was that too much to ask?

A tiny voice inside her said yes. It was too late to be normal.

She sniffed. She couldn't think about the cure now. What she wanted now was fifteen minutes of darkness and uninterrupted rest. She locked the



door to her office, sat down behind her desk, and popped her headache killers.

Ilida chased them down with cold, two-hours-old coffee. Not a good idea to mix Ibuprofen with caffeine, but nothing bothered her. She had an iron stomach. She never got sick. She only had the headaches. Ilida pulled the shade down blocking the streetlights. Not that there were many lining the roads. She was in Riverhead, New York—the boon docks. Here, dwindling farmlands, burgeoning malls, vineyards and the Riverhead Raceway surrounded her. Yeehaw!

She moved her name plaque and the Bootsy Collins doll with the bobbing head birthday present Beverly gave to her over to the left edge of the desk.

Thank God, she lived in Brooklyn. Smiling through the pain, she put her head down on her desk and closed her eyes. In thirty minutes, she needed to set up the downstairs living room for game night. Until then, she wanted to chill out.

\* \* \* \*

Ilida's hand shook as she unlocked the door to her fifth-floor walkup. The two-hour trip back to Brooklyn was longer than usual. It made her headache worse. The pain in her head made her not want to move another step. Her head throbbed

as if some tiny person hammered her temple. The dead bolt clicked inward making her temple throb intensely.

Voices. Inner voices of people around her: a baby crying wanting her bottle, couple arguing in Spanish. She felt the three different sensations coursing through her body like three electric charges electrocuting her at different points. A couple making love? No, it's a ménage a trios. She groaned aloud. At the moment, her sex life was labeled deficient. All she needed was to eavesdrop on someone doing the nasty to make her feel *very* good about life.

She stumbled into her apartment, her refuge when she had those episodes that at last count was one hundred seventy six days with no signs of stopping. She threw her keys not caring where they landed, pulled off her coat dropped it on the floor. She didn't bother flipping the kitchen light switches on. That would only hurt her eyes. Light seemed to hurt her eyes these days.

She felt her way to her bedroom, took off her remaining clothes, boots came off next. She fell back on her bed.

*Oh, man!* She had to get something strong for the pain. Not that it would help her. Ibuprofen didn't do a thing for it. Her system had built up a tolerance to it. She stayed in bed, kept her eyes closed and wished for relief.

No relief here. The voices kept up their usual chatter. The male in particular... kept up serious “white noise.” She sat up in bed, squinting her eyes. That helped sometimes. She smacked her lips—her mouth hot and dry as a dessert. Gradually, she rolled out of bed, and felt her way to the kitchen.

The left side of her brain tingled, shifted to awareness of another presence. She knew she wasn’t alone. Her hearing keyed in on a scratching and squeaking. *That stupid mouse!* So far, it had avoided the three traps she laid on the floor of her galley-style kitchen.

*Smart assed fur ball.*

She’d been trying to catch it for so long that well, maybe she should keep it as a pet. Call it Ralph.

That voice again. *Yes, I did and one of them was being able to sense someone in my lair.*

Lair? Who talks like that? Dracula? She waved her hand, dismissing it. She opened the refrigerator door, took out her pitcher of filtered water, and placed it on the counter. She looked up amazed that she could see in the dark. Something was wrong with her. No one can see in the dark, but then she wasn’t just anyone. She was an empathy/telepath who hadn’t used her powers in five years, a psychic who needed to write a report for tomorrow’s daily morning meeting. Until she

could get rid of the headache, it wasn't going to get written.

His voice echoed in her head again. *She wanted more than I could and wanted to give.*

Ilida's cheeks heated up. A guy breaking up with his girlfriend. She was nosing around on someone's private pain - thoughts and she didn't know how to stop it.

\* \* \* \*

Thirty minutes later, the limo turned onto Gramercy Park and East Twentieth Street. My body tensed and I prayed I wouldn't encounter anyone on the way to my house. I have an animal inside me that had to be reigned in. "You can let me off here," I said into the intercom. "I want to walk the rest of the way home." My voice when in battle-readiness rumbled.

The windowed partition was awash in a red haze. The driver's hand I saw in red, also.

The driver opened the door for me. His eyes widened and his pulse picked up. Then he visibly relaxed. He knew he wasn't tonight's meal. "I have two uninvited guests in my home."

"Do you need my help, Sir?"

"I'll take care of it."

"I'm under the King's orders."

"Tell him I let you go. See you soon."

He's just a kid—an acolyte. To young and innocent for him to see what I'm about to do to the intruders.

“Good night, Sir.”

I thanked him and then began my walk down the block.

Chilled wind danced on my skin bringing with it the smell of a dog taking a dump, coffee, cooking, paint, and fish. I preferred warm weather, but loved New York City and took what came with it. I swung open the gate to my townhouse, took off my shoes, pulled the lace out of one, and ran up the terra cotta stairs. The stairs were hard slabs of ice but I ignored it. My hunting instincts were on full alert now. If anything moved, I'd kill it. It didn't matter what or who it was. I am a quarter wolf. It makes me somewhat wild when I have to protect myself, feed or have sex.

Humph, the fish stench was more pungent and it emanated from my house. Hermes!

Inaudibly, I unlocked the front door of the house I bought three years ago, before I became Daedalus Sqourakis – Wulf, Prince of Vampires. The thought of officially taking Radu's surname made my stomach heave. That vampire brought nothing but misery to all of his children. I didn't want to be reminded of it by taking my rightful name. I needed the separation to function

normally. I've since learned to separate the vampire from the name.

They had no idea I was watching them. Being a powerful psychic made it possible to sneak up on other vampires undetected, and impossible to have my thoughts read. I left the lights off. I'm comfortable without them on and that would alert the intruders. Vampires don't need light to see.

With stealth, I breezed past the kitchen table. My kitchen is open and large enough to include a couple of loveseats and couch. I reached over, took a knife that was taped under one of the loveseats and flung it at the male pawing through the drawers.

Hermes grunted and fell back as blood spurted from the front of his shoulder and out the back. I jumped on him, pushed the knife clear through his shoulder, then pinned him to the white oak cabinet doors.

I wanted him to pay for what he did to me in Santorini, but not here. I didn't want his blood desecrating my floor, my home.

His girlfriend made a dash for the hallway. She was going to leave her beloved Hermes behind to bleed to death? How heart warming. Not missing a beat, I reached out with my long arms, wrapping the shoelace around her neck twice. She struggled and I pulled the lace tighter. We then landed on the black tiled floor - the blonde's back to my

front.

I tasted Terra and Hermes' fear.

"You're turning three shades of blue, blondie," I warned. She kicked. Her arms flailed then hit the bottom cabinets. She raised her sharp talons. I kept an eye on her menacing nails and Hermes.

"I don't know what you came here for. I don't care, but you two had better get out of here before I get nastier," I said in her ear, but loud enough for Hermes to listen.

She sputtered, "Go."

Hermes struggled, pulled the knife out of his right trapezoid. Blood coated the sleeve and torso of his turtleneck sweater. The right arm hung pathetically. I was surprised Hermes didn't rip his arm off to get away. It would have grown back. He held his right shoulder tight. He raised the knife in the air ready to kill me. Oh Joy! "I'll use her as a shield, idiot."

"Let her go!"

"When you're out the door, I will."

Hermes' face contorted in pain and his veins shown green and stark under his pale skin. "She might die by then," Hermes said.

"Take a risk," I ground out.

"You cunt hair," Hermes hollered.

"You talk tough for someone who's half dead."

One thing I loved most in the world besides sex was the smell of blood. It made me deliciously

bloodthirsty and lusty. Sex I could do without for a night. Blood I cherished unconditionally. If Hermes doesn't tend to his knife wound like now, he'll bleed to death. Already my bat self tried to assert itself: my ears grew pointy, gums itched signaling the growth of fangs, and my fingernails wanted to lengthen. I was seconds away from having my own blood drive, and I couldn't hold it back.

Black hair bursts through my pores. I opened my mouth revealing fangs and bit down on the vampiresses's neck. Salty thickness spurted to the roof of my mouth. The prized liquid, heated from her exertion, flooded my throat. Then saltiness turned spicy, hot. It burned my throat.

Hermes gave me a red-toothed smile.

"This is a taste of what she can do to you. You fucking freak! Let her go!"

Yes, it was time to. They'd overstayed their welcome, and my vocal cords were melting. We were at a deadlock but it was by no means over – not for Hermes and me.

I pulled her up. The harpy-in-training still struggled. Then her skin, dissolved into vapor, enveloped Hermes. The string I had wrapped around her neck fell to the floor in front of my feet. Hermes maniacal laughter filled my kitchen then faded to nothingness, their psychic signatures gone from my home.



I spit the blood out of my mouth. The droplets of crimson sizzled, danced, and bubbled on the cold surface of the sink. Copper scented steam rose up and coated the already-bloodied cabinets.

Hermes obviously shared blood with her, marking her. I didn't know he had it in him.

I pushed the faucet to the right for cold water and drowned my mouth with it. I gulped and spit it out until I could taste neither her blood nor the water.

I ran a white cloth down the dagger, wiping the blood off the blade. Going over the past four hours: I broke up with Brittany Lane after realizing she's on drugs. I hurt her deeply. I know I can be a shit sometimes, but we'd agreed a year ago that the relationship would be light, fun, and sexually gratifying, only. I don't ever want to lead someone on.

To prevent this from happening I had to cast out the wards around my home. I should have done it before. My three-day-old argument I had with my daughter distracted me.

I let my mind, or a part of my essence, flow out and encircle my townhouse. It's a strong barrier, like me, and won't let the unwanted in.

There was the nagging, tingling sensation in my head just as I finished fortifying my lair. More visitors were about to darken my doorstep and my wards would not keep them out. Something to

work on later.

The shrill buzz of the doorbell signaled my family's arrival and my aggressive instincts once more. Tania and Alec knew it was better to come invited. The wolf instinct to guard my lair made it impossible to have uninvited guests. It wouldn't be different for my brother and sister-in-law.

I opened the door to see Alec on guard already. He stood still and met my steady gaze, ready to strike me if needed. The cool breeze blew his longish black hair. Alec is as ferocious and as cunning a fighter as I am. If we had to fight each other, I would be hard pressed to guess who'd win. Tania, Alec's wife and Queen, crossed her arms in agitation as she looked from me to Alec. Then she looked around. She sensed my wards. "You should have called first."

"We sensed you were in trouble," Alec said equally as tense.

"I handled it, as usual."

"I swear it's like watching Animal Planet. Are you two alpha males finished?" Tania said.

I know from whence my aggressiveness comes. There was no need for me to feel threatened.

"Give me five more minutes," I half-joked. Alec was about to growl at me. I love goading him and would have continued if Tania hadn't interrupted me.

"We didn't mean to encroach on your territory.

By the way, it's freezing out here," Tania reminded me, hugging herself.

Her crocheted rose-colored hat tamed her long black tresses. The color of her hat vibrated off her cocoa colored skin. Staring at her, I suddenly realized I was attracted to her. What male wouldn't be? It would never go any further, though. We're best friends and I...love my brother as much as I could love him. Love has always been a mystery to me. I've only seen the opposite so I was stunned I could say that. I don't think I know what love is, but without question I would do anything for him while joyfully giving him a hard time. "Come in. I'll turn up the heat."

Once their coats were off and shoes discarded by the door, they settled in the kitchen. I continued cleaning up the blood on the cabinet doors. I wiped back and forth turning the dark, viscous liquid into pink bubbling suds.

Alec and Tania sat down on the stools in front of the bar. Tania still wore perfume knowing other vampires would be sensitive to it. I chalked it up to stubborn human habits. My nose itched then got used to the floral scent. Heat gradually warmed the living room and kitchen.

I hated silence. Silence meant something not too savory was on the horizon, and yours truly was going to be the fall guy. Whatever it will be, I was on a roll tonight.

Alec spoke first. "Let me guess. The Jacquerie paid you a visit?"

I shrugged. Their visit barely meant anything to me, though something told me I shouldn't have been so peace loving tonight. "Hermes is after me."

"Why is he after you?" Tania asked.

"I had a feeling you knew him," Alec said.

How do you say what I was about to say? My secret will be out, then what? Will they think less of me? Will I have to prove myself in their eyes?

"What is it?" Tania asked.

"Are you being dramatic?" Alec asked.

Hardly. I didn't know where to begin. It was safer to look into Tania's eyes. She had an understanding non-judgmental way about her. Alec is a lucky asshole. I doubt if I will ever find that, and do I really want to? All relationships are complicated at best. There was so much they didn't know about me and vice versa. We're family and this would help me to know how much of a family they want to be.

Tania's eyes softened. The dawning of understanding showed in her eyes. "Wait Alec. I don't think he's about to tell us a bedtime story."

"I cut off his left arm and penis two centuries ago. He and Terra smelled like sex so they grew back obviously."

"Ouch!" Tania visibly shuddered. "I'm not a

male and that hurt. Why so harsh?"

It was a vicious act, but I will not apologize for it. "I believe it was a Monday. I hate Mondays."

"You hate Mondays?" Alec asked.

"Doesn't everyone?" I wasn't ashamed. It wasn't my fault but telling my newfound family about the most horrendous night of my life—no never. But it may come out soon especially with Hermes lurking about again trying to cause trouble. I could see him resorting to blackmail next.

"What did he really do to you?" Tania asked softly.

I'm a sucker for compassionate women and vampiresses, and she's my best friend. I should tell her, but when she became Queen of Vampires, our friendship changed.

"He tried to humiliate me and it worked for all of five minutes." Shrugging, I said, "I took care of it." Pride means everything to a vampire male.

Alec's eyes were intense as he watched me. He wanted to probe my thoughts, find out what I was hiding, but had the good manners to leave it alone.

"I'm sorry you got pulled into our fight with him," Tania said.

"I don't shy away from fighting." I want Hermes to remember I'm not peace loving. "There is something you should know about Hermes. I bit

his girlfriend's neck tonight and her blood burned my throat. It felt like it was being eaten away, like corrosive acid eats through metal."

"Well, that isn't good," Tania, breathed. "What does that mean?"

I said shrugging, "Hand-to-hand combat is not advisable. What do you know about his girlfriend?" I asked Alec.

"Terra has a background in biochemistry. She grew up in Spain," Alec said. "She most likely manufactured red queen."

"She'll be dead soon. If I don't kill her first."

"How do you know?" Tania asked.

"Hermes likes power and he doesn't like sharing it. He and Manus made the perfect couple that way."

"How is that?"

"Manus loved power. So did Hermes. I killed Manus—beat Hermes to it."

"What did you do to Hermes?"

Tania has delicate ears. "And that's where the cutting off arm and penis come in."

"Are you—?" Tania asked me.

"Never been better. I'd love a cig though." Tania doesn't understand. In a masochistic way, I have to thank Hermes for trying to kill my spirit. His act forced me to act and free myself and the other Vrykolakas clan members.

"What did you do to her in the past? Is she a

woman scorned?" Tania asked.

Obviously, my sex life was fodder for critiquing. "I remember every woman and vampiress I've slept with. She wasn't one of them. So, what can I do for you two?"

Alec fixed me with his serious gaze. "This is strangely apropos. We want you to be our Enforcer."

"And we'd like you to start right away," Tania added.

The sponge in my hand froze. Then I dropped it in the green bucket and turned around to face my brother and his wife. "I think both of you fed on a drunk wino tonight," I said while wiping my hands.

I've been restless lately, itching for a risky venture, and they just handed it to me on a silver platter, but did I want to be their Enforcer?

"We have rules regarding killing our kind. If we made your activities legal under the Vampiric Constitution then we could eliminate the Jacquerie whenever we please."

"Why me?" I've never been a leader except a couple of centuries ago in Santorini. That only lasted five minutes.

Alec regarded me with a patient smile, as if he knew what was best for me and I only had to relent to it. "I trust you."

"We just met, Alec." How could I trust what he

felt about me?

"It's been a year, *Daedalus*. You're my brother, and underneath that shell you constructed around yourself, lays a good heart and a well-developed sense of justice."

I'm not right for the job. I'm not a leader and I'm nobody's 'yes man'." I fight—kill, not for sport. If it's a necessity, it gets done. Humans kill without breaking a sweat. "The Council won't see my good points if there are any. It's no secret how I feel about bureaucrats."

"Yes and no. Being an Enforcer involves being fair and thinking quickly on your feet. You do that often. I've seen you in action." He paused, loosened his tie.

I didn't know I held my breath waiting for him to finish. "I still don't see how..."

Tania placed her hand on mine, interrupting me. "I would love to work with my brother in-law- and get to know him better."

"That's sweet, Tania but..."

"You fight with the grace and skill of a predator and you can handle yourself around the Council. You are protective of the weak, vampire and otherwise." Alec said.

Alec was being modest. Even while shackled to the walls of the lava tombs in Santorini I felt how frightened Manus was about encountering Alec, the Vampire Viking Prince. It was the first time I'd



seen him tremble. The second time was at the sight of me in bat form.

I leaned against the counter and crossed my arms. All of their compliments made me squirm. I suppose never hearing compliments all my life it's a foreign thing. I've only heard the opposite. "I was part of a clan grandfather never sanctioned."

"You were sold into the Vrykolakas Clan by Radu at four years of age. You couldn't defend yourself back then. I'd be an idiot not to recognize that."

Even centuries later the memories came back to me of my enslavement and humiliation at the hands of Radu and Manus. I paid Manus back in kind for torturing me, of course. The memories still dug deep and twisted my gut. I straightened up and reached for the cabinets. "What's in it for me? I have more money than I can spend. My life is relatively easy. Why should I complicate it to become your Enforcer?" I asked them while taking down two large coffee cups from the cabinet. The owners of a diner downtown invented a flavored coffee just for me after I saved them from a nasty death by a vampire. I'd never thought of adding cow's blood to coffee. Ingenious! "Brew eighty-eight?"

"Sure," the couple said simultaneously.

"You're the Prince of Vampires by birth. You'll have authority to act on any emergency decision.

Naturally, if anything happened to us you would take over our duties as the royal elect."

That sounded ominous, but I supposed being King and Queen meant a relatively short life span. Still, I wasn't chomping at the bit to accept the job offer. I lifted the coffee-filled carafe and poured. "And who would I take orders from? You two?"

"Would that be so awful?"

I snorted at her ridiculous question, and then took a sip of the eighty-eight. "Have the Jacquerie attacked you since last year?"

"Once or twice," Tania interjected.

"*You* shouldn't be fighting," I said. Her thin brows knitted together. What was it that made a woman beautiful when she got angry?

"And why not? Don't raise your eyebrow at me, Daedalus. A woman can fight just as well, if not better, than males," she argued, the earlier tenseness gone. That relieved me.

"Before Tania and I met she could defend herself," Alec interjected.

I had no doubt of that. Tania is brave, muscular, and sexy. For a reason unknown to me I was drawn to the utility drawer Hermes had ransacked almost thirty minutes ago. "Your wife is trying to get pregnant," I said to Alec while pouring red liquid into the coffee mugs. I passed both cups to Tania and Alec, and then opened the utility drawer.

Tania lifted the mug, gave me a mock toast. "Thanks a lot!"

"You're welcome," I said, and then went back to looking through the utility drawer. All the while, my anxiety level increased as it became clear her picture wasn't in the drawer where I'd left it weeks ago. With slow dread, I closed the drawer then placed both hands on my hips. How could I have been so sloppy? In a fit of rage, I raised my fist high and slammed it down on the marble island, cracking the surface and clattering my coffee cup. It tipped over on its side. Coffee poured on the saucer. The coffee machine jumped, shook, then settled down.

"Daedalus?"

Without looking at them I said, "They took my daughter's picture."

## Chapter Two

Reddish brown liquid poured out of the cup and seeped into the crack I'd made with my fist. Fear held my heart in a death grip. I headed for the floating staircase then ran up to the fifth floor.

The fifth floor was an addition. I needed the space for my dojo. I slid the Shoji screen door to it open. I wasn't surprised when I heard Tania and Alec's footsteps behind me. They traveled like Siamese twins. It was that strange and frightening vampiric marriage, the Hymeneal that all mated vampires had, and I'm loathe to indulge in.

It was unavoidable. I have secrets I haven't trusted anyone enough to share with including Alec and Tania. They'll be hurt. I'll deal with it.

"My daughter." Alec's mouth opened. Before he could utter a sound, I cut him off. "I'll explain later."

Alec was a hurricane ready to flood me with his anger. The power of it literally danced over my skin. Instead, he calmly stated, "Maybe you took it

out of your drawer?"

I sighed inwardly. "I never forget." With that, I turned around and pulled off my black, v-neck sweater...exposing my scars. It was clear I wasn't going to get the privacy I needed to change my clothes. There was a sharp intake of breath from both of them. The two of them seeing me naked was the least of my worries.

Behind me, I heard footsteps retreat into the hallway. Good. Tania got the message. I wished Alec would heed it also, but he wasn't the sort. Distantly, I registered a dull ache on my left temple.

I pressed a button on a silk wall panel. A rectangular panel came forward. I pulled it down and opened it. Three pieces of black clothing were folded neatly on the shelf.

"This is a trap," Alec said.

"He'll try to kidnap Juliana. I taught her to defend herself, but Hermes is older and deadlier." I unbuttoned and unzipped my jeans, pulled them off. My socks came next. All the while, the fear tried to paralyze me. I was completely naked. I hated underwear.

"Maybe she isn't in town?" Alec said.

"I would have sensed her departure. She's still here and probably getting herself into trouble."

"I'll give you your privacy."

"Thanks." I was thankful neither Alec nor Tania

asked about the scars covering my back. They were my business only. I pulled on the black top. It hugged my muscular chest. The pants, tabi socks and the tabi boots with the sectioned off big toe I pulled on next. I'm efficient, having done this a thousand times over. Gloves and the gauntlets I pulled on last. The mask I'll pull on later. I had to retrieve my sword next.

I shook my head disbelieving the opportunity I gave up. If anything happens to my daughter because of my twinge of non-violence... I shook my head in disbelief at my stupidity. This was the night of all fuckups. I ran down the stairs and found Alec in his uniform. Not a Ninja uniform but something ancient, chivalrous and all Alec.

Then I scrunched my face tight as I held the Katana in my hand. A dull throbbing pain ricocheted out into the void then back into my head, as if I was playing mental boxing. I felt as if someone stabbed my head with a knife repeatedly. Whomever I sparred with, was having a harder time than I was.

The space in front of me shimmered. I stepped back, tense, ready to fight. Terra was good. She must have many tricks up her black sleeves. I had renewed respect for the crazy she-bitch, but it wasn't Terra I saw. A woman with skin the color of dark honey was laying on the floor, in her underwear, curled up in a fetal position. She held

her head for dear life. Tears ran down the bridge of her nose.

I got on my knees and stared at her. The Fates were screwing with me tonight.

"Daedalus?" Alec stepped forward, walked through the image, dispelling it, and with it my burgeoning fear. I couldn't lose contact.

I held up my hand halting further questions from my brother. "Wait, Alec!" In my head her voice echoed, *Stop! Stop! Stop! Dammit!* I trusted my instincts and something told me it wasn't Terra playing mind tricks. I'm worried about my daughter. My thoughts are traveling to places I don't want them to go, so anything is possible.

Every instinct told me it was the woman I'd stared at. I walked straight ahead, the sword held at a safe angle, opened the balcony door, and braced my back against the high cement ledge. I forced the sound of the City and the freezing cold to the background and concentrated on the voice. *Who are you?*

*More important, who- are- you?*

Her telepathic voice caused deep shudders in my core making my cock tighten, filling my mind—distracting me with encompassing heat. The pain in my head lowered like an elevator down through my nose, eyes then cheekbones and out my ears. Remembering the scalpel sharp weapon in my hand, I carefully raised it over my

head then lowered the blade behind my back into its scabbard. *You're in pain.*

*And you're causing it, pal. I can't believe I'm talking with another damn psychic.*

I couldn't help but smile at her smart-ass comeback. For a fraction of a second, I'd forgotten about my fear for Juliana. I lifted my arms, stretched them out on the ledge. As usual, I kept calm and cool. *How did I cause it?*

*Your anger. Its always strong emotions. What's going on with you?*

*She's noseey, too. I ask the questions. You answer. Why are you in my head?*

*I was born with psychic powers, and you share the same problem. Yippee!*

To say I wasn't intrigued would be a lie. A telepath! Human, I guessed. I'm wholly fascinated by how the sound of her voice made me hot. Her telepathic voice sent pictures, impressions of her physical state to me and I was sure by accident. I felt something hard and cold on my right side. *You shouldn't lie on the floor.*

*How did you – you can see me can't you?*

She sounded shocked. Not a seasoned telepath I'm dealing with. How could she not know telepathy wasn't just mind-melding? *You won't get rid of your headache that way.*

*Does this ever happen to you?*

*No.*

*So, I'm supposed to take your advice.*



*You...intruded.* Chips – awful human snack – lay around her kitchen floor. A dark brown wooden bowl lay upside down on top of the chips. I had to restrain myself from reaching out to her. She had the lost broken-down look to her. She rolled onto her back holding her head in one hand. That was a start. Our conversation distracted both of us.

*No, you intruded first. It's your...daughter... Juliana, isn't it?*

I straightened my posture then. *Did I give you permission to probe my thoughts?* I sensed her inward shrug.

*I'm seldom rude, but if it will get rid of my monster headache...*

I crossed my arms, remembering I had a mission now and this little detour, though amusing, was hampering my efforts. *Take a deep breath. Think of some place beautiful, warm, calm, and quiet. Picture yourself there.* I could see the picture she formed in her mind. It was oddly familiar: a large blue sea, black, rocky beach, and white houses. Good God! Santorini.

*I think it's working.*

*Good for you. Now stay the hell out of my head, please.*

*You're going to hurt someone aren't you?*

*Before they hurt my daughter? Damn straight!*

*Violence begets violence.*

*Get some rest.*

\* \* \* \*

Terra coughed as she held her boyfriend's arm steady. "We'll find a cab," she said as she wiped her eyes. Red tear droplets ran down her forefinger.

Hermes peeked around the corner. He smeared blood on the brick wall he leaned against. He'd make a trail if she didn't stop his bleeding. It might work to their advantage, though, but then vampiric blood evaporates after a while. If the police go around to all the residents and ask them if they saw anything suspicious, heard someone screaming, who knows what they might say?

"Not like this. I'm bleeding all over the place. You'll have to hypnotize the cab driver then kill him."

"We don't need a trail of corpses tonight," Terra said.

"We're in the wrong city for alleys."

Like shadows, they moved in the darkness concealing their appearance from humans walking by. They were lucky. It was freezing out and New Yorkers were tough but even they knew when to stay out of the cold.

"That freak almost killed you," Hermes said."

"Watch your mouth. He's my father." She clutched the green crystal necklace. Once they found an alley, she opened a vein in her wrist.

As it pulsed, it pumped out blood. She applied pressure (she hated to be wasteful) to it

then held her wrist to Hermes mouth. He suckled her. She had more blood than she could handle in her body. As usual, his sucking made her womb contract. She held her breath and thought of the woman in the photograph as a distraction. She barely felt her orgasm. Terra opened her eyes in time to watch Hermes' muscles and tendons reconnect.

She reviewed the events of fifteen minutes ago in her mind. Daedalus and Hermes talked as though they knew each other.

"Will we go after this one next?" Hermes asked, interrupting her thoughts.

She arched her brow as she studied the young vampire's face. "We will. He'll come after us, you know," she said.

"I've never known you to be afraid of anything."

"I'm not, but he'll hate me now for sure."

"You know who your father is. You know who you are," he said caressing her raven hair. "He had no right to throw you away after you were born."

"Will he realize in time?" While Daedalus was strangling her, she thought he saw her for who she really was. Instead, she saw the cold, ruthless killer there. Would he kill his own family? Terra lifted it up the picture and gazed into the violet eyes of the young woman. The eyes were so much

like hers. The hair was different though. While her hair in the picture is blonde. Terra's is black as coal. The girl in the picture looked to be in her early twenties. Vampires don't age as rapidly so who knows. Terra just wanted to get rid of her. She didn't need any more barriers to her father.

"He will realize who you are, Terra. *He* will and if not we go to Plan B." Hermes her knight in shining armor, her protector, bent down and sniffed the ground. "I'll pick out her scent. You pick up her energy from the photograph. I'm sure she's been here."

## Book Two

## Chapter Three

Ilida sat up, leaning against her plain, white bottom cabinets. The sharp, throbbing pain in her frontal lobe receded to a dull ache.

Another telepath? Of course, she knew there were others out there but she'd never made contact, or did she contact him?

Angry Man had skill. He knew she was lying on the floor on something cold at least. She smiled to herself thinking about his terse questions and statements. He's used to being in command. *Oh, man, way too much mental energy spent on a stranger.*

Ilida stood up, wiped her eyes, and walked to the bathroom. She walked out backwards with her aunt Cassandra walking toward her. Ilida hunched over and her fists clenched at her sides. "I swear can't you ever knock or call first?" She made an unintelligible sound as she sat on the couch.

All she wanted was to get on with her night,

type out her reports for the daily meeting. Every time her aunt popped over it was a reminder of how different she was no matter how hard she tried to pretend. She wondered what her father would say if he knew, she was having psychic headaches. He'd probably flip. He'd punished her at fifteen for using her powers- grounded her for a month.

The tall woman with the worn straw hat, long amber dreadlocks littered with dried leaves shook her head. "I knew this would happen, girl."

"Knew? About my leaks? Can you stop it?" Cassandra was the only one she knew and trusted to stop her telepathic leaks, but as she watched, her aunt's crow's feet deepen. She had a feeling it wouldn't be easy.

"Tut, tut. It *won't* be easy."

Cassandra was a psychic of unknown potential. Unknown potential to Ilida that is. She knew Cassandra was a telepath and diviner, but that's all she knew. Cassandra had skeletons in her closet she wouldn't share with her. "You're kidding me. Please tell me this is one of your bizarro jokes."

"Not my only gra-niece! I could kill you." She shook her head. "Do it I will not." Cassandra took off her straw hat in a dramatic gesture.

With each moment, her hope faded. "Why would it kill me, Cassandra?"

"Strong in mind you are. Something in you would resist."

Resist? All she ever wanted was to be normal. "You know I don't want this... power."

"You have it in spades. You may have more." She clutched Ilida's chin, rubbing the side of it. "You took after me."

"Great! I need morphine to celebrate," she said as she walked into her bathroom again. Ilida moved her shoulders in a circle and prompted herself to think back to that imaginary place, but thoughts of her angry psychic...friend intruded. Okay, she was curious as hell about him. Why? What was she going to do storm troop his head again and offer him her help? He asked her to stay out of it. She didn't blame him. What happened was weird, to say the least.

"Will you help him?"

Ilida jumped hurting her neck. Cassandra had the softest footsteps. She thought the woman floated rather than walked. That was the mystery of Cassandra. She faced her aunt. "It's none of my business, Cassandra." She opened the lacquered pine and oak medicine cabinet, moved a few bottles of over-the-counter pills aside, and grabbed the small bottle of ibuprofen.

"But you know you will. I sense fire in your blood. Curious you are."

Ilida popped the pill in her mouth. Cassandra



stepped aside to let her out. Ilida grabbed a glass from the upper cabinets in the kitchen then filled it with filtered water from the tap. She drank the water swallowing the pill down. "For once I'm going to stay the hell out of people's business and do my work. I have reports to type up."

Ilida heard the scratch on wood then flame eerily illuminated Cassandra's nose and hazel-brown eyes much like her own. Genes are strange, Ilida mused.

"How long will you let this insane behavior continue?" She took a drag then blew smoke.

Her aunt loved to smoke her cherry flavored, slim cigarettes. Ilida didn't like the smell it left in her apartment, nor Cassandra's need to remind her of what she'd left behind five years ago. "What insane behavior, Cassandra?"

"Stop pretending to be anything other than what you are," Cassandra said, pointing her finger and cigarette at her.

"Go away, Cassandra."

"Stubborn girl."

"Stubborn wom—" Ilida peered to her left then right. She was alone in her apartment once again. "Call next time!"

\* \* \* \*

I walked back into the living room. The woman's

voice remained in my head...and my heart. Alec and Tania's eyes were heavy on me. I put up mental shields to block out their questions. My family meant well, but they were intrusive at times.

As I walked to my desk Alec held up my Ninja mask.

"A Ninja? All this time you never told me you were a Ninja," Alec said, as he tossed the mask into my waiting hands. I didn't talk about myself much. How do you tell your brother you're a trained assassin? He should have figured it out a year ago when we fought the Jacques together for the first time. That night was a night of firsts for all of us. "I learned Ninjitsu as well as Bushido." I wasn't in the mood for a lecture. Alec may be pushing one thousand but I have an old soul. I'm too seasoned for a lecture on proper family functionality. "It just never came up."

"What happened on the balcony?" Alec asked.

"Nothing to concern yourself with." I don't know what happened. It was strange, exciting. It was something had to be pondered another day.

"Daedalus?"

I rolled the opening of the mask. The micromesh material is stretchy and adheres to itself. "I have to find my daughter. Are you coming or not?"

"I'm coming."

"So am I," Tania said.

"No!" We spoke simultaneously then looked at each other, surprised. This was none of my business. She's my friend and sister-in-law, but... I had to intervene. I care about Tania too much to let her get hurt. Besides, I want to see my niece or nephew one day. Women's lib be damned tonight.

Before I pulled on my mask I said to Alec, "Meet you on the roof." I opened the balcony door again, jumped on the wall and climbed on all fours up the red brick facade. I settled on the roof of my dojo, waiting for Alec. I couldn't help but hear Alec and Tania's conversation.

*"Now you're going to listen to him?"*

*"He's right," Alec said. "You are trying to get pregnant. What if you are now?"*

*"Alec?"*

*"I'll meet you at home."*

*"I'm Queen and I belong by your side."*

*"Yes, and if I'm killed tonight you take over."*

*"I have to do something besides make like June Cleaver and twiddle my thumbs at home. I'll make some calls to Matt."*

*"Tell him to be on standby to divert the cops"*

*"Thanks a lot, Daedalus."*

That hurt, but Alec was right in putting his foot down with her. I didn't want to lose her friendship, though.

After a few minutes of waiting, Alec appeared behind me. "Ready, Alec?"

"She'll get over it."

"Right, let's go to Juliana's place, first." We leaped onto the next roof with uncanny synchronicity, like siblings who were raised together. We weren't, but it was interesting to play observer and witness how we mirrored each other at times almost down to the wings. Almost.

"And if she's not at her apartment?"

"There's a club in Chelsea she hangs out at." Juliana is always ready for dancing and having a good time. The one thing we had in common. It also tore us apart.

I should have kept a tighter reign on her. She was angry and belligerent when we talked last. She hated me and I know why. I wasn't there and she resented my intrusion into her life now. If I were her, I would have picked up and left years ago. I wasn't a real father to her. Maybe I was too afraid to be her father. I didn't have a glowing example to live up to. I don't know how to love and she knows it.

"I'm sure she's all right, Daedalus."

"Yeah," I said not really listening. The roofs of the buildings stretched before us. I tried to keep the panic at bay.

"About my niece?" Alec prompted.

His niece, my daughter. We're family now and I have to keep remembering that. "I kept her a secret so that she wouldn't be a target," I said,

clearing one rooftop running then jumping across to the next. Alec kept paced. To the human eye, we're a gust of wind.

Vampires are super human.

"Did you have to keep her a secret from us? From Tania? We are your family, right?"

"You more than made your point." It wasn't over. I hurt his and Tania's feelings. They won't let me forget it especially after I introduce them to Juliana.

"I can make my wings grow and can get us there faster. Though I know you can fly, too," Alec said.

"My bat self is useless without an extra pair of clothing and your wings hurt you."

"I feel your panic."

"We're here," I said as we landed on her roof. Here. Downtown. The noise was deafening and the buildings shorter. My heart was pounding and I still couldn't push the conversation with that woman out of my head.

"What happened to you back there?" Alec asked.

He read my thoughts. I raised my shield, my steel door to keep him out. My fear of Hermes hurting my daughter made me lax. "Nothing."

"It didn't seem like nothing," He narrowed his eyes at me, aware of my shields.

"Leave it be, Alec. This is Juliana's apartment.

She's on the top floor. Right below you." I held onto the ledge, flipped over it, and released my hands landing on her balcony soundlessly.

The screen door locked from the inside. It didn't deter me. I telekinetically unlocked it. Alec followed me inside. I didn't hear her, feel her, or sense her here. Nothing. There was one other place she could be. "Club Amaranthine."

"Where is that?"

"You should know. Your ex girlfriend use to own it."

## Chapter Four

Ilida sighed as she stared out the living room window. Droplets of water fell against the pane. She should type her report, watch a movie and then go to bed. "I have to help him," she said to herself. Then she sniffed the cherry tobacco and rolled her eyes. *Cassandra, Cassandra*. She's never too far away.

"And do this how?"

"Find his daughter for him."

The tall woman with the amber-curled dreadlocks shook her head sadly. "My dear niece you are out of practice."

"Yeah, but I have to help him," Ilida said, closed her eyes.

"Let your mind drift out to him. Don't let him know you are there."

Ilida nodded then let her consciousness take over. Her mind's eyes saw in grayed hues. Bright lights with voices floated past her, their inner

thoughts exposed to her.

The pain slowly advanced on her brain, again. She had to move faster to outrun her headache.

Ilida locked onto Angry Man She had to get in there and out just as fast. He was agitated, annoyed and his shields were down. He was listening to someone talking. Another man's voice? A name bounced back and forth between them. Juliana.

Angry Man was agitated, frightened. The other man—she couldn't read his thoughts. He'd erected a tall brick wall shutting her out.

She ran out of his mind, fast, and ran down the path to his daughter. Angry Man had to be a powerful psychic as well. He was linked to Juliana. It made sense if she was his daughter.

She could feel her head stretching and her blood vessels constrict. The voices doubled in quantity and tripled in sound volume. She was forcing her mind and body to its limits.

*Where is she?*

A faint signal became clearer and more distinct. The signal's light sparkled brighter, like someone adjusted a fancy flashlight.

Soon, Ilida was surrounded by music and more disembodied voices surrounded by light. It was all mental traffic until she heard a lyrical laughter, clink of glasses and techno dance music. Her favorite group was spinning on the DJ's table. The



lights shimmered and moved. People danced and grooved to the music. Juliana is in a dance club. *Juliana? Juliana?*

*What?*

Her target had long dark hair, vibrant blue eyes, and an attitude like her father. Ilida also sensed she was older. Angry Man felt young to her. This was confusing by far.

The incandescent light stood in front of her. Only another powerful psychic could do that. Was Angry Man's family that formidable?

*Juliana?*

*And you are the fashion police?*

Ilida forgot that when someone communicated to her telepathically they saw, depending on their mood, an idealized or negative image of her.

*Your father is looking for you.*

*So why did he ask you to find me?*

*He didn't. I volunteered.*

Lights twirled and boogied passed them. Ilida floated on air. Her telepathic projection unaffected by gravity.

*He's so suffocating.*

*She can do the diva thing well.*

*He cares about you.* Ilida grabbed the young woman's arm. You have to leave and go to him. Ilida began floating away, but Juliana yanked her back.

*No way, lady. I don't know you.*

*I'm...I'm helping him. I think you're in trouble.*

*Trouble is my middle name. So take your uninspiring sweat suited self out of the club. Tell Daddy I'm not a child anymore and **stay out of my head!***

Ilida clutched her head forgetting that she was out of her body. Juliana's telepathic voice was strong and high pitched. From Juliana, a bolt of focused psionic energy hit Ilida in the head—a force blast meant to keep her out.

She groaned. Ilida disliked screamers. She ran away from Juliana and her screaming inner voice. She had to find Angry Man now. Talk about dysfunctional family. His outranked hers.

Something evil and foul raced up her spine.

\* \* \* \*

From the sky, the stench of fish caught me. "Drop me here."

Alec let go of my hand. I landed on a roof, then I flipped as gravity pulled me down then fell on Hermes' shoulders, crossed my ankles around his neck and squeezed. His shoulders loosened. I then flipped back forcing him to arch his spine unnaturally. A crackling sound gave me instant satisfaction. He fell, hitting his head. I released him as I flipped away.

Alec took care of the blonde.

Hermes' hips stood up; his torso twisted about. His vertebrae cracked and I imagined realigned.

He stood tall and straight now. I unsheathed my sword.

Hermes kicked it out of my hand. It went flying. I lunged for it. But not before Hermes' foot collided with my head. I slumped to my knees, but kept myself from falling down. My vision blurred. I saw him take an object out of his pocket. I staggered to my feet, ran straight for him.

\* \* \* \*

Ilida's attention now centered on the man who staggered to his feet. He ran but not well. He managed to run right through her telepathic projection form. The other man, who reeked of fish, entered the club. She spied something shiny out of the corner of her eye.

The injured man—somehow she got the impression of him being injured—pushed the fish-smelling man down. An object went flying into the club. Ilida ran for the object.

*Juliana?* resounded in her head. With startling clarity, she knew it was him.

In a blast that would've deafened her corporal ears, the club blew out and up, fell around her in flames and cinders. Bodies that danced with life just minutes ago now lay scattered on the dance floor in burned charred reminders of life.

Maniacal laughter from the fish-smelling man.

Her telepathic friend lifted the smelly man up. Smelly Man rammed his head against her friend. The pain leaped from the front of her head to the back, almost blinding her with its force. He stumbled back. Then he plunged his hand in the smelly man's stomach. Dark wetness saturated his sweater.

A salty, sweet aroma burned her nose. It made the pain in her head pound more.

Smelly Man went down screaming.

Ilida floated to the ruined building.

A man with charred skin stumbled out of the club holding a body. Fur covered half his body. Fur? Like a— No. His hair, or what was left of it, she could see, was short, wavy, and black like her friend's. His eyes were dark and hollow with anger and grief.

She got a whiff of him as he ran past her. He smelled like burnt flesh, mother Earth, and animal.

"Juliana?" She turned to that familiar voice now choked with grief. It was him. Everything within her told her it was him.

His lanky, sturdy frame walked with hurried grace to the burned man holding Juliana's body. She felt his hopelessness and his racing thoughts. His body temperature plummeted as his grief rose. She felt all of him and frantically tried to disengage. But she couldn't break away, as if his

pain held her captive. Muscles convulsed in his chest. He threatened to go into shock. Though brokenhearted and shaking, he held himself upright.

She watched the scene before her in slow motion. The charred man still held Juliana's body in his arms. Tears rolled down his face as he handed the body to him. Another man held his shoulders as they sank down to the blackened pavement. Her telepathic companion pulled his head back and let out a scream that reverberated through her telepathic projection form.

She had to get back—leave the scene of pain to mourn privately. As before, the City floated passed her in shades of gray until she recognized her surroundings.

Ilida opened her eyes, seeing her apartment, grateful to be back and away from the horror. However, the images wouldn't leave her. Juliana's burned body limp and lifeless cradled in that burned man's arms. Her stomach rebelled. Clutching her skull once more she said to Cassandra, "Her name was Juliana, and I'm about to throw up." Ilida ran to the bathroom, shut the door, lifted the toilet lid...

\* \* \* \*

I located my sword while Hermes writhed on the

floor behind me. I gutted his stomach, side, and back-staking major organs. He'll recover fast. I know I have nothing to lose so if I die while killing him... that's life.

I feel empty space were my child's spirit should reside. This is one last act of love I will do for her.

Hermes tried to slither away. In the Bushido Code of Honor, one never lets his enemies suffer. I could do no less than end his suffering as mine began. I plunged my sword into his throat feeling and hearing the cracking of bone, the wet cutting sound of tendons ripping apart.

The images of the two of them holding me down, splitting me in half, my cock spurting cum, brown blood streaming down my ass and legs came quick and unbidden...

Hermes' blood spurted, coating my face, boots, and legs. He gurgled trying to speak. Fashioning my sword into a lever I moved it to the left. His vocal cords split, esophagus collapsed. I bent down holding the sword steady and stared into his eyes draining of that evil spark. "I'll see you in hell, bitch!"

## Chapter Five

Terra stumbled into her apartment on the eighteenth floor. Her limbs shook and felt like loose bits of wire, no longer under her control.

Her townhouse—a sky home it was called—sat on top of a high-rise building. She had her own elevator with a key, and a private entrance to get in and out of the building. She had to spend the exorbitant amount to show her father she could roll with him and his patchwork family.

“Oh, Hermes. I knew you’d bite the dust sooner or later,” she said, feigning grief. With the chemicals running through her blood—Hermes drank from her quite a bit—he’ll be back to his fish smelling self real soon.

Her father fought Hermes, killed him.

Then Terra had made her escape as the club blew to bits. Alec gave her a few good spankings before her retreat. Queenie poo wasn’t there. She and Alec are never apart for too long. Never apart. She shouldn’t be apart from her father, but she

was. At least she got the interloper out of the way. Now was on to phase two, but not yet. Now she needed to rest first.

She fell to the cubed shaped couch and stroked it lovingly. She had the best of everything, just like her father.

\* \* \* \*

New York City lay before me like a black blanket dotted with yellow and pink pearls. I used to love looking at the city from up high. Now I wondered if I'd ever care for the view anymore. I can't feel a fucking thing.

How will I feel tomorrow night? Lights from a plane, cloaked by the darkness and clouds, flickered as it made its quiet trek across the sky. Will I be able to feel? Will I feel relieved after it's over? I wanted to be on that plane.

"You approve of the final three for the Strategist, Communications, and Weapons position?"

"Approved," I said handing Alec the list from behind me. A droplet of ice water fell on my knuckle, nose, then ear.

"We'd better go inside." Tania hooked her arm around my elbow pulling me. "It's beginning to drizzle."

I acknowledged Tania's concern. I didn't want



to feel it. I don't deserve it. I stayed her hand, slipped out of her clutch. "If it's all right with you, Tania I'd rather stay out here."

"Juliana's funeral arrangements have been settled. You don't have to worry about a thing."

Tears rimmed Tania's eyes.

"I know and thank you." I stared with mild interest at the sky again.

"Let him be, Tania," Alec said behind me.

"Come in when you're ready," Tania said.

The sliding door that led to the living room of their penthouse slid open then shut.

Up here on Alec's penthouse patio, life seemed peaceful. I'm above the wasteland. In the six centuries I've been alive I've lost four loved ones. As always, I'm left behind to mourn and pick up the pieces. My stepfather, Juliana's mother, her grandmother, and now my daughter, dead. There is nothing but endless loneliness for me, and I have only myself to blame.

I'm cursed with forever being alone. I didn't have a chance to tell her I'm sorry for being a jerk-off of a father. Juliana will come to me in spirit form and tell me she forgives me and I won't buy it. I can't forgive myself. I jumped on the edge of the cement ledge. I paced looking for the perfect device to end my demise.

If I fall down from this height my head will split open, bones will shatter and my internal organs

will be crushed, but it won't kill me. As I fall, I could twist my body in midair and impale myself on that flagpole exactly at dawn. My flesh would burn, crackle like Juliana's had. Gruesome, but quick and final. This eternal night isn't worth living. Why not end it that way?

*Don't say that.*

Warmth infected my body at the sound of her telepathic voice. I can hear her voice though it might not match her audio voice. It will match close enough. I don't intend to hear the real thing.

I can block telepathic thoughts and attacks with ease. I can invade a vampire or human's mind always without detection. How was she able to break through my defenses?

*You again?* My tone of voice slashed her. She was unsure of talking with me this way, but she wasn't about to back down, yet.

*I keep annoying you. I have a habit of butting in when I'm not wanted, but sometimes you gotta butt in.*

*How much did you hear?*

*I heard "Your eternal night isn't worth living." Are you a night owl?*

I felt her smile and her teasing; she was trying to lighten my mood. Why did it work with her? From others it felt like an intrusion. *You're impertinent.*

*Killing yourself is the coward's way out.*

*Are you trying to give me hope?* My reactions to her soothing voice were instantaneous and telling.

Flames leaped and gathered at my cock.

*You have people who care about you. I'm sure if you left them, they'd hate you for it.*

*Why the hell do you care?*

*You helped me that night. You went out of your way when you could have left me to twist in the wind, and my head hurts. I could use your help again.*

I felt her fear, her anxiety tightening her chest as if it was my own. She was afraid I'd do something. Did she know I was pacing on a four-inch wide ledge? *Don't be fooled.* I paced back and forth faster this time. *I'm a selfish bastard. I could have done it for reasons you have no clue of.*

*I don't believe that.*

*Who would have thought helping you would gain me a best friend.*

*Like feeding a stray dog that keeps coming back?*

Listening to her voice the image of man's best friend did not come to mind. *Are you a stray?*

*Sometimes I feel like I am. How about you?*

*Certifiable stray.*

*I sense your grief, you know.*

I ceased my pacing on the ledge feeling the wind whip around me, trying to knock me over. *You shouldn't be able to sense my emotions, not my thoughts. How is this happening?*

*I don't know. This is something new for me.*

Watching the cumulous clouds skulk across the sky I wondered was she my angel or my embodiment of hell? Though I'd killed Hermes,

Terra isn't through with me yet, of that I am certain. It would be a smart move for her. Why did the idea leave me more hopeless than ever?

Does she know my weakness?

*At least you loved your daughter. Some parents can't do that.*

*You speak from experience?*

*My mother left me when I was eight years old to pursue all things non-familial.*

*My father killed my stepfather in front of me. I didn't expect to feel her shock. It was so long ago and violence is so much a part of my life that I should have held back. She should break contact with me right now for I am unable not to want to hear her voice.*

*I'm sorry you experienced so much violence.*

I felt her compassion and for a complete nameless stranger, no less. Compassion is a dead end. *I'm sorry. I shouldn't have told you.*

*I'm honored you told me.*

*Why did your mother leave you? Why would anyone leave her?*

*She's a singer – wants her name in lights deal. What is your name?*

*Let's not do names, yet.* I winced at the harshness of my thoughts. She felt slighted. I'm not ready for the all important name exchange yet.

*Fine with me. You want to keep talking?*

I jumped off the ledge and landed on the patio floor. Freezing rain saturated the patio floor. *Sure.*

\* \* \* \*

Ilida checked the poster paint jars. Dried, crusty paint cracked on the bottom of one jar. The contact with him strained her abilities and her body began to rebel. The headache, her actor, pushed his way through the crowd toward the stage again.

*Are you still there?*

*I wouldn't leave for anything in the world.*

*Careful, I might hold you to that.* She smiled liking him despite his standoffish behavior. She had so many questions to ask him but they would wait. Maybe she'd never hear from him again.

*What are you doing?*

*Cleaning up.*

*Your home?*

She wetted four paper towels, squeezed the excess water out, and then wiped off the long tables. Red and purple paint streaked the paper towels. *I'm cleaning up after kids where I work.*

*You work with children.*

*Yep! How are you doing?*

*How am I? I feel your headache coming on.*

*I should go. I don't want to hurt you.* The last time she had a headache it hurt him. He was none too pleased about her painful intrusion. He had enough pain to deal with. She stopped wiping, gathered her hair in her hand, and tied it with a covered elastic band. She resumed cleaning up.

*Don't go! Close your eyes.*

*I'm supposed to be helping you, remember.*

*You like to argue apparently.*

She felt his smile in her heart. That shouldn't happen. Should it? The more she talked with him the more she felt drawn to him and he was the last person she wanted to be drawn to. She liked power-free people. *You are doing well for someone who went through something traumatic.*

*I'm pragmatic. Our loved ones never truly leave us, or so they say. Close your eyes.*

She pushed the chairs under the tables. *You're being pushy.*

*I missed Manners one-o-one. For the third time...?*

Ilida closed her eyes and felt his psychic touch on her temples.

*Breathe in, breathe out deep, and think of the place you thought of before.*

She did and that mysterious place in the Mediterranean surrounded her. Her pain eased out of her temples like someone squeezing toothpaste slowly from the tube. *Thank you. Do you know that place?*

*No!*

He was lying, but she wasn't going to call him on it. She grabbed a chair and pushed it in front of the sink. She stepped up, and then pulled the cabinet open. *I saw you fight that man.*

*Then you saw too much.*

She wasn't trying to but she'd backed him into a

corner. He wasn't feeling her choice of topic. She checked the inventory of art supplies in the overhead cabinets above the sink. *Is he dead?*

*Do you really want me to answer that?*

She'd never felt chills so profound before. He was dangerous but for enemies or in general? *You were out there in the open.*

*No one saw us.*

*Not until...*

*The building blew? You can say it.*

*We'll talk about it some other time about...*

*It's a closed subject.*

*You have secrets like everyone else.*

*It's late for you, isn't it?*

*Women can hang out late nowadays. I don't want to leave you.*

She was terrified he'd do something. She caught stray images. Or, she thought she had. There was a ledge, freezing rain, and a table. He must be on a patio.

*I'll be fine.*

She hesitated, not sure if she could believe him. Her head hurt her so much, especially when in contact with him it seemed. It was like her mind wanted to open up to him and hurt to keep forcing herself not to. *You're on a ledge in the rain.*

*Glad you can see me.*

*I'll have to trust you to not fall off.*

He broke contact with her, leaving her alone, deserted. She had to see him face to face, but

where was he? Would she dare make contact with him again to find out?



## Chapter Six

Ilida stood a ways back, not wanting to intrude, especially with her head threatening to pound again. She took shelter under a tree from the rain as she closed her umbrella. What a miserable night—perfect evening for a funeral. She had a feeling Angry Man had some pull. A tent covered the mourners, a cellist, and two violinists. Odd, there wasn't any light source in the tent.

Angry Man was a complete mystery to her. She suspected he had a dark past and she guessed that attracted her to him. She's secretly attracted to irreversibly dark men. She didn't know why she'd come, just knew she had to. She wasn't sure she could find him and when she'd settled down at her apartment and zeroed in on his thoughts, it hadn't been hard. His grief was a like a psychic flare for her. She wondered if he was aware of that.

Uncomfortably, Ilida surveyed the elaborately decorated tombstones and bare trees.

Ilida was late and wasn't sure if he would want her there. The mourners, and there were many in attendance, were of all races: black, white, brown, and yellow. She'd expected to see a priest presiding over the funeral. Instead, a tall, cloaked figure held a book. She noticed the mourners were somewhat pale except for the African-American woman standing next to Angry Man. Just then, the woman looked over her shoulder at Ilida.

She felt as if the woman skimmed a strobe light over her body searching for clues in every nook and cranny. The woman's dark, probing eyes searched her inside and out. Another pair of eyes followed suit. Green eyes this time bore into her. They drew her in. Are they psychic, too? Or was it just her imagination? Ilida looked away breaking contact. Soon all the mourners and the cloaked figure looked her way. Ilida had the strangest unsettling feeling of being inspected, as one would give a Christmas ham a good once-over.

She guessed they thought she was some morbidly curious onlooker. The aching in her head increased. Images of... sucking? Pangs of hunger. The mourners were hungry. Why did she feel like it was for her? She looked back at the couple. They stayed next to Angry Man, not touching or hugging him, as if he was untouchable. They gave their condolences and moved on. Pallbearers lifted the casket and

walked forward to the mausoleum.

She watched the scene alternately from Angry Man to the casket. He stood straight and tall, his shoulders back. Rain showered his shoulders and hair. The black woman and the other tall man with green eyes walked behind the casket. Ilida had to admit she was surprised to see a black woman at the funeral. He left her with the sense of white elitism. He dashed that impression.

The mourners began to disperse as the pallbearers entered the mausoleum. A moving sea of black pearls made its way past tombstones to the road. It was an eerie, impressive display almost like a movie shot in slow motion. Angry Man stared motionless as the mausoleum door closed without a sound.

It was so final, so hideous that a tear rolled down her cheek. The tent came down with exceptional speed, giving her an unobstructed view of the mausoleum. Six stone steps led to a stone landing. Pedestals with bats ready to lift off flanked the stone staircase.

Pallbearers exited the mausoleum through a Gothic door. Evergreen bushes gave the mausoleum some color.

The tall African-American woman spoke to him then kissed him on the cheek. The tall man with green eyes joined her, leading her away hand-in-hand. *She's not his girlfriend.* A wave of relief

washed over her. Immediately, she scolded herself for feeling proprietary over a man she didn't know. She wiped her eyes and walked over to him.

The statuesque couple left his side arm-in-arm under a large umbrella. The tall woman looked back at her. She didn't bother to hide her curiosity. Ilida made her way to Angry Man and stood there, not knowing how to approach him. Like that couple, he soared over her with powerful, broad shoulders and short-cropped black hair. His black trench coat made him seem even taller. His head was bent—softly he cried.

Her chest muscles tightened. Her arm holding the umbrella tensed. She gathered her courage. She didn't want to intrude or embarrass him. She knew he was the kind of guy who didn't let his feelings show often. "You'll get through this."

He whirled around. A shock went through her body followed by heat. His blue-violet eyes rimmed in red pierced her heart and soul. His over-ripe lips shaped into a flattened 'm' made her flounder. And yes, she was lusting after a man on the eve of his daughter's funeral. She grimaced to herself. *How frickin' classy, Davis.*

He was definitely probing her and she let him. She had nothing to hide and had no ulterior motives. He should have known that from their talk. "

"What the hell are you doing here?"

His disrespectful, angry response didn't surprise Ilida one bit. She didn't know why she was there. She shrugged unsure of what to say. "I needed to come."

"No, you didn't. This was a private ceremony." He advanced on her. She backed up. "No outsider was supposed to know about it."

This outraged her. "Outsider, huh?"

"Yes, *outsider*."

"I tried to warn Juliana. She wouldn't listen. She was too busy dancing, laughing, and having a good time." A smile came over her at the memory. "She insulted my sweat suit."

The deep, rich laughter surprised her. The sadness she noticed did not. His coping skills are admirable. After watching his stepfather die in front of him, he could probably withstand anything. He shouldn't have to withstand it alone.

The tree they stood under swayed its bare branches.

"That was my girl."

With her therapist guard up and much stronger now she said, "I meant what I said. You will get through this."

"How did you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Make me laugh on the worst night of my life. Are you the reincarnation of Circe?"

He compared her to a siren. That was a first from a man, but he didn't seem like any man. "You aren't the sappy kind of guy. I thought realism was the best approach."

He stared down at her again and her heart did a somersault. His eyes were dark with sorrow. Rain pelted his trench coat, not penetrating the fabric but rolling off it. Then he looked up at the night-gray sky. The cleft in his square chin was exposed to her. She shoved her hands in her coat pocket, anything to keep from running her hands along his cleft chin. She shouldn't be feeling this way on a night like this. This was an insane idea to begin with.

Unexpectedly, his brows furrowed and his voice deepened into a growl. "You've got to be a plant by Terra."

"I don't know who Terra is. I'm just trying to help you," she said; weary of his need to see her as the enemy.

"It's done. Juliana is gone and I can't bring her back, so I have to get on with it." He started walking away. He didn't bother to put his umbrella up.

His long legs ate up the ground. Ilida had to run to catch up to him. "You sound as if death is old hat to you," she said, breathless from her jog. "I hate funerals and hate losing loved ones. I wish death had never been invented."

"I walk with death every day."

His grisly words sent a chill up her spine. He had to be a cop or something in law enforcement. "You don't have to cope alone."

"When you've lived as long as I have you see death for what it is—a selfish taker of vibrant lives."

"Look, I'm holding you up here. If you want to talk..." Ilida produced her card and held it out to him. "This is my number. Call me."

He didn't bother to look at her card. He kept his beautiful eyes trained on her.

"Call you for cheap psychology?"

"Actually I'm a recreational therapist." She held it out, and he took the card from her more out of politeness than anything else, she decided. "Take care," she said, opening her umbrella as she began walking away. Her knees wobbled with every step, as if walking away was an impossible thing for her to manage. With his eyes on her back, it was damn near impossible.

"It's dark and pouring."

She stopped and spoke over her shoulder, looking straight ahead of her, avoiding headstones. "I'll be fine."

"Your tiny umbrella is useless in this torrent."

"You don't have to concern yourself with me."

"How giving of you. Terra taught you well."

She didn't like where this was going. She only

wanted to comfort him, lend her support. She really had to put a lid on her impulsive need to help people. "I'm just concerned about you. I'm going." She marched away from him holding back her tears. She wasn't going to let him trample on her feelings.

"Stop!"

"So you can insult me more? Grief doesn't give you an excuse."

His eyes softened from cold amethyst to a warm violet. Maybe there was hope for him after all.

"I'll walk you out of the cemetery."

That was the only apology she would get from him. *He doesn't do apologies well - too proud.* He could use some humanizing. That was funny. *He is human.* What else would he be? Right?

"Aren't your friends waiting for you?"

"We could keep this up all night, too. They know I'm walking you out." He opened his large umbrella, offered his elbow. The color of his umbrella made his skin glow black. Shyly, she curled her arm around the inside of his arm. Her whole body hummed with the rightness of being so close to him.

They walked in silence for a while, turning with the snaky lane. Then, suddenly he spoke. "I have no proof that you're telling me the truth."

"You can read my thoughts and see for yourself."



"Thoughts can be manufactured."

There he went again. One minute they were having a civilized conversation than the next he blamed her. She blamed herself enough without his help. "This was a mistake. I'm sorry."

"She was stubborn; a perpetual, troubled teen. She loves...loved trouble."

Was he letting her in now? Or was it the ramblings of a grieving father? Both? "How old was Juliana?"

"How old did she feel to you?"

"She felt young; in her twenties, but she had an old soul, I sensed."

"That's about right."

They kept walking, and then her right foot skidded over a slick piece of broken headstone. Before she made contact with the ground, his strong arm curled around her waist and lifted her up. His touch sent a jolt through her wool coat to her skin. He held onto her until she steadied herself. Shakily she said, "Thank you."

He seemed effected by it as well. The muscle near his ear pulsed.

Five minutes later, they were at the mouth of the cemetery under the Gothic Gatehouse. Cars sped past and the noise of Brooklyn intruded, sending her back to reality. "I saw two people dressed in black walk into the club."

"I know who killed my daughter, and you need

to stay out of it," he reprimanded. "That is if you know who...just stay out of it."

"Are you a cop?"

"No," he answered slowly.

"FBI?"

"No."

"CIA?"

Ilida hunched her shoulders with her hands out grasping for a good guess. "The mob?"

The corners of his mouth lifted in a patient half-smile. "How are you getting home?"

*Meaning it's none of your business, Ilida. Take a hint.* "I'll hail a cab." She held up her hand as she walked to the curb. Two cabs passed her by. She felt his eyes on her back watching her, waiting. She was not going to impose, even though she wanted to be near him.

"I'll drive you home."

"What? No! That's not necessary." Involuntarily she touched both of his arms, as if simple touch would convey how she felt. "You just said goodbye to your daughter for the last time. I'll get home on my own."

For her own sake she moved away from him began her walk across another area of tombstones. Rain shortly showered her as her shaking hands opened the umbrella. It wasn't the smoothest of exits. She decided she didn't care to be smooth and graceful. With each step, she felt his eyes on

her.

"Where do you live?"

She stopped walking, took a deep, tremulous breath, then spun around. "I don't even know your name."

"Daedalus. Address please."

At that moment, she felt an invisible tether weave them together.

He ate up the distance between them, held his umbrella over her.

Handsome as sin and he didn't take no for an answer. Well, that was lame. The word handsome hardly described him. He was earthy and rugged yet his features portrayed an Old World elegance. His eyes, she decided, were the softest, most disarming feature of his face. "Four-forty-six Seventh Avenue," she said as she drew her breath out. "And Union Street."

"Let's go."

She gaped at his retreating form. He walked straight and imperiously. "Parking is nonexistent around there, you know," she called out to him.

"Sometimes you get lucky."

She skipped after him and grabbed his elbow. He stopped in his tracks. "Why are you doing this?"

His violet eyes, focused and powerful, held her captive with his gaze. "Why do you have to ask why?"

The tall striking couple walked over to Daedalus. She stood back giving him privacy. The three spoke, and she could see a resemblance between Daedalus and the green-eyed man. Good looks ran in the family. The green-eyed man was exceptional.

Daedalus wrapped his arm around her shoulder.

"This is Ilida. I'm going to take her home, now."

"Hello." She shook hands with the tall African-American woman. "Good to meet you."

"Same here."

She didn't sense hostility from her, but her companion or husband was a different story. The green-eyed man said nothing, only warily peered into her eyes, as if he was looking for something he couldn't find and angry that he came up short. Rude!

\* \* \* \*

Alec watched Daedalus and the woman walk down the winding path. It was a side he'd never seen of Daedalus before. Who knew the Vampire Kingdom's preeminent killing machine had a tender side? Radu and Manus, those bastards, didn't succeed in killing that part of him.

He and Tania had probed the woman's thoughts earlier. She was definitely concerned

about Daedalus. Overly concerned and aching for him. He knew his brother, the sexual acrobat and skirt-chasing god, could inspire a woman to love him.

As much as Daedalus tried to hide it, he was in tremendous grief. If they'd gotten there ten minutes earlier, maybe Juliana would be alive now. The woman could be what he needed after losing Juliana, but at what price? Terra has proven herself bold and resourceful. She could have studied Daedalus, found his type of female, and dropped her in his lap. That woman he was with did not fit Daedalus's criteria. Any worthy nemesis would do that. Was she a friend or foe in a very pretty disguise?

"I know that look on your face."

Tania's voice never failed to make him tingle, even on a horrid night like tonight. He cupped her chin as much for reassurance as for the need to touch his wife. "What look, Tania?"

"You were squinting. Your jaw is set and your thoughts are running a mile a minute. Do me a favor, babe. Stop looking for trouble where there is none."

Tania knew him like the proverbial back of her hand.

"Something about her bothers me. What if she's a plant by Terra?"

"Maybe you aren't used to seeing him that

way."

"You're right. You know his reputation."

"He is a bit of a hound dog, but I've glimpsed his better qualities."

"Then you're one of the privileged few. I've mostly seen the hound dog, calculated killer, but I know his tender heart is there hiding."

"She might bring it out of him. I didn't sense anything from her but concern."

Tania had a good heart, maybe too good. She liked to focus on the good in humans and vampires and throw caution to the wind. "You missed a not-so-small detail. She's a powerful telepath. She sensed we were probing her."

"Humans have their surprises." She crossed her arms and looked up at him with those chocolate eyes. She didn't want him to do anything to alienate Daedalus. "You want to check her out."

"I'm going to."

Tania shook her head from side to side and made that sucking sound he found irresistible. "Daedalus might not appreciate that. Don't forget he's just like you."

"We're miles apart, Tania."

"That's like the pot calling the kettle black. The two of you need to keep your loved ones safe through control. Isn't that what he tried to do with Juliana?"

"Juliana was a rebel like her father, obviously."

"He'll see it as way for you to control him." She placed her hands on chest and rubbed soothingly. "He won't see that he does the same thing."

Daedalus had a wild streak. He was brash, lively and terribly honest and dangerous. Alec liked to take it easy and absorb, look and listen. Daedalus did that too, but he feared his younger brother snapped to judgment too soon. *He needs protecting.* "He might thank me later."

"He might *not* thank you later. Face it. He's independent and you need to pull back, Alec."

"Can't do that. I have to know. How did she know about Juliana's funeral?"

"He isn't sloppy. Maybe he wanted her to come."

"Humans at a vampire's funeral? You can't *give* everyone the benefit of the doubt. Think about it."

"Leave my twin brother alone." Gauge came from around the tree Alec and Tania stood under. "He's getting his freak on."

"I didn't hear you behind me, Gauge."

Daedalus and Gauge came as a package deal. Alec couldn't accept one without the other. He understood that. They were paternal twins, but the oft-times belligerent Gauge got on his nerves, like now.

Gauge's skin sported rapidly healing burn scars. In a week, his skin will look healthy and free of scars. His long hair had to be cut. It matted onto

his burned skin.

"Blame my sneaky vampire werewolf genes."

"Do you know anything about her, Gauge?"

"I know Daedalus's heart skips a beat when she's near. I know he's hurting and full of hate and she makes him laugh."

"You got all of that from just looking at her?" Tania asked.

"It's all in the body language, Tania," Gauge said. "She is all my brother needs right now, not the drama you're getting ready to pile on him."

"He's as much my brother as he is yours," Alec reminded him.

"I've seen him at his worst and his lowest. I scraped his own filth off his skin after Manus..."

"After Manus what?" Tania cut in. "Gauge?" The horror dawned on her face. "What did Manus do to him?"

"You two need to back off Daedalus."

Gauge went on ignoring the look of disgust on Tania's face and centered his vehemence on Alec. "And you're coming in after the fact, *pal*."

This was Daedalus's battle, but Alec wanted to kill Hermes himself.

"We saw the scars on his back," Tania said. Anger was evident in her voice. Alec fought to keep control of his.

"Courtesy of Manus."

"We'll have to wait until Daedalus trust us



enough to tell us what happened to him on Santorini."

"We should have it already, Alec. We just buried your niece," Tania said.

Alec held Tania close to him. He forgot how funerals depleted her positive outlook on her new life. Vampires are supposed to be hard to kill. Juliana proved them all wrong.

Gauge looked away then back. Alec readied himself for more of his verbal onslaught. The polymorph's eyes glowed with intensity and shifted from red to yellow to dark brown.

"You look like Radu," Gauge said.

"So does Daedalus." Alec continued reigning in the beast. He understood Gauge's anger. "What is your point?"

"You don't put me at ease, Alec. Forgive me if I don't harbor that fuzzy family feeling when I see you."

"Do you ever give it a rest? Neither of us loved Radu," Tania insisted.

"I wished to God Radu hadn't killed your father, but I'm not him. Goodnight!"

## Chapter Seven

They finally reached the entrance of the cemetery, walked under the Gothic House arch then down another long lane. The real world was in their line of view. Ilida was under a silent, beautiful spell: its name, Daedalus.

"My car is on the next corner."

"Lead the way."

They walked side by side again. This time, Ilida felt the couples' eyes on her back. "Was that your brother back there?"

"Yes," he said in a monosyllabic tone.

She had to strain to look up at him. "I noticed the resemblance. Both of you have squared faces. You have the cleft in the chin, he does not." She wanted to say he has beautiful lips but kept it to herself instead. "Was that his girlfriend?" she asked as her thumb discreetly pointed back. "The tall African- American woman?"

"You sound shocked."

"Where I come from race mixing isn't

encouraged."

"I'm glad you moved. I find your views amusing, being that you are mixed yourself."

"I'm not against it. My grandfather gave my mother up for adoption because his family wouldn't accept her. My father never encouraged me to date men from different races because of that." She admonished herself. Now was not the time, if ever. "Why am I telling you this? Anyway, they make a striking couple."

"The tall African-American woman is his wife. Here is my car."

Ilida spotted it right away. She wondered if cars tend to look like their owners after a while. Her car, compared to his, was a pile of junk. She knew instantly why he'd chosen this one. It was a black, liquid, metal marvel. The door unlocked without any outward movement from him. He opened it for her and she stepped in and sat down in the black, leather passenger seat. She reached over and opened the driver side door for him. Soon, Daedalus sat next to her and turned the ignition key. He waved a large hand over the control panel under the dashboard. A hum and then the controls lit up with green lights. "I've never seen this before."

"It's not on the market yet."

He drove as if he'd been driving all his life. He looked to be around her age. How could he have

had a twenty-year old daughter? Why on Earth did it matter to her? After this, she would never see him again. That much she knew.

They drove in silence. She pretended to watch the traffic while watching him. He drove one-handed. Yep! Probably started driving at sixteen. Probably had his own car at sixteen. He fit the rich and aloof category well.

They stayed silent until Flatbush Avenue and Grand Army Plaza Circle. "You never told me your name," he said.

"It's Ilida."

"It means light in Greek," he said.

"I know."

"It's also a chain of supermarkets in Peloponnese."

"Oh gee." There went her claim to fame, she would have said.

He shrugged in the most elegant way possible. His profile was perfect. An actor would kill for it. He must have heard her thoughts. He glanced at her from the corner of his eye. Note to self: learn how to keep thoughts *to myself*. There had to be books on telepathic shielding at the library. Why leave him with the task of helping her? He had enough to deal with, even if he was cold, rich and suspicious of the slightest act of caring.

"Do you have a headache now?"

"I had a small one at the cemetery. It's gone

now."

With a fluid turn of the wheel, they were on Seventh Avenue in Park Slope, Brooklyn.

"How long have you lived here?" he asked.

"Five years. Daedalus is a character in Greek mythology," she said. In the rearview mirror, she saw his eyebrow arched. Was he surprised? Probably. She had a way of surprising people. She wished she hadn't surprised him.

"That's right. You don't seem the type to know that."

"Why?"

He shrugged again. "I've lived long enough to not buy into stereotypes. Sorry."

That was a strange statement. He looked no older than she was. Well, he did have that old soul aura about him like his daughter and brother.

He still didn't offer any information about himself and her mind fought to categorize him. She came up empty. Labeling and stereotypes, she mused. They were both doing it.

"My apartment is right...here on the right." The car came to a slow stop. The engine cut off. His eyes intent on the road, he took her left hand and held it. This time, nothing prepared her for the electric jolt that shot up her arm to her neck to the apex of her breasts from his naked touch. Neither was he, she could tell. He dropped her hand as if she'd burnt him.

She sat there and waited. The silence drowned out the muted sounds coming from outside, and her furious beating heart. He wasn't going to move, and his nearness unnerved her. Why did the touch of his hand have to be so sensual? She pulled the latch opening the door. Droplets of rain collected on her knees.

"Don't go yet," he commanded.

Ilida swung her legs back in the car, closed the door, and waited. The car seemed too small. His very height, his demeanor, his shoulders were too powerful to be contained in the vehicle. He dwarfed it and her.

He stared straight ahead. Freezing rain assaulted the windshield. "I won't bullshit you. I'm drained and in need of comfort."

She watched the quick flick of his wrist and the wipers swept the rain back and forth across the windshield. Insight came unexpectedly for Ilida. "I know you're hurting."

"I'm more than hurting. I am numb. I want to feel - something."

"We could go to a restaurant and talk for..."

He interrupted her, adamant about what he wanted. "I sensed you around me after I found my daughter. We shared our grief silently but together."

She couldn't deny that. She was attuned to his every thought. He wanted physical comfort. She

didn't do casual sex. Yet, his invitation was provocative enough to make her want to leap at it.

She was an adult, she could handle it. If it made her uncomfortable then she could tell him. Did it make her uncomfortable? "I'm sure you have other women you can--"

"You were there, Ilida."

His invitation charged her insides and excited her. "I've never had casual sex before."

"This, by any stretch of the imagination, isn't casual."

He stared straight ahead and she sensed he wasn't looking at the cars ahead of them or the dreary, nearly deserted sidewalk. He was waiting for her reply, watching her every physical nuance.

Three vehicles ahead a car tried to park in a space. Its red lights blinked through the rain. Her mind raced with all the arguments against what he was proposing. "Then what? You send me on my way in a cab afterwards?"

"I won't do that."

"You might as well. We'll have the awkward silence bit that all women love while staring at the rumpled sheets."

"We're adults. I'm sure we can handle having sex with each other without the awkwardness."

"Is this how you pick up women?"

He laughed bitterly. His voice dripped with cynicism. "I don't have to pick up women. They

come to me."

"And you think I'm easy like your other...how many? Forty women?"

"It's forty now? I think you want to sleep with me, but you don't know how to say it." With his head bent down and eyes shuttered by insanely thick black lashes he said, "By the way, I think sleeping with forty women simultaneously is sleazy. Don't believe everything you read."

"You've had numerous affairs."

"Most men my age have."

"This will be another notch on your belt!"

"I'm seeking spiritual comfort not just physical."

She knew in her soul that he was telling the truth. "I'm not your type."

"I'm white but you still want me. Goes both ways."

His invitation was so cold and honest. Uncertain of her feelings, she got out of the car and looked up benignly at her apartment window. The light was on. Which meant Beverly was back. She and Kwame must have had an argument. Turbulent emotions floated out the window to her. Beverly had the worst timing in the world.

Daedalus turned on the engine. Over the clamor of the rain, she heard the door click. He was getting out. This was her chance. She could be the same old Ilida or sleep with him and emerge



changed—good or bad. When was the last time she took her lust in her own hands?

“Where do you live?” she asked as her vision swam. It’d been almost a year since she’d had sex. “My roommate *would* decide to come home tonight. She’s nosey, too.”

Daedalus stood before her trapping her against the car and shielding her from the rain. He said, “I can get us to my place in twenty minutes.”

\* \* \* \*

He was true to his word. They got there in a little under twenty minutes. He opened her side of the door. She was surprised he did that. She expected him to forget she was alive except for him wanting to get in her panties. Beverly had told her enough horror stories to convince her not to do this. Why was she here?

His large hand held hers, lifting and pulling her out of the car. The huge umbrella went up, protecting them both from the downpour. He held her around the waist as he guided her to the wrought iron gate of his home.

The exterior of the townhouse, bathed in red, beckoned to her. The black wrought iron detailing on the canopy made this home look older—not stuffy. *It must be the cold and the rain.* She felt anything but warm, but looking at it felt like she

was coming home. How ridiculous was that? She wasn't home. She was standing on the steps, watching Daedalus unlock the front door so that they could have sex.

The door swung open without outward movement from him. "Welcome to my home."

"Thank you."

The house was long as most townhouses are with floor to ceiling windows throughout and cherry wood flooring. Her boots would echo. She squatted remembering she had a skirt on.

"Let me help you with that."

"I can manage."

"Sit down," he said evenly and authoritatively.

She stood as tall as he did with aid from the step. If only she could take it wherever she went. He must love dating women as tall as he was. "You're used to being in charge."

He cupped her face with one hand. "I highly recommend it."

She wanted to curl up in his palm. Then she nudged herself for getting all gushy inside. "I don't follow orders very well."

His face was set in stone one minute, then he managed the barest of smiles. "How about, 'please let me help you'?"

Ilida sat down on the bottom third step. She stuck her leg out holding it under her knee.

He grasped her ankle in one hand. "How long

did it take you to get in these?"

"I don't know," she shrugged. "Fifteen minutes maybe."

He smirked. His hypnotic, violet eyes shuttered as he bent over her leg. His pants yawned and stretched. He pulled the boot zipper down in an unhurried manner. Was he savoring the feel of her legs? Like she savored the feel of his hands on her calves? She looked for a sign that said he was feeling her. He could have sex with anyone he wanted. Why her?

"You're calves are too shapely for these boots."

"How did you know?" *Okay, Davis, he is touching your leg.*

"I looked."

Daedalus clutched the heel of her boot and pulled. It didn't come off. She had a feeling he was holding back his strength.

He found her attractive? "It's hereditary. My mother has great legs from what I remember."

He held her calf. Warmth seeped into her muscles. Those very same hands had been ready to kill to protect his daughter.

"Pull your leg forward as I pull your boot off."

Her boot came off, finally. They did the same with the other, and then he placed both boots on the floating staircase landing.

"When did you look at my legs?"

"When you failed miserably to hail a cab." He

stood up to his full height and held out his hand. "I know I wasn't the only one who looked."

"Thanks. For taking my boots off for me, I meannn..." Ilida gained buoyancy by way of him lifting her up off the stairs. Daedalus' capable hands held her waist tight. She held his shoulders to keep her balance. He lowered her down to the floor as if he had all the time in the world.

Ilida's hands slid down his well-built arms to his elbows. *Nice muscle tour.*

"Make yourself comfortable. I have to run upstairs, then I'll make you tea."

"How did you know I drink tea?"

He tapped his temple as he ran up the stairs.

Not only was she in the home of a man she was falling hard for, but was also a telepath. Her meager ability to block him had proved useless.

Ilida walked into the entertainment room that had two loveseats and a cubed couch. All three pieces of furniture were upholstered in black with red and beige throw pillows. The colors fit his personality; intense one minute, calm the next, like tidewater with an undercurrent of anger.

The walls painted in a gray yellow and the ceiling a sage green gave the impression of calmness. He was seeking tranquility, but she doubted he could find it.

She heard Daedalus around the corner in the kitchen opening up the cabinet doors. There must

be an archway under the staircase that leads there she thought, otherwise he would have passed by her.

"You're in luck. I have your favorite brand," he called out to her.

She felt her earlobe. She nearly forgot about her annoying earring. Yep, it had fallen off, again. She had to get the clasp fixed.

"Which is my favorite brand?" Ilida bent down and searched the floor for it. The clasp was nearly the same color as the wood flooring.

"Passion by Tazo."

She nodded her head at his accurate reading of her thoughts. He sounded so sure of himself. He had a right, too. Tazo was her favorite brand of tea, and Passion was her favorite flavor.

She pressed the floor, searching for her runaway earring. Damn, that was her favorite pair of earrings, too. Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted something shiny under the love seat. She reached out, touched it, and felt its sharp edge. Skin on her finger snagged on the sharp edges. *Oh Davis, Davis, Davis. This is beyond noseay.* There was so much she didn't know about him except he loved his daughter. She pulled the object off the thin fabric under the love seat. It was round with eight points surrounding it. "Throwing stars," she whispered. Hurriedly, she put it back where she'd found it. It wasn't soon enough.

Daedalus' voice startled her. "Find something interesting down there?"

His face held the barest hint of amusement. It took guts for her to be nosey. She hated it, but curiosity she hoped wouldn't kill the cat. "You have a star taped under your loveseat."

He nodded. "Yes I do."

"Why?"

He shoved his hands in his pants pockets. Raised veins wrapped over his muscular forearms. "My cheaper version of home security."

He'd said it with a straight face, too. Neither corner of his tempting mouth curled up. "Do you have throwing stars taped under all of your furniture?"

"Daggers, knives, and other weapons."

Ilida reached under the other loveseat and found just what he said; a dagger taped under it. An extreme survivalist. "Are you always on guard?"

"Always."

They stared at each other. His violet gaze traveled over her face, as if he wanted to memorize her features. "You're expecting danger from me tonight?" she asked.

"Every moment I breathe. Not the kind of danger you're thinking about."

God, he felt it, too—that bubbling in the pit of your stomach, excitement that only comes when

you're expecting to unwrap the perfect gift.

The water in the kettle bubbled hitting against the metal walls. The kettle whistled.

"Your tea is ready."

He spun and walked around the corner. Her pulse pounded. He moved swiftly and she couldn't hear his footsteps only the click of a cup landing softly on, she assumed, a counter.

She followed him, anxious to see the kitchen and what other dangerous objects he may have in there. To her surprise, the room was spotless, and Zenlike. She was expecting the usual bachelor kitchen scene; sink cluttered with dirty dishes and crusty four-day-old sauce on the counter. She was delightfully surprised to find a coffee colored granite countertop and copper backsplash.

He dunked the tea bag in the hot water once, twice. "Do you cook?"

"I know how to cook, but I don't."

"How come?"

"Do you cook?"

"When I have time to."

He smiled enigmatically. His violet eyes twinkled with amusement. No, with secrets. Ilida tried again to get a straight answer. "What other weapons do you have?"

He placed the cup of tea in front of her. She hoisted herself up on the stool in front of the bar-island and noted the cushioned seat buffeting her

behind. The counter, a gray peach marble, matched the back splash.

"I have a few Samurai swords."

"Really? May I see?"

Okay, so she was over eager. She probably resembled a kid at Six Flags salivating over a mean looking roller coaster ride, but she'd never seen a Samurai sword up close.

"Bring your tea with you."

She hopped off the stool and picked up her cup. He was already striding down the hallway. He took up all the space in the hallway. He had an easy, confident gait that comes from knowing one's limitations. She was beginning to doubt he had any. He projected a dangerous energy and power she'd never encountered in a man before. It thrilled and frightened her.

Ilida mentally shook it off as she watched him uncover a rack holding three samurai swords. The way his hands and arms moved gave the act solemn dignity.

"You can place your tea on the coffee table. I placed coasters there." She did and walked up behind him. She could feel heat from his back, and he smelled musky and raspberryish.

"I'll teach you how to hold it."

His shoulders were stiff and he rotated his head counter-clockwise as if the thought of showing the sword was taxing his nerves.



"Do you show your friends your swords?"

He hesitated then he answered her. "No," he said as he folded the cloth and placed it neatly on the loveseat. "Do you know the parts of a sword?"

"I don't," she said.

He crossed his arms and shifted his weight to one leg. Did he have to exude sex in that simple pose?

"But you like Samurai swords?"

"Back in the day, I used to watch the martial arts movies every Saturday with my brother. It was a requirement."

"What does your brother do?"

"He's an emergency plastic surgeon."

She envied the way his long lashes swept down, blocking her from reading his expression. His eyes were too pretty to be on a man as cold and as hot as Daedalus.

"Stand in front of me."

That made her hesitate. Oh well, she wanted to get a look at her first real live Samurai sword. This was an opportunity she couldn't miss. She slid in front of him.

"This is the scabbard," he said pointing to the black, slim casing.

Her arm muscles protested the sudden weight. "It's heavy."

"Hold the scabbard tightly and straight with both hands."

Ilida did and almost jumped when his hands closed over hers. His breath tickled her earlobe, sent an involuntary shiver through her.

"Hold the tsuka or handle, tightly."

His deep voice rumbled through her chest. She wanted to throw her head back and wallow in the sensations coursing through her body. Instead, she willed her body to remain rigid. "Tsuka?"

"Yes."

"Do you speak fluent Japanese?"

She felt his body stiffen around her as if she was treading dangerous ground with her questions. It was strangely alluring to feel his body alive and pulsing so close to her.

"I speak five languages," he said gruffly.

"And they are?"

"Greek and English, obviously. Italian, Japanese, and French. Am I being pumped for info?"

"You don't like to talk about yourself."

"I'm a private person."

His shoulders were stiff, posture erect, and brows furrowed. No, he hated talking about all things Daedalus. She didn't have to see him to know. She could feel his angst through her back.

"Pull the sword out straight but gently."

She eased the sword out of the scabbard and noticed the Japanese calligraphy on the blade. She stilled her hand. "What does this say?"

"It says Daedalus, the fox. This was a gift from an old friend."

"Was he Japanese?"

"He was a Samurai master. Pull the sword out slowly...like how a man pulls his dick out of a woman's hole."

Shocked, Ilida blushed. Her ears heated up. She knew what was coming and why she was there. "I can't believe you said that."

"Careful with the sword. This is an uchigatana sword. A battle-ready Katana."

"It's sharp?"

"Look at the tameshi-meji on the rectangular metal piece that holds the blade to the handle."

The Japanese calligraphy was embossed in gold on the thin band.

"It says it will cut through small and large bone. This will kill."

"You're no ordinary man with a dangerous streak," she said.

"I'm not."

"Are you trying to scare me?"

He forced her to push the blade back in its scabbard. "Now why would I do that?"

His voice had the right amount of sarcasm to it—just enough to make her think twice—like he was testing her or something. "You have these large weapons. I'm sure there's more."

He took it out of her hands and placed it back

on the stand on the top.

He arched his brow. "You want me to tell you what is in my freezer?"

Yes. No. She was nuts for even staying there. "Are you some high powered hit man? After you're done with me you'll switch to hit man mode then chop me up?"

"That's a serial killer and I love women."

"Just a rich guy with a danger fetish?"

He shrugged as if trying on the label for size. "If you like."

He placed his hands on her waist and pulled her to him, her back to his front. The sound of her dress zipper coming down made her suck in her breath. Then his hands caressed the sides of her torso pulling her black, wool dress down to her waist. Ilida closed her eyes against the sensation of his body against her back and the cool yet warmth of his hands on her skin. The dress fell in a puddle around her feet. He was going to strip her while he was still clothed. Did she really care now? No, she didn't for once.

He stood in front of her now, watching her. His violet eyes raked over her form. He then smiled, making her feel hot and beautiful.

"Are you going to take off your clothes?"

"Is this a contest of who takes what off first, Ilida?"

With cold seductiveness, he said her name. His

tongue a mixture of accented Greek and urban American. She promptly shivered remembering her weakness for deep-accented voices.

"You don't like standing half naked in front of a man."

"I'd feel more comfortable if you were half naked or naked, too, that's all."

"Will you give yourself to me for one night?"

She should split now. Leave before he breaks her heart, but she knew she would stay right where she was with him studying her face. "Yes."

"And I can do whatever I want to you?"

She swallowed hard. "Whatever means...?"

"I won't hurt you."

He walked behind her making her talk over her shoulder to him. "And I should trust you?"

One hand slid over her hips to her front as he stepped in front of her. She always disliked her more-than-generous hips. She had reason to celebrate them now. His hand rested on the silk covering her mound. She sucked in a quick breath when his fingers found her moist clit. Wetness soaked through her pantyhose and slip. The other hand traced the fullness of her lips.

"If you don't, then I will take you home. No bad feelings."

"You can do whatever you want to me," she said as she drowned in this new sensuality.

"If I get rough say stop, and I will," he said

between kisses.

"I thought you weren't going to hurt me?"

He stood up. His gaze was steady. His face still as stone, but behind his expressionless facade was a wounded soul. She was confident in that analysis. She could read his face well.

"Pain," he unhooked her bra, moved the straps down her arms, and let it fall to the floor, "is relative."

His hands cupped her breasts, measuring their fullness. He bent his head seizing one nipple in his mouth while he manipulated the other between his fingers.

Then he lifted his head releasing her. The moisture on her nipple drying made it tingle. It peaked.

"One more thing," he said as he held her breasts in both hands massaging her peaks with his thumbs. "Don't touch my back."

Ilida's womb convulsed. Her hip muscles contracted. He waited, a warning in his eyes, for the question on the tip of her tongue. "I won't touch your back."

What was on his back that he couldn't show? Was that what made him so predatory, angry even feral? Stark desire showed in his eyes. "And I won't ask why."

"Good," he said satisfied, as he circled her butt cheeks with his index fingers. She clenched her

muscles involuntarily against the delicious swirls of the silk fabric rubbing her. Cool air brushed her skin as the pantyhose came down. She moved her legs back and forth letting them fall to the floor.

He lowered her to the cubed couch then seized her mouth in a hard kiss. His hand held her head prisoner for his kiss. Lips, smooth and insistent crushed hers. It was punishing, however they carried their own brand of magic. Heat spread from the point of contact to her scalp. Her womb contracted. She found herself raising her hips towards him, rubbing his bulge.

She wanted to feel him, touch him. She wanted to leave her mark, let him know that she gave as good as he. Boldly, she unbuttoned the top buttons of his black shirt. She pulled his shirt out of his tailored pants and unbuckled his belt.

He shrugged out of his shirt, revealing a broad muscular chest. His skin was a lighter olive tone than his face. A stylized bat tattoo covered his left deltoid. It made him more dangerous, mysterious. Together they tugged his pants past his hips. His hard muscular hips involuntarily flexed in her hands. A memory she would savor forever.

His erection sprang free, nudged her above her belly button. No underwear. Going commando. The hooded part of him was dark purple. His shaft, covered in raised veins, was thick.

He smiled ferociously as he caressed her neck

with one finger. With her eyes, she drank in his chiseled form. Her fingers itched to touch him.

"You feel good," she moaned.

Lightly she traced the contours of his lips, the smoothness of the rise on his upper lip. He threw his head back, moaned.

She reached up, lightly caressed his hard pectorals. His nipples hardened to nubs beneath the pads of her fingers. His breathing was hard and his eyes showed pure hunger. Good. She wanted to seduce as much as be seduced. Emboldened by his response, she stood on her toes and licked one nipple. She caressed the hard bumps of his muscles, felt the veins that ran to his curly hairs. A beautiful athletic body under her finger tips.

She didn't want to stop touching him. Hesitantly, her forefingers traced his abs. He closed his eyes moaning giving himself up to her touch. Elated she had sexual power over him she continued. She kissed her way down to his belly button. Before she could go any further, she found herself on her back.

Cool air chilled her skin then she felt his long lean warmth on her side. One arm possessively held her to him. Tiny hairs on his arm brushed the underside of her breasts. He continued to kiss her. His tongue pushed through her swollen lips.

She jerked as his teeth nicked her lower lip. She



pulled away or tried. He held her to him as if she would try to get away. Suddenly he let go of her lips.

“Blood,” he murmured. He stared at her lips. Lust made his eyes a royal blue.

His face blocked out her view of everything around her. He seized her lower lip, sucking and laving it with his tongue. All thought left her. This was insane. She reprimanded herself for not pushing him away. What good would that do? Daedalus caught her in his web. He needed her if only for one night. She wanted him as much.

His tongue claimed the cavern of her mouth. It searched the corners, making sweeping, swirling motions. His kiss was hypnotic.

Alarm set in as his hand cupped her mound. His touch electrified her. Her breath came in quick and shallow as he teased her nipple, caressed and teased her folds. She pulled in a lungful of air as his hot mouth encircled her breast again. His teeth tugged, nipped without breaking her skin. He administered the same care to her other nipple. Without realizing it, she pulled him closer to her.

Ilida threaded her hands through his short, straight hair. Another moan escaped his lips. She felt that tingle in her brain she'd become accustomed to, and his mind opened to hers. He wanted to hold back on doing something.

He traced a moist path down to her mound of

tight curls.

She gasped as she felt his hot breath on her clitoris. Out of nowhere, her body tightened. She cried out in sweet death as the tidal wave of orgasm hit her. All he did was breath on her.

She lay there weak, trembling from need. He loomed over her. His penis stood proud and stiff, pointing towards her center. Moisture leaked from the purplish tip. His eyes glowed red then blue and red again.

She could do nothing but lie there and watch him. Her body still ached, wanted. Wanted him. She was tight with it. Then she felt his hands spread her thighs open. His hand stroked against her throbbing clitoris; cupping her mound, flicking her. Reflexively her thighs closed around his hand. She grabbed his wrist, closed her legs around his hand, hoping to pull his hands away, hoping to keep them there.

Ruthlessly, he forced them open again. His fingers worked between her legs. She reacted. Her hips moved against him. She cried out. Her need was unbearable. All the while, his penis touched her knee, her thigh, leaving droplets of thick fluid in its wake. A reminder of how large he was. He tore-another orgasm from her.

Finally, he lowered himself to her. Her thighs parted to give him access, her thoughts cloudy. His head prodded her entrance. Her juices flowed

freely. She stiffened realizing this was it.

"I need more."

He pulled the tip out. Ilida wanted to protest his retreat. Did she do something wrong? His eyes bore down into hers as if he was weighing a question in his mind.

A cloth came out of nowhere. He wiped the head off. "Lay on your stomach."

"On... my stomach?"

"Will you give yourself to me?" His hands massaged her inner thighs skimming her clit, brushing her hairs.

This was going to get impersonal for her. This was for him so he could feel. She wanted to feel, too.

"Remember, if I hurt you say no."

She answered him by turning onto her stomach. She raised her hips offering herself to him. She angled slightly facing him. Men got off easily and quickly from entering in the back. Five minutes and he would take her home. She didn't want a quickie where he only got off and she would be left wanting.

He whispered, "Give yourself to me."

The air around them heated up. Her hands bunched the throw pillow she rested her head on. She tensed as his hands probed her, pushing her cheeks apart. He gently rubbed cool liquid between her hips. It warmed. Lubricant? "Have

you ever been touched here before?"

"No." It was true. She hadn't allowed it. She wasn't inspired to do it with her last boyfriend. She was severely inspired now.

His long hands gripped her thighs. He fingered her tight hole, rimming it while he kissed one hip then the other as if he had all night. His other hand lightly rubbed her clit. She was wet and painfully ached for him to put his fingers inside her.

He heard her thoughts.

One finger slid past her nether lips into her entrance. Her inner walls gripped his finger. She reared back as moisture trickled through her hairs. Inside her, he felt long, tapered. Good. He played with her special spot. Very good. He stretched her between her legs while he stretched her from behind.

Her muscles clasped around him, shocking her. It was an invasion—a welcomed invasion of her body. An invasion she fully sanctioned. To her it was more intimate than Daedalus entering her sex.

"Ilida?" His voice hoarse in her ear.

"Keep going," she said hoarsely.

"Not casual... is it?"

He worked her back and forth in both openings. Then he gave her two fingers inside her sex and two in her forbidden opening. Not so forbidden now the way she moaned and threw her head

back. She stiffened then another orgasm.

Wet hardness rubbed against Ilida's butt cheek in circles. It rimmed her tight opening, replacing his fingers. He pushed forward. Pain made her butt muscles quiver. The quivering set off tiny tremors in her womb and sucked him further inside her. Three inches. Four inches more.

He bent over her. His long, strapping limbs trapped her in a cocoon. His torso shielded her from the coolness of the living room, his breath raspy and hot in her ear.

Ilida gasped as he pushed more length, more of him into her behind. Pain, lust spread throughout her body from that strange place.

Unbelievable, how now doing this she felt a part of him, breathing with him.

Breathlessly he asked, "Do you trust me, now?"

Ilida's voice caught in her throat. Warmth invaded her lower region. All thought and feelings centered on his manhood and his fingers in both holes. She vacillated between pain and pleasure.

"You want more?"

"Please, yes," she pleaded.

He pushed in. It must have been the remaining three inches of him. He totally filled her. Then impossibly his fingers established a rhythm moving against her nether lips. Then he eased out her hips alternating between two rhythms. It was insistent, leaving her insides vibrating.

Sweat ran down her back. Arousal ran down her thighs onto his wrist.

Now four fingers impaled her while he drove inside her butt. Light kisses on her neck soothed her, giving her more sweet vibrations.

She lowered her head watching his leg muscles convulse from the effort. His body corded with muscle. Remarkably, he gave her his whole fist.

It was her undoing. Her body pulsed and tightened around his fingers. She reared up scrunching his erection as her orgasm shook her.

He gave her one last Herculean shove as he released his seed into her. Ilida collapsed onto the couch. Daedalus followed. All she could hear and feel was the sound of her heart beating as Daedalus's breath mingled with hers. She drifted off to sleep, his manhood still rooted inside her.

\* \* \* \*

I felt the gentle rise of her back underneath me. She breathed softly as she slept, the smell of dried blood an indication of our intense activity. A luxury I'd never had with Juliana's mother. Our joining had been fast and full of mercy and kindness. I'd been a pathetic sight chained to the wall of the lava tombs waiting for my next slashing by Manus—unable to fight and unwilling to defend myself or to get away. I'd been beaten,

and starved for many things. The monthly rituals of the Breeding Circle haunted me. I'd wanted to feel arms embrace me, a lover to call me, but he'd barred me from feeling those emotions allowed. Manus called me an aberration—something unearthly, an abnormality in the vampiric gene pool.

She'd found me there. Somehow, she'd gotten away from Manus, released me from my manacles, seduced me. She accepted me just like Ilida had an hour ago. That night had been the best night of my life then. Tonight was the best night and worst night of my life. I wanted Ilida again. I always want more, and this time was no exception. Vampires are sensual creatures, after all.

I pulled my cock out of her ass smoothly. Great Zeus! The musk! I shouldn't want more. I should investigate Ilida. She fell into my life to neatly to be mere coincidence. However, here I am with my bulging cock standing at attention ready to fuck her again. I gripped myself, feeling the veins and ridges. I was harder than ever.

She'd tried to save my daughter's life. That should stand for something. There was always a "but." I was too confused to think, especially with her blood on my tongue. With a frightening insight, I knew I was no longer in control of my desires. I looked down at her sleeping form. Her

dark, coiled hair damp around her temples. Her sable colored skin held a sheen.

My Ilida is practical. She would want to bathe, dress, then get on with her life. I had a surprise for her.

I bounded off the couch, picked her up, carried her upstairs to my bedroom, and then I lowered her to the bed. Once she was covered with the comforter, I entered the bathroom to clean up.

Afterwards, I filled the octagonal tub with scalding hot water and dropped a large bar of white soap into the tub. A soft command from me woke her up fully.

Ilida sat up, pulled the sheet up to cover her chest. Her dark brown eyes were wide with embarrassment and surprise. I was getting used to her face.

"What is it?" Her eyes rolled around my bedroom then down at her shoulders. "I'm in your bed."

"I'm running the shower water for you."

She squirmed.

"Do you still think I'll send you on your way in a cab?"

Her tight curly hair was wild, her lips swollen. If I had a Polaroid...I could easily read her mind and I knew what I'd find. She's just as determined as I am to not attach.

She cleared her throat. "I need to..."



“Bathe. I know. I’ll help you up.”

“I-I don’t need help.”

Before her eyes could find me, I was by her side. I picked her up. She wrapped her arms around me.

“You do. You need lots of things.”

The water was hot—exactly what she needed to clean the sweat and my scent off her skin. I lowered her feet into the tub.

From the shock of the hot water, her feet pranced in the tub, splashing water on my chest and the floor. “Hey! Hot, hot!” I had to force myself to not laugh at the look on her face. I could stare at her for hours. She’s unlike the other women I’ve slept with. That must be it. That’s the allure. She’s different. “The temperature should be cooler now after all that.”

“You don’t have to do this.”

“I know I don’t.” I soaped a washcloth and rubbed her skin leaving fine white bubbles on her legs. “But I’m doing this, so relax.”

She stood with her weight on her left leg, her right knee bent. Her right arm crossed her chest holding her left arm to her side, covering her voluptuous breasts. I wiped her arms and legs down as her cheeks blushed furiously. The color of her skin reminded me of those iced mocha drinks they sell at those chain coffee shops.

She stilled my hand. Soapy water dripped from

our fingers. In this position, I could lift her out of the tub, hold her against the bathroom wall, and make love to her again. I met the statement in her eyes. "You were right. That wasn't casual."

She let go of my hand. I bent down, loaded the cloth with soap. I held my breath as I ran the cloth over nipples. The hard nubs beckoned me to suck. I brutally ignored the urge.

For a distraction, I inspected her neck.

"What is it?"

"You have a long, pretty neck." Perfect for lingering bites. I was careful to avoid wetting where I'd bitten her. Somehow, I'd remembered to seal the bite marks. Fucking didn't dull all of my common sense. They were almost gone. She'll feel some residual pain tomorrow and will be none the wiser.

Again, I loaded the washcloth with soap and without asking her—she would have argued with me—I pushed the cloth between her legs.

"Why are you drawing this out?" she asked, flinching from the sensation of the cloth rubbing her nether lips.

"Beats the hell out of me." I rinsed the cloth, and then rubbed the soap off her. I never bathe the women I sleep with. Shit! What is wrong with me? "Turn around." I held her, making sure she didn't slip in the tub.

"Tell me about your relationship with Juliana?"

Images of my daughter when she was alive and bratty, but *alive*, assailed me. "This is a strange time for confessional, isn't it?"

"I don't think so. I passed your weapons test, didn't I?"

I rubbed Ilida's curved back with the soapy washcloth. "Is this how you counsel patients?"

I investigated her ass. The puckered skin was red and swollen. I'd hurt her. "You're going to be sore for a couple of days," I said, as I poured soapy water on the slope of her ass.

The water flowed down the gentle curve of her back to her crack. She gripped the wall and sucked in her breath. The sting radiated from her ass to her thighs. So merciless was the burn that I felt it, too. For her health issues and her peace of mind, I cleansed the area. Vampires don't carry diseases, but I didn't want her to worry.

"This isn't counseling. It's a talk between good friends."

"I didn't know Juliana existed until she was five years old. By then, I was too emotionally damaged to take care of her, so I sent her to live with my mother." My chest threatened to constrict after saying that. I never shared that with anyone. How did she make me talk? Who the fuck is Ilida Davis?

"Where you abused by your father?"

"Yes and others."

"So you stayed away from Juliana hoping she would have a better life with your mom. She never forgave you for leaving her."

"I want to switch gears."

We were silent for some time. I lingered on her back and behind for a while, lost in my emotions. She didn't complain even when she began to shiver.

"It wasn't bad," she said.

Ilida faced me. She leaned against the tiled wall and hugged herself.

"It wasn't? Despite your cringing when I cleaned you back there."

"It was strange, painful at first then it felt good. Primitive good."

I rinsed the rag, wrung it out, and then placed it on the edge of the tub. "A good fuck should feel primitive."

She glared at me then. My tongue had a way of lashing humans and vampires at the worst times. I'm just being myself- warts, fangs and all.

"I assume you'll take me home."

"I keep my word."

"You don't have to feel obligated to check on me afterwards. I'm a big girl and can take care of myself."

Her eyes widened.

"What? What is it?"

"I have to...to... you know."

Understanding her reluctance to say it, I picked her up carried her to the toilet and sat her on it. I closed the door behind me and waited. Once she was finished, I cleaned her up again. As I did so, I heard her stomach rumbling. I've heard human's stomachs growl when they are over hungry. "You need something to eat."

She hung her head, tears rolled down her cheeks. I cupped her chin and lifted it so I could see her eyes. "Why are you crying?"

"I don't know," she sobbed.

"I hurt you."

She shook her head crying harder. I usually make the women I slept with in the past cry with joy not ...It affected me, seeing her like this. "Ilida, if you don't answer me..."

"It was so intimate," she sniffed loudly.

*Frightening, exposing...*

The ability to speak left me. We were naked, but I couldn't have felt more out in the open. I wiped the running tears away, reached over her head, grabbed a towel, and then swaddled her in it.

I hardly noticed the cold tiled floor. She's human and susceptible to temperature changes. I picked her up again and carried her into my bedroom. I took baths or showers to relax, not for hygienic purposes.

I forgot about the water she dripped onto the floor too late when I slipped while holding her.

We toppled onto the bed. I braced my hands on either side of her head. My knee lodged between her legs.

The scent of soap and lust wafted from her skin. We stared at each other, breathless, but not from falling.

Once she was sitting up on the edge of the bed, I dried her off. She protested and, of course, I ignored her. "I'll get your clothes."

"Sure."

I opened my mind to hers making sure I didn't leave a back door for her to communicate with me or block my probing. She was disoriented and not sure how to take me, or what we did. She also didn't know how she would feel about herself in the morning. Ilida shouldn't feel any different. Sex is sex, but being a human woman she'll analyze it ad nauseum.

I should keep my cock in its proper place: in vampires's' holes. My life was getting increasingly complicated by the minute with her around.

After we both dressed, I drove her home. She had four messages on her cell phone from her roommate. She listened to them while I double-parked and left the motor running.

I kept my umbrella over her head as we ran up the cement stairs of her walk-up apartment.

"Thanks for driving me home," she said.

"You're welcome." Once again, I was alone in the world. That's how I like it, but now... I wanted to...I didn't know what I wanted. She was right in front of me. My angel, my tempest, ready to vacate my life as quickly as she'd entered it. I didn't give her a choice.

"Goodbye, Daedalus."

I gazed at her swollen lips in side view, from when I'd kissed her, as she took out her keys and began unlocking the door. "I feel something," I muttered over the tinkling of her keys.

"What? I didn't hear you..."

I cut her off, pulled her to me, and kissed her as passionately as I didn't want to kiss her, but did nonetheless. The umbrella dropped out of my hands. She responded. I released her lips, and Ilida quickly pulled away.

"We can't see each other anymore," she said.

"Agreed."

She closed the door behind her.

I'd kissed her as if I'd never kissed a woman before. I had to force my hands to not rip the door open. I leaned my back against it. Energy, a force, I can't explain, came through the door, my coat my shirt, then my toughened vampiric skin. A cold chill coursed through my body from head to toe.

I had to clear my head. I had to meet with the Haemo High Council for the first time. That would kill any reaming sexual desire I had left for

the night.

\* \* \* \*

Ilida leaned against the door. Her forehead tapped the door. Her heart beat a staccato rhythm. That kiss, that kiss. Like fire, but now she felt a tingling all over her body as if someone lightly drew a feather from her forehead on down.

Imbued with energy she ran up the five flights of stairs, not caring if she made a lot of noise with her boots. He'd changed her, awakened her senses, her sexuality. Nothing else gave her a buzz like this.

Why had he picked her? Was it because she was available? Or did he feel an invisible tether tying them together, as well? Whatever. He was in so much turmoil. The naked pain in his eyes astounded her.

Ilida unlocked the front door to her apartment. Beverly sat on the floor watching a DVD.

"I'm famished," Ilida said as she looked in the fridge.

"So, who was he?"

Beverly had her "boyfriend" antennae up. After her tumultuous evening with Daedalus, Ilida wanted to keep quiet. It was her secret. Her fantasy. She didn't want to ruin it by babbling to the mouth of the south. "Who?" She rolled her



eyes. That was lame, but how else was she going to stall Beverly? Beverly is like a pit bull when she's onto something.

"I know you were with a man tonight."

"You scare me, Beverly."

"So I'm right. Who was he?"

"It was a friend, that's all." *More than a friend. God, I'm in trouble.* She cleared her throat and bent down, grimacing as she reached for a carton of Chinese take-out.]

"You look different."

*Uh, oh* "How?" she asked as she looked up from the fridge to her roommate.

"I don't know. Your mouth is plumper and "Beverly gave her a knowing look. " What's wrong? Can't bend over?" She laughed evilly as she dramatically bent over mimicking Ilida.

Ilida rolled her eyes to the ceiling. "Lay off, Beverly! Okay?"

"You hungry, girlfriend?"

"Starving like a bandit." The food in the take-out carton had a gelatinous consistency to it. It would take five rounds in the microwave to make it look semi- fresh.

Ilida pressed the foot lever on the bottom of the garbage can. The lid popped up and she tossed the carton in.

"Sex makes you hungry, Ilida."

Ilida slammed the refrigerator door and

pointedly stared at Beverly. She was a little too close to the truth for her comfort. "I'm ordering take-out and staying in my room."

"Seriously, are you okay?" Beverly asked following her.

Ilida considered her question and her own state of mind. She so needed advice, but didn't want to go into great detail.

Standing in Ilida's bedroom doorway, Beverly waited patiently. Ilida took a deep breath and said, "Have you ever had...sympathy sex?"

"Oh yes I have. Is that what happened tonight?"

"Let's just say comforting took on a whole new meaning tonight."

"Was it good?"

"It was incredible. I surprised myself." Did she surprise herself? She'd never had sex that way before. Her last boyfriend showed her pictures of a couple having anal sex. It looked painful. It was painful half a second then a burst of pleasure. "Have you ever cried after having sex?"

"Sure. It was so bad I cried while digging my vibrator out of the trash. He made you cry?"

"Like a virgin. It was intimate." Her body was different. She was different, and even if she never saw him again, she'd have this feeling to carry her into next week and beyond. *I'm a sexual being! Hallelujah!* She cleared her throat.

"How did you surprise yourself?"

Ilida cradled the cordless phone in her hands. "I'm not terribly sexual. Well, that's what I'd thought."

"I know. You've had the sex life of a nun since you broke up with Kevin."

"Thank you for the sideline commentary."

Beverly crossed her arms and gave her a knowing look. "So will you see him again?"

"I don't think so." She hunched her shoulders wishing she could talk with her best friend about Daedalus. She didn't want their friendship to suffer because of her unwillingness to talk about him. "It's complicated."

"Do you regret what happened with whomever tonight?"

"Oh God, no. It was amazing."

"Okay, so go with the flow."

"Just like that? Whatever happens, happens?" Well, the committed way hadn't worked. Wait a minute. No, one day she would find the right guy. All right until then she would wait and see.

"Why not?"

"Maybe I will."

## Chapter-Eight

I have five minutes.  
That was good enough.

In Alec and Tania's penthouse apartment, I pulled off my gauntlets and black top to my Ninja outfit. Folded that neatly. I took off my pants, then the tabi socks.

They'd offered me an apartment across the hall from them months ago. It takes up the other half of the floor. We would have access to each other's apartments. I'd declined the offer. It would have been too much togetherness too soon, but miracles I heard do happen. I don't think they happen for the likes of me.

"Daedalus?"

I buttoned my shirt reaching the bottom when Alec appeared holding a garment bag. "Yeah?"

"I have a suit..." He stopped dead in his tracks and looked me over from head to toe. His bottom jaw hung open. "No suit?"

"No suit."

"Why not?"

I pulled on my pants, tucked my shirt in, and zipped up. "I hate suits. This is good enough."

"One night you might have to wear a suit."

"It won't be tonight."

"The idea is to look highly competent and to match the new Haemo High Council's look."

"To look competent is to be confident in one's self. Tailored pants and a silk shirt is my look."

Alec dropped the suit on his bed and crossed his arms looking every bit the blue-blood grouch he is. Not getting his way was killing him.

"Relax old man."

"Ready, Daedalus?"

"Let's go."

We waited for the high-speed elevator that would take us down to the ground floor in the lobby then we'd have to make a left turn to the conference room. The tension radiated off him.

The bell rang and the art deco doors opened up to birch wood, brass detailing and oriental carpeting. The familiar warmth spread over my body as we stepped in the elevator.

*Daedalus.*

*Ilida? I thought you'd had enough of me.*

*You're still in my head, Daedalus. Can't get rid of you.*

*I'm heading into an important meeting right now.*

*Yeah, I know.*

*You know?*

*I had a feeling something important was going on with you.*

*What do you need?* I looked at my image in the mirrored panel checking myself out. My forehead was creased with worry and the muscle west of my ear pulsed. Ilida's pinging me held my attention.

*Nothing. I won't bother you anymore.*

*Ilida?*

*Yes?*

*Take care.*

"Daedalus?" Alec's concerned voice got my attention. Ilida was practicing. I felt her close the connection with skill. I didn't know how much I missed hearing her voice until she pinged me. Our connection was so strong. *Is this how Alec and Tania feel?*

*"Thinking. I'm allowed."*

*"Is there something you want to talk about?"*

*"No."*

*"One day you'll trust the me enough to open up."*

I didn't answer him lost in my own thoughts and yearnings. So many yearnings.

Alec lost his patience and started another topic. "You've told me how you felt about the Council. "You should learn diplomacy when dealing with them. This is a new group."

*"I'll be myself as always."*

*"That is what worries me."*

Why would Alec have the confidence in me to do the job? It's the same old story repeated through my life. "Then you should not have offered me the job, Alec."

"They're in there."

"Yes they are. I grasped both door handles, took a deep breath through my mouth and out my nose, and opened the doors and walked in. Showtime.

The two oldest members, Rachel and Nafi wore their customary black leather garbs and flowing capes.

All eyes fixed on me at the head of the table. I have two titles now: Daedalus Prince of Vampires and now the Head of Security for the King and Queen of Vampires.

I leaned over the stylized oval table and glared hard at each new and old member of the Haemo High Council.

The newest members—but certainly not fledglings—watched me with awe. Some would say I'm full of myself. I'm not. The look was on their faces for all to see. The older members, the Nosferatus, waited, rapt with attention.

This was for Juliana. I had to make a compelling argument to go after a group of Vampiric drug dealers and to make her death mean something. Finally, after the long ominous silence, I drew breath. "The Jacquerie is out for blood. I don't

have to tell you how many vampire and human laws they have broken already. I want full authority to kill without trial or hearing. My Tyrian Guardsmen will dismantle and destroy them."

"We have never acted without trial, Your Highness. This is most irregular," Nafi said.

"Starving to death would be irregular, for us," I countered smoothly.

A murmur of surprise went around the room. The Council exchanged furtive glances. Rachel the oldest of the Nosferatu and the Council spoke. "Your Highness, it would help if you told us why you want full authority."

I nodded agreeing with her. The Nosferatu, save Rachel, spent all their time at Visegrad in Romania. They had no clue of what was going on here in the States and what would eventually take over all of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. "The Jacquerie has introduced a drug on the streets of New York City and its five boroughs. The drug, Red Queen, is highly addictive for humans and vampires. It can even kill."

"But vampires are immune to drugs, Your Highness," a council member spoke.

"Not anymore. The Jacquerie, specifically the leader, Terra Escalante, has broken the code. Vampires are equally, if not more, susceptible to the drug's effects."



"Please elaborate?" Nafi asked.

I gripped the desk as I thought of Mike, strung out on Red Queen and tearing up my townhouse. It had been a pathetic sight. Mike clawed at imaginary enemies, tried biting his own wrists, until I'd restrained him, and purged the poison out of his system.

I hung my head for half a minute lost in memories, new and old, until I addressed the council. "On the drug, vampires can become unpredictable, blood thirsty, uncontrollable, and aggressive. They can be subject to hallucinations, as well. Imagine a vampire, high on-Red Queen, arrested by the human authorities. One drug-crazed vampire could wipe out a precinct and keep going. It will shed an unfavorable light on our existence. Vampire hunters would come out of the woodwork. Our food supply will be tainted. We need all the blood we can get."

Blood, or the lack of it, always caught the Council's attention. Another blanket of murmurs went around the room.

"And for humans, Your Highness?"

"I'm sure it has disastrous results for humans." I've yet to find that out. This was enough to get the Council interested.

"What is in this drug?" another council member asked.

"Heroin and ancient vampire blood."

"Ancient blood? Whose?"

"I don't know."

"Is the death of your daughter related to the Jacquerie, Your Highness?" Rachel asked.

"The Jacquerie killed her." Now they're in my business. Juliana was off limits, not up for discussion. I was careful to keep that information from leaking to the Council. All vampires were telepathic to some degree. Through loss of control of emotions, thoughts could leak out. I had to be careful.

"We cannot usurp the King and Queen's authority. Nor can we act on personal grievances." Rachel said.

Bile—I didn't think it was possible—rose in my stomach. "I'll make this clear to all of you. I dislike advisory councils. *You* are the embodiment of red tape, but I respect the ancient laws. Give me the authority to kill those sons of bitches and the kingdom will be stable again."

"I give my brother full authority to kill the Jacquerie, Rachel." Alec said.

"And the Queen?" Nafi asked. Nafi was another Council member who'd served Alec's grandfather well. He is almost as old as Rachel is. He's an ancient African Nosferatu with mediating skills. Would he vote against me on the full authority appeal?

"Drugs should not be taken lightly because it's

mainly a human health issue. I give Daedalus my full authority to kill the Jacquerie,”

The council members deliberated telepathically. I wasn't privy to it. No vampire, polymorphic vampire, or hybrid could read his or her thoughts. I just knew it was boring me. What did they have to discuss? Either give me the authority or not.

Minutes ticked by and my patience wore thin. I sat down with a hard thump, yawned as loud as I could, stretched my arms, then smacked my lips. I lazily regarded them. Rachel looked as if she wanted to place me over her knee and give me a spanking. Some looked uncomfortable, as if they didn't know whether to laugh or be indignant. The youngest members giggled in their hands.

“What about your human pet, Your Highness?” asked Nafi. “The young human at your daughter's funeral.”

I moved my neck and loosened the top button of my shirt. Any mention of Ilida in a threatening manner bristled me, but I suppose that was my lust for her talking. In actuality, it didn't matter. Rachel's tone of voice was about to do her in.

*Calm down, Daedalus. The rage is building inside you.*

I ignored Alec's attempts to calm me down. “We're talking about the Jacquerie, not-my-private-life.” I emphasized the last four words.

I didn't bother to hide the vexation in my voice.

The bald headed rats in leather were crossing the line. I found myself gripping my fists - about to draw blood with my nails. I cupped the straight edge of the table.

"Your life is our concern. The human is privy to our world when she should be oblivious to it. That in itself is grounds for a trial," Rachel said.

"You want to put me on trial? Go right ahead, Rachel." Vaguely, I heard the sound of the table cracking in my hands. "I hope you'll be able to find someone as ferocious as me to destroy the Jacquerie. Good luck, Nosferatus!"

Alec stepped forward, I held his arm. *It's not worth it. I can take care of the Jacquerie on my own without their backing.*

*This is your job and they're trying to squeeze you like they tried to do with me when I got involved with Tania.*

*I don't need defending.*

*I will defend you to the death. That is what family is for. Know this.*

I let go of Alec's arm and stepped back.

"My brother, at my behest, has taken the appointment of Enforcer. That means he has the job of protecting you, the Queen and me. He deserves the utmost respect. Don't forget he saved two Council members last year. I will not stand by and let you twist him like you tried me. I give him full authority to kill the Jacquerie."

I had never heard my name and the word

respect in the same breath or sentence. When Alec faced me, I hid my shock. Alec nodded his head at me. His green eyes shown the utmost sincerity, but I could do nothing but stare at him in astonishment.

The Council deliberated again.

\* \* \* \*

I smelled the beer mixed with blood and various other bodily fluids from five blocks away. The smell of fermented hopps made me nauseous. My brother, Gauge, didn't fair any better. He turned all shades of green. This had to be done. As much as I hated dealing with the Weesal, he was a necessary evil.

"I can't believe we're going in there. You should take time off go through the grieving process at your leisure, then get rid of the Jacquerie."

"I'm going through the grieving process my way."

"You can't bring your daughter back. Let the almighty King of Vampires take care of this."

"Alec sets the laws. I enforce them. He can't do both." In fact, I was grateful Alec and Tania asked me to be their Enforcer. I needed purpose and to take risks. I needed to get my mind off my loss and Ilida.

It was nine hours after the funeral, and I still

couldn't shake Ilida's presence. As if Ilida was bottled and I drank her essence and thereafter she invaded every pore of my body.

Ilida showing up at my daughter's funeral shook me up. How did she know where it was and when it was to happen? Why was it when I saw Ilida, I felt safe? Why was it when I was inside her, I felt like I'd come home?

I could easily link to her telepathically find out what the hell she was thinking. *Without a doubt, if I do I'll never be the same.*

"You're thinking about her."

"Mind your damn business."

"That was brave of her showing up at the funeral."

"She tried to warn Juliana or so she said." I couldn't trust what she said, could I? However, I do.

"Not many humans would stick their necks out for us."

A stop sign caught me.

Gauge continued, "I recommend getting in her pants first, then tell her you're a vampire."

I didn't answer Gauge. He would know if I got in her pants or not already. Being twins didn't guarantee us privacy. I could read his thoughts as well as he could read mine. He was being overly polite now. "I made love to Ilida four hours ago."

"That explains it."

"Explains what?"

"You know how we subconsciously mirror each other if we don't pay attention."

"Then I guess you need to look for your mate and get it over with." Burculacas or vampire/lycanthrope are subject to the same tendencies as your average werewolf. They mate for life, protect their lairs, and have packs. Gauge, as far as I know, is the only polymorph in existence. We share the wolf-shifting trait but for him it's more instinctual.

We have the same mother but different fathers. Two eggs separately fertilized at the same time. I couldn't blame my mother, Tena, for getting it on with my stepfather as soon as Radu left. Radu wasn't fit to raise a Cyprus tree, never mind being a mate. Radu returned four years later to kill my stepfather. He was a good soul and good werewolf and I miss his guidance, as I know Gauge misses him, period. "How are you doing, Gauge?"

"How am I?"

"You lost some good customers. One of your pack members was injured." My brother has a hefty dose of loner in him, as do I. We have those wolf tendencies to contend with. When we have sex, it hurts. When we fight, we're hard pressed not to kill.

"My pack is a comfort. I want to talk about you

and your inability to trust."

"I refuse to fall into the love-mate trap you wish you could indulge in and Alec so readily endures."

"Bullshit. You are afraid to trust and that inability is your way of keeping up walls. I'm surprised you got married two centuries ago," he said.

He had to bring that up. Every time I go to sleep, I relive that moment. I had to shake it off now! I couldn't be distracted when entering a Nosferatu bar. "Why would I take advice from a polymorph who has a mate ready for the taking but won't take?"

"Your friend is pretty."

"She's not for discussion."

"I saw the way you looked at her at the funeral, O adelfos."

I'm stale. O adelfos means brother in Greek. I hadn't spoken the language in so long I almost forgot.

"I'd watch King almighty if I were you. He thinks your little friend is up to no good."

I found a parking space across the street from the club bar. The cloying stench was much stronger now.

After parking the car, I waved my hand once over the dashboard. The green lights illuminating the controls shut off. "He's doing what you are



doing now – being overprotective and annoying.”

Gauge, being Gauge, jumped on another subject. “The Swollen Tit. How original,” Gauge mused. “It doesn’t compare to the Titty Twister.”

Gauge was trying to take the edge off our conversation by shooting the breeze. Fine. I played along. I need to shoot the breeze before I get down to business. “That was the bar in the movie *From Dusk ‘til Dawn*.”

“The name had potential.”

“I didn’t invite you to come along. If you’re having reservations, get the hell out of my car.” I opened the driver’s side door when Gauge stopped me from getting out. I sat back down in the driver’s seat. “What?”

Exasperated Gauge shook his head at me. I brought that out in vampires, werewolves, and humans. “I worry about you.”

“Don’t.”

“I don’t have a choice since I share twenty-five percent of my DNA with you. You know that twin connection we can’t get rid of.”

“Like it or not this is my job, now. I can’t hide from the world like you do.” *I wish I could*. The Bouncer—a vampire, surprise, surprise—stood around six foot ten inches tall and weighed between two hundred sixty to three hundred pounds with slicked back, mafia hair. I watched the Bouncer open the door for a male wearing a

trench coat with the collar raised concealing pointy ears.

The Swollen Tit is a bar for male Nosferatus. How they continuously get away with showing their faces in the City is beyond me. Nosferatus need a place to hang out and just be. It's a sanctuary of sorts. Their appearance is such that they would appear to be monsters to humans. They aren't monsters. Their bodies could not withstand the change, therefore, they were newly born vampires but horribly deformed.

Nosferatus filled the bar, watched the strippers do their thing, paid for a lap dance or two, loitered in the back rooms, jerked off, and said good night.

He had no problem with it as long as they got away. This was a part of the City few ventured to. It used to be at any rate. The yuppies are slowly taking over. Where will the Nosferatus go when the yuppies completely gentrify the area? Fireworks will happen then and he'll be there to keep the humans from killing them.

Gauge shrugged. He rubbed his forehead, ruffling his layered dark brown hair. He loved having long hair. When I was Manus' slave, I had no choice but to sport long hair. As soon as I liberated the others and myself I cut that cumbersome reminder off.

"What I don't like is the music blasting out of the speakers like some call to battle. It leaves little

to be desired," Gauge said.

"You hate Punk music?"

I watched the flow of traffic as we walked across the slick street of Third Avenue on the Lower Eastside or LES, as the Eastsiders like to call it. The Bouncer stared us down as we walked his way.

"I like the Stones. The Clash never did anything for me but make my head throb." Gauge motioned towards me. "You need a shave."

"Least of my worries."

I planted my feet in front of the bouncer and stared him down.

"What's the password?"

I smirked. The Enforcer doesn't need a password. "Get the fuck out of my way."

He crossed his arms displaying his impressive biceps and triceps. "Last week's password."

I growled, feeling my animalistic side rear its head, "I said *get the fuck out of my way!*" Daedalus jabbed the Bouncer in the gut three times. He bent down, then reached out and grabbed my neck and lifted me up. I grabbed his wrists, walked up his large torso, and kicked him under the chin, flipped backwards, landing on my feet. The force of the kick knocked the Bouncer back, his upper body went through the glass window. Fresh-drawn vampiric blood ran down the shards of glass. "Routine."

"Was that necessary? Now you're making me hungry."

Before I could answer Gauge, Nosferatus streamed out of the back, growling, ready to kill me. "A few days at home and he'll be as good as new." I said as I assumed the fighting stance, held up my fists, and started punching.

One Nosferatu after the other fell at my punch. They are tough skinned and ferocious. They're cannibalistic and will fuck you if you leave your ass exposed. They are the pinnacle of blood lust. I match them in ferocity. I haven't succumbed to cannibalistic urges, though.

"It's a good thing I ate before meeting you," Gauge said as he licked his lengthy fangs.

"We didn't meet." A Nosferatu grunted as he tumbled down to the sticky floor. "You found me and insisted on coming along."

I walked into the club dragging an unconscious Nosferatu with Gauge in tow. The bartender, a scraggly looking Nosferatu, ran up to us brandishing a machete.

"So much for routine," I muttered.

"This is the tamest evening with you yet. You are loosing your touch."

The bartender swung. I dodged then sucker punched him. "Anytime you want to step in, Gauge." He fell on a toppled table then came back at me. The machete never left his hand.

“Remember my vow of nonviolence? I’ll settle for observing the entertainment.”

The smell of blood brought out the insatiable vampire/lycanthrope in Gauge. He keeps it under control by not fighting.

I grabbed the bartender’s hand that held the machete and twisted it back, breaking the wrist. The machete fell to the ground. The bartender clutched his broken wrist moaning in pain. Vampires are sensitive to pain as well as pleasure. I hauled him up and set him on his feet. He looked at me, confused.

A vampire, human, whatever, should be able to realize his or her American dream. “I’ll pay for the damages I caused.”

“Whit’re ye daeing, mon? This is ma club. No gang banging vamps allowed.”

*I took note of the lilt. Scottish?* The accent tickled my ears. I studied accents as a hobby and a tool for survival. A Scottish Nosferatu. I shouldn’t be surprised. Nosferatus came in all shapes and one size: thin and humped back. This one was bowlegged. “I’m Daedalus the new Enforcer.”

I watched the bartender’s wrist and hand eerily twist around as if animated by a puppet master. Bones cracked, then he tested the movements of his hand. “Och! Warn me next time, laddie.”

I nodded my head, reached out, and grabbed Weesal by the collar. “My business is with him,

and I'll pay for the damages."

"Ah need a new bouncer, laddie. Can ye dae that?"

"Done!"

The strippers on stage hurled curses any sailor would be proud of at me. I snarled at them showing my fangs. They picked up their discarded clothing and ran off the stage. This was vampire business. Humans not allowed. Still holding the Weesal, I took out a wad of cash and gave it to the bartender. "This is for the girls only for the girls. I'll come back to see if they've been paid."

The bartender counted the money and laughed while walking to the broken window.

"Sit down, Weesal."

Gauge righted one of the bar stools and patted the cushioned seat. The Weesal obeyed and sat down on the stool. His right eye and the right corner of his mouth twitched.

The Weesal, a Nosferatu not by birth, lives in the sewers and under the tunnels of the City's subway system. This, as far as I know, is the only time he ventures to the surface. The disgusting odor of urine, stale bread, blood and feces radiated off my contact's body.

I watched Weesal take out a pack of cigarettes, hit it against the bar, dislodging a cigarette. He pulled it out, lit it, and I inhaled the heavenly

aroma. "The Jacquerie, Weesal."

His mouth moved dislodging the cigarette. "Oh no, no, no, no." Weesal jumped up frantically looking for it.

I placed a firm hand on his shoulder, pushed him back on the stool. The young Nosferatu was so slight any more pressure would break his shoulder. He had the fragile bones of a rodent. "Sit down before I break your scrawny ass." I calmly picked up the cigarette and handed it to the Weesal. "I want names and addresses of hideouts and drug dens."

"Great! A smoker," Gauge complained.

Being a werewolf made Gauge strong as well as delicate. Smoke and certain smells made him sick. His club, or what used to be his club before Terra blew it up, was non-smoking.

"I don't mess with the Jacquerie!" Weesal shrieked.

"I'm not telling you to mess with them. Just spy on them."

"It's gonna cost you. They could find out and kill me. You don't care about me." He moved his head with much attitude. "I'm just Weesal, your little snitch."

With pained tolerance, I pulled a wad of cash out of my leather jacket and waved it in front of Weesal's face. "Smell that, Weesal. You're a valuable snitch. Five thousand now, five thousand

later when you give me a list of addresses. I need the info by Thursday night."

"T – that's twenty-four hours from now."

I casually leaned back against the bar, anchoring my elbows on the edge and interlaced my fingers. "Then you'd better get to work."

"Are you really the new Enforcer?"

"That's right."

"Shit!" He took a jittery drag again.

Smoke billowed out from the Nosferatu's nostrils and mouth. It swirled around my nose. All I want is Ilida straddling my cock while I smoke a cigarette.

"Yes, shit. If you screw me, Weesal I will take your headless body and feed it to your fellow patrons."

Weesal visibly swallowed then took a drag of his cigarette. "Yeah, I'll get your info."

I handed the Weesal five thousand dollars.

"Do I have to count this?"

"Do I have to break your legs for fun?" I reached out to Weesal. He flinched like a scared rat. I pulled the cigarette out of his mouth and took a puff. The drag took me back to simpler days. "Ah, nothing like nicotine."

"Nothing like cop cruisers," Gauge added sarcastically. "We'd all better get on up out of here."

Weesal had already darted out the back



entrance.

"Let's go."

"The bar owner is Nosferatu. How will he explain this to the police?"

"Nosferatus who choose to live on the surface have human servants who deal with the police."

\* \* \* \*

Ilida woke with a start. Sweat ran down from her forehead to her chin. She jumped out of bed, then grabbed the nearest article of clothing. As she walked past her mirror, she saw Daedalus struggling with a monster? holding a machete?

She pulled on her sweat suit and ran out of her bedroom.

"Hey! Ilida where are you going?"

"Out!"

"It's two in the morning."

Ilida closed the door, stopping any further protests from her roommate. As she ran down the stairs, she could hear her roommate hollering for her to come back.

\* \* \* \*

After we made our getaway, Gauge decided to crash at my place. Fine. I could use the company. Twenty minutes later, I parked in front of my

home, annoyed. I sensed a presence in my house. I'd cast my wards last week and kept them up. How could someone barge in?

"You want me to check the back?"

"Check it," I said as I unsheathed my sword. I ran up the stairs as Gauge jumped up the wall and climbed it until he disappeared over the roof. I opened the door slowly, quietly. The living room was dark the way I'd left it. So far, so good.

Whoever broke in was sitting in the dark waiting for me to my right.

"It's me."

"Don't move!" I commanded the lights to come on. They did, to reveal my sword against Ilida's neck, her eyes horribly fixed on the tip of the sword. Her throat jerked trying not to move. A sudden move in the wrong direction would cut her throat. I moved the sword to the left away from her jugular and sheathed it. "What are you doing here?" I hadn't intended to sound brusque but almost killing she frightened me.

"This will sound stupid. Like I'm stalking you, but I'm not."

She was shaking. Dark circles hung under her eyes, making her look older than her thirty-one years. "Try me."

She walked to me, held both my arms. The rattling of her bones vibrated through me. Seeing her shining with fear, I wanted to wipe it away.

Her heart beat so that her blood roared in my ears. *I can hold off the hunger for another hour. When she falls a sleep, I'll feed.*

"I dreamt a-a monster came at you with a machete."

Before I could answer, my brother, the annoying sage, walked into the living room.

"You two look cozy."

All right, we did, but this was private. "You stay, Ilida." I turned to Gauge pointing my finger at him. "You go home."

Gauge's eyebrow arched, feigning indignation. He took his time getting to the door, bowed, waved his hand in a circle as if he was addressing a Sultan, and then closed the door. It gave me time to calm myself down. I almost killed her. If I'd succeeded, where would I be then? "Hold on, Ilida."

I wanted the sword out of my hands, didn't want violence to touch her. That emotion so foreign to me struck me dumb. Since when did I ever care about violence touching a woman I slept with? I was ashamed to admit that I didn't. This connection was more than a fluke.

I put the sword on the stand and covered it. Ilida sat on the living room couch playing nervously with the belt on her coat. "Ilida, I'm fine. Take your coat off."

"You must think I've lost my mind or

something."

"Then I'm losing mine with you. Come on." I said, pulling off her coat. "We have a connection, obviously."

"This has never happened to me before."

"Me, too." Her coat held her scent. I wrapped her collar around my nose inhaling it.

"I won't come here again even if I feel something."

"Let's not talk about it now," I said, as I closed the closet door.

"I can drive back home."

I walked around the corner and leaned against the squared-off beam. "You will stay here. It's almost two in the morning." I shrugged off my coat and let it drop to the floor. Tomorrow I'll wash the bloodstains off it. I had pressing things to do right now. "Upstairs. No protests."

For once, she listened to me. I followed her up the stairs, directed her to the bedroom. "Is this the famous sweat suit?"

"Yep."

"It shows off your curves. Take off your clothes and get in the bed."

"I..."

"No sex." I pulled her sweat hood zipper down. "Just sleep."

She didn't look convinced.

"Believe it or not I can abstain," I said, then

planted a kiss on her forehead.

I pulled the hooded sweatshirt off her shoulders, folded that, and placed it on the bed. I diligently kept my eyes above her neck. I grasped the waistband of her pants and pulled it down to the rise of her hips. Her hips don't slope down. They rise, then slope, and curl under. Her hands grasped my wrists.

"I can... manage that," she said wryly. "I shouldn't be here."

"Are you forgetting we had sex earlier," I said against her forehead. My hands clutched the waistband of her sweat pants. I couldn't let go.

"We're supposed to be staying away from each other."

I shrugged. "We'll sort it out in the morning. For now you need to sleep, peacefully." *Before I ripped her clothes off and had my way.*

"Sleep is... good."

"Yes it is."

Her lids fluttered then thick eyelashes swept down over her rounded cheekbones. I picked her up, laid her down, took off her clothes, and then covered her with the sheets. I moved to the other side of the bed, sat in the chair, and then stretched my legs propping them on the bed.

"Who was your friend?" she asked sleepily. She broke through my hypnosis. Instead of finding it troublesome, I found it challenging.

"My friend was actually my paternal twin brother."

"You didn't have to make him leave."

"It's okay. He's thick skinned," I said, as I tucked her in.

After fifteen minutes, light snoring filled my bedroom. I stood up and paced the floor. Sleeping at night was an anathema to me. Daytime was my night.

The connection we have...I didn't want to think about what it could be. I swore after my disastrous marriage to Maiko I'd never let it happen again. *This isn't me. This isn't what I do. What is Ilida doing to me?*

## Chapter Nine

The next morning Ilida woke to the smell of bacon. She rose out of bed, and padded to the adjoining bathroom.

"Hum. Shower cap." She reached down for it. A note fell off the basket onto the floor.

*Just in Case.*

She smiled at Daedalus's thoughtfulness. It was the kind of thoughtfulness to make her think twice about not being with him. Maybe that was his way of getting back in her pants. *Willpower, Davis. Willpower!*

Something...well, her annoying psychic powers drew her to him. It would be perfect if he didn't have psychic powers and a dangerous bent to him. That was what attracted her to him in the first place. Now she had time to really appreciate it. She always had a thing for bathrooms and Daedalus's ranked up there with magazine showpieces.

That had nothing to do with being in-like with him. She sat on the tiled bench, covered her head with the shower cap, and let the water cascade over her shoulders.

After taking a quick shower and dressing, she ran down the floating staircase and into the kitchen. Daedalus was sitting at the bar dressed in a black sweater and blue jeans. The sweater left nothing to the imagination. When relaxed, his muscles still bulged.

He nursed something in his coffee cup. His hair, too short to muss, looked neat but his face was a different story. Bags took up residence under his eyes. His skin looked drained of vitality. He could use some sleep.

Ilida ached to hold him in her arms and have him sleep on her shoulder, but there was that staying away from each other thing.

"I made breakfast for you."

"You didn't have to do that."

"I did it."

Yes, he did and he knew exactly what she liked for breakfast. It was the reason her hips were too ample. "Thanks."

Maybe he wants to fatten her up then keep her to himself. She had a big butt. That should be enough. Leaving her dark thoughts alone she decided food was the best distraction.

She kept her hands to herself, sat down, and



inhaled her apple pancakes with bacon. Too bad she was hungrier for the guy next to her than what was on the plate in front of her. This reminded her that they had something to discuss. "We need to talk."

"You sound like a guy."

"Maybe you're rubbing off on me."

Why did she say that? She groaned. Daedalus didn't bother to mask the mischief in his eyes.

"I'd like to rub something on you but you won't let me."

She couldn't help smiling as she looked down at her food. She cleared her throat. "That's why we need to talk."

"Thirsty?"

"Sure. I'll have what you're having."

Well, she liked being this close to him, liked finding out what about his private life. No daggers or swords for a barrier, just Daedalus being himself.

"What are you drinking, by the way?"

"A special brew. Too strong for you."

"Let me taste for myself."

He wagged his finger at her. "Nope. You'll be flying to the moon," he said, then took a sip and licked his lips. "Can't show up fully loaded at Tilly."

*That's true.* She counseled drug-addicted teens, but she couldn't let it go. Daedalus's caginess

returned. He guarded his special concoction as if it was gold. "It can't be any worse than Jamaican rum. My mother is Haitian and they have five times more stronger spirits there than Jamaica."

Funny as he drank his concoction his color returned, like magic.

Daedalus arched his brow. "How about Jamaican rum in coffee."

"You really don't want me to know do you?"

"I don't," he said.

Fine. She was determined to find out eventually. She rubbed her forehead then rested her chin in the palm of her hand. This wasn't going the way she'd hoped. He deflected her questions and gave her sexual innuendo instead. Not that the flirting wasn't appreciated early in the morning, but she still was on the fence about him.

"About the original topic?"

"I don't know why we're connected, Ilida. Why analyze it?"

"Why should I be connected to someone who doesn't want anything permanent?"

"What's wrong with a little while? Six months? Nine?"

"What happens to me after you find someone else?"

"You are a strong woman. You'll find someone who'll want permanency."

*God, he can do some verbal slashing. He either knows what he said cut my heart out or he's deficient and doesn't have a clue that I'm falling for him. Yes, I will find someone new, but I don't want to keep looking over my shoulder waiting for his next conquest to push me out of the way.*

"Let's try to stay away from each other. If you feel me, block me. I'll do the same."

"Good idea."

Deficient, Ilida decided. Her agreeing with him surprised him, too. *It figures. He doesn't know what it's like to be dumped. And who would want to dump him? Really.* It was her lust talking loud and clear. She decided sex was purely designed to get one into trouble.

Daedalus slid off the stool. Two steps later, he was behind the counter pouring coffee into a cup. Whatever else he added to his coffee, he didn't pour into hers. He slid the cup to her. She smiled at the scene they made.

"What?"

"Smiling at the picture."

"We could do this often."

"You, me, and all the other women you shared your bed with. That would be awkward and crowding."

Annoyance darkened his face. "As you wish," he said.

"It's that easy for you?"

"Would you like me to force myself on you?"

Daedalus asked.

He looked to be two inches from being pissed off with her.

"Of course not. It just seems you could take me or leave me."

"I'd like to take you upstairs now, but for some reason, Ilida, I don't want to make your life... *difficult.*"

There was the familiar tingling in her stomach. He ruined her for other men. She cleared her throat. "So we're agreed on staying away from each other for good."

"We can't be friends, obviously."

"We could try. How far do you think we'd get?"

"My bed or yours," he said then gulped down the last of his special brew.

Not what she'd asked. It was virtually guaranteed they'd end up in bed together but she didn't have to tempt fate. It was time to go. "Thanks for breakfast," she said as she stood up from the counter.

"Do you have to leave so soon?"

"Yeah, I'd better."

"I'll drive you to work."

She touched his chest and the tantalizingly hard pectorals under his merino wool sweater. She felt him flinch. His eyes darkened with warning.

"I-I'll catch a cab to Penn Station."

"No, I'll drive you there."

"Can you guarantee we won't rip each other's clothes off on Eight Avenue?"

He leaned on the door while she took her coat out of the closet.

"No, but I don't want my picture on the cover of the *Post* with a huge stamp on my forehead that says 'Billionaire Nudist'. So I'll refrain from gettin' nekked."

"I'm sure the *Post* would sell more copies."

"Stop," he said while he held her coat open so she could get into it. "The verbal sparring is turning me on."

"Sorry."

He drove her to Penn Station, but she swore there were times when it seemed like he was about to collapse behind the wheel. Or so she thought. Daedalus was tougher than nails and she didn't believe he had rum in his coffee. If he was tired, he didn't complain about it and tried not to show it. He would be great to lean on in dangerous situations, but she'd never have that privilege of finding out.

They were staying away from each other.

"You still need instruction on using your powers."

"I can manage on my own."

"How?"

"The library, websites."

"They are better than me helping you?"

"Under the circumstances, yes."

\* \* \* \*

I knew I was dreaming when I found myself surrounded by wild flowers, olive trees and whitewashed houses. My feet were partially submerged in clear, clean water. The rocky, bumpy, earth I sat on smelled of ancient ash. The sea, a jewel of greens and blues lay before me like an aqua blanket. The waters were still and the air warm and somewhat humid. Armeni Bay on the Aegean Sea!

I was home? Why would I dream about Santorini? I vowed never to set foot on the Island again. No, I wasn't really there. It was a dream—a representation of Santorini. Then, I stopped and my vampiric ears strained to listen to soft humming.

I first noticed a toffee colored arm swinging in and out of view. I then saw fabric the color of Santorini blue flapping like a flag in the wind. The humming became louder and more pronounced. Finally, Ilida stood on the tiny hill and their eyes locked on each other. A smile appeared on her face then she ran to me and held me fiercely.

Her nose crinkled with amusement. Her breath was warm and minty on my neck. She was so

small. She barely reached my shoulder. "I've been waiting for you. What took you so long?"

God! That voice sent shivers down to my cock. The wild feeling of wanting to pick her up and swing her around came over him. Would I hear her laughter or her fear then? For three weeks, we'd been having these rendezvous. Who was she? Why did I react to her as if I knew her heart? "Ilida?"

"Quit playing around, Daedalus."

I grabbed her shoulders, turned her around to face him. "Is this a trick? Are you some vehicle for my enemies?"

"Whoa! Hold on now." She eased out of my grasp too easily. I don't know what this is," she said, as she shrugged and smiled. "I just want to go with the flow."

"This isn't funny. You're playing with my..."

"Shhh." Her index finger pressed lightly against my lips. I wanted to take her finger into my mouth and suck.

"I'm not trying to play with your emotions. I'm as confused as you are, but look at this gorgeous scenery."

I did. I looked at her. Was she telling the truth? Did they somehow do this together? It was their link.

"Do you really think I'd play with your emotions?"

"I don't know. You'd have an easier time of it than most of my enemies."

She wagged a short finger at me. "You wouldn't trust an ordinary shoe box." Then she crossed her arms in mock irritation. She was playing with me and I lapped it up like a hungry puppy. "Should I feel insulted that you'd think I would hurt you?" she said.

"Are you doing this?"

"I don't know. Maybe."

"How can you not know?"

Her name fluttered on the wind as delicately as a gossamer wing into the blue sky. I muttered a curse as my ears attuned to the sound of breaking glass.

Quickly, his body jumped to alertness. He sat up, the covers fell exposing his rock hard chest, and abs tensed and ready to fight. Someone was in his house, again. It wasn't easy to send the brutal erotic feeling to the farthest corners of his mind until later. My dream woman's essence still lingered as always around me, in. Being with her left my lair vulnerable.

Other emotions—waves of confusion and anger beat at my soul, competed for attention. It wasn't mine but the intruder's emotions. I bounded out of bed forgetting my pants.

I'm sleek, ferocious as a wolf, and sneaky as a bat. I can take down anyone in a fight...but this



wasn't an intentional intruder.

I ran down the stairs never making a sound. Stealth was one of the things I did best. What I saw shocked me to the core. He had to be no more than sixteen, seventeen. His eyes were blood red wild with blood lust. Foam leaked out the corners of his mouth. The boy's skin was pale and his strength bordered on vampires scale. He reeked of Red Queen.

The boy demolished the couch with his sharp talons. Cotton duck covered the coffee table, floor. It extended to the kitchen counter. My desk was about to meet the same fate. They could be replaced, but this boy needed my immediate help.

"Hey!"

The boy's eyes zeroed in on me. Wrinkled folds surrounded his red, sunken eyes. Pinpoints of light, as pupils, bore into me with hunger. He was nearly too far gone for help. His grayish, pink skin hung off his skeleton. The clothing hung off his shoulders. Fangs to long for his mouth protruded over his lips.

I jumped off the stairs and landed on top of the boy. We tumbled to the floor, knocking the coffee table on its side. Swiftly, I turned the zombie's head to the side and bit down on his neck. The boy howled from the shock and pain of my fangs puncturing his neck. His skin texture was chewy and tasted of decay.

My stomach wanted to heave.

Acidic blood swamped my mouth. The burn intensified as I kept sucking. I sucked and sucked, not swallowing the tainted blood. I lifted his mouth away and spit out as much of the blood as I could. The rug smoldered, and a sizzling, burning sound accompanied smoke where I spit out the blood.

Once the boy was calm, I commanded his body to reject the opiate. White, thick fluid oozed out of his pores. It coated my knees, the carpet. "Just relax and let the drug leave your system," I said as his body convulsed.

As I watched, the boy's body reject the poison, images of my deceased wife superimposed over him. She was an innocent, much too fragile to have married the likes of me, but we were in love. Against her father's and my master's wishes, we married.

Unfortunately, life with me had been anything but happily ever after. I couldn't adjust to married life. I had nightmares of my years under Manus's rule, and I tested her every step of the way until she gave up. One night she went missing. I'd looked all over the village for her. I found her in an opium den, strung out.

I'd dragged her home and purged her body of the drug like I'd done with the boy. She didn't get better. She looked for other ways to cope with my

mood swings, constant need for reassurance, and my vampiric lycanthropy.

Later I pulled on pajama pants I unearthed out of the walk-in closet. The boy now known as Mike was wrapped in three blankets. Mike was knee deep in withdrawal and I held as much of his drug sickness at bay as I could.

After four days of nausea, throwing up and irrational frenzy, Mike appeared less erratic, and he could hold down herbal tea. I wiped the sweat from Mike's brow and coaxed him into taking a shower. I realized Mike needed more help than I was able to give and looked in the phone book for reputable rehab centers. After a full day of making calls, I settled on one rehab center in Suffolk County, Long Island, the Tilly Drug and Substance Abuse Rehabilitation House.

\* \* \* \*

"Daedalus?" Her eyes opened to semi-darkness and the distant sound of cars driving past. Gradually, she became aware of wetness on her forehead and arms. She turned to her digital alarm clock on the night table. It read 5:30. "Crap," she groaned.

*Ilida?*

*Yes?*

*Were you in my dream?*

*You were in mine?*

*We have to talk.*

*Maybe this will pass.*

*I don't think so.*

As quickly as he'd responded to her the connection went dead.

\* \* \* \*

Ilida sat uncomfortably in her chair as her co-workers stared at her waiting for an answer. She felt as if a car was backing her against a wall of thorns. "Did you all have your coffee this morning?"

"We're waiting for an answer," Thom her supervisor and director, prompted.

They were a close bunch—started Tilly House together and depended on each for everything. They even gave each other moral support when it came to their patients and their outside lives. Ilida was the backbone bone of the group. Her co-workers went to her first for moral support. She couldn't say she relied on them for moral support.

Ilida felt as if she was suffocating. Once again, they depended on her for something. If Mike got violent with her, would they help protect her? She narrowly eyed Thom then finally said, "Okay, I'll take his case."

A collective sigh went around the room. Thom slapped her on the back. She swore her shoulder snapped. "I knew I could count on you, Ilida."

"Yeah, right. He's only a kid." She hoped.

"He's a troubled six-one-and-a-half foot kid who bit his previous therapist's ear off," Thom said.

*Yeah, only a kid with a violent streak.* "You're a big burly man, Thom. Why don't you take his case?"

"I have patients up the wazu. If I take on any more patients my wife will kill me, and I'm not kidding. I've been so absent minded of late I almost gave my one- year-old the dog's Alpo."

Beverly turned to her and said, "One of your patients just graduated."

Man alive! This was not looking good for her.

The therapist with the huge lungs sitting next to her chimed in. "You're perfect for Mike."

"I don't want to lose an ear anymore than you people do."

"Your used to physical confrontation," Sally, the drug withdrawal specialist said.

She was a non-violent, peace-loving person until one day five years ago when a teenager socked her on the right cheek. A month in self-defense class changed all her non-violent ways to violent when necessary. She could take down a mugger, rapist if needed, but she drew the line at one of her patients. "I don't want to fight my patients, Sally."

"You'll work with his guardian closely," Thom interjected.

"Guardian?" Ilida leafed through Mike's file finding his parents' names. "What happened to Mike's parents?"

"They gave up on him. A Mr. Sqourakis is his legal guardian now. He's in your office waiting to talk with you."

"He's a millionaire, Ilida," Beverly said.

Ilida crossed her arms. "Oh really? Is this guy scoring points per his PR people's suggestions?"

"He's a billionaire actually and gorgeous as sin. His voice..." Sally seemed to vibrate in her chair.

*Oh boy.*

"He's a billionaire?" Beverly turned to her with a wide sex-starved plea on her face. "Look if you don't want to take Mike's case I will," Beverly said.

Homegirl looked serious, too. Beverly loved love and men. She had a boyfriend, but you could never remind her of that. "Okay, bucket of water for hot and bothered here."

"Meeting's over boys and girls. I expect two progress reports by the end of next week, Ilida."

Ilida watched the therapist vacate the conference room. She didn't have to ask where. "Guess I'd better go meet Mr. Billionaire Do-Gooder."

Thom held her arm back. Ilida faced him. "The minute this kid gets physical with you, he's out."

Thom forgot they weren't seeing each other

anymore. He and his wife reconciled after their divorce. She was his rebound bed partner and it fizzled quickly after that. He still gave off proprietary waves toward her. She didn't need his protection. "I doubt he'll get physical with me."

"Be careful anyway."

Mike needed someone to care about him, someone to give him his or her full attention, and she was the one who would do it. She wasn't so sure about Mike's guardian. Rich people made her itch. They cared until there was money involved. "Time to meet the Good Rich Samaritan," she sighed.

Ilida rounded the corner walked down the stairs and found all of her fellow female co-workers fogging up her office door. "Hey, can we show some professionalism here?" she said, as she clutched her door knob, then a hand shot out in front of her and pulled down the window blind.

Sally turned to her. "The man is gorgeous. Did you know he's dating that Supermodel? What's her name?"

"Don't ask me. I don't pay attention to that stuff," Ilida said. What were they ogling this man for? His back faced the door. His shoulders were broad in the black sweater. His black hair layered and short, hugged his head. Something about his posture was familiar.

The tall man stood with self-confidence and

casual elegance.

"Brittany Lane," Beverly said in her ear.

"Hum?" Blinking her eyes she faced the smitten Beverly. "Brittany Lane? Well, why not? The rich and beautiful often go together, don't they?"

"I thought you didn't pay attention to that stuff?" Sally asked laughing.

"I don't. Not really. Okay, would you all go, please? I have to meet with Mike's guardian."

Finally, her grumbling co-workers moved away from her door in pack formation. "Bye, Ilida. Give us the details at lunch."

"Yeah." She waited for the *Waiting to Exhale* gang to leave then she opened the door. "Mr. Sqoura..."

Her voice faded as the man in the chair stood up and faced her. "Oh my God!"



## Chapter Ten

Outwardly, I kept my cool while hell broke loose inside me. The woman haunted my dreams and filled me with fear of the likes I've never known. She could twist me up, cancel my ability to protect myself with one touch. She disturbed me, and now she stood before me in tantalizing flesh. I trapped myself the night of my daughter's funeral.

I sat down as she seated herself behind her desk.

Dressed, as comfortably as if she were at home watching a movie, she hardly resembled a recreational therapist. I would have mistaken her for an intern if not for the determined look in her eyes, especially when those eyes caught mine. She was fighting something undeniably fierce and hot. The darkening of her raw sienna cheeks was one indication. Why couldn't there have been another residential therapist home in the area?

A clearing of her throat and a squaring of her

shoulders and she was calm again. "My supervisor mentioned your last name. I had no idea it was you."

She sat behind her desk, pushed her chair in, and then placed the folder in front of her.

"That's not surprising since we didn't exchange last names."

"That was your idea, by the way."

"I know. Before and after we slept together."

"Could we stick to business, please?"

That was my reason for being there, but something in me wanted to play with her - feel her out. It was sex play and I didn't want to initiate it. "Certainly."

"Well, you came to the right place."

"Did I come to the right person? That is the question."

"Meaning?"

"You and I know I have a lot of nerve coming here."

"You do." She rested her hands in front of her on the desk and interlaced them. "So that means you have to trust me to help Mike."

Ilida could easily turn me away and confirm my suspicions about the opposite sex.

That night was written all over her face. She kept her distance from me - seeking shelter from behind her desk. Her coffee brown eyes were wide and fixed on mine. The pulse beating erratically on

her neck was another indication.

"Sit down, please. I read Mike's file."

*My angel. She will help Mike.* I noticed she shielded her thoughts from me, but it wouldn't be enough. I could break through, easily. Why did I want to? "I have no doubt that you will be able to help Mike."

A desk wouldn't prevent me from taking what I wanted: her blood, her body. This brutal lust was incredible. It was more than what I'd felt for any woman or vampiress. Oh, but I'm not a beast. Ilida required care, or she would run like a hunted animal.

"His parents have given up on him, mostly," she said.

"It seems to be an epidemic of late."

"Yeah, why have children if you aren't going to tough it out with them. I don't get that."

She too had had a painful childhood. Mike will benefit from her kindness as I did the night of Juliana's funeral. It's unfortunate it will cost us all.

"How do you know Mike?"

"He broke into my house."

"To rob you?"

"He was drug crazed. I doubt he remembers what happened." It's too convenient that Mike doesn't remember. Could he be trusted under Ilida's care? The possibility of the contrary made me uneasy.

"And you're helping him?"

"We're here, aren't we?"

"Okay. You have to be straight with me, Daedalus. What is he on now?"

"I believe he's on heroin." That was all I would tell her. I had my own ideas on exactly what Mike had taken.

She looked down at Mike's file, eyes moving back and forth. Then, she shook her head. Amber, curled afro swung and shimmered around her face. "That can't be all. I read his file from the rehabilitation center he previously lived in. His behavior is unpredictable. Did you know he bit one of his counselors and drew blood? Heroin addicts don't bite. They go through periods of sleep and wakefulness."

"You'll be his therapist, Ilida?"

She sighed, "I'm the only therapist who will take his case."

The idea visibly shook her. Perhaps bringing Mike here was a bad idea. Too bad the Heamo High Council hadn't thought of Rehab centers for drugged up vampires. Those bald rats thought of everything else. "A male should take Mike's case, not a slip of a woman such as yourself."

She moistened her luscious, brown lips, and then tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. She smiled tight, making my cock stir to life. A storm of indignation brewed inside her tiny body.

"I wasn't aware we were back in the fifties, Daedalus, and you haven't answered my ques —"

I held up my hand. "Peace! If you think Mike is a danger to you then a male should be his counselor. I should take him out of here."

"*That* won't be necessary." She cleared her throat again, sat up, and put her shoulders back ready to fight my concern. "I'm comfortable with physical confrontation, so I can handle Mike."

"You've been attacked before."

She hesitated contemplating whether to lie to me or not. "Yes."

A quick possessiveness came over me. Who would hurt her? She wouldn't hurt a fly. "When? And by whom?"

She shifted in her seat not knowing how to take my questioning. I felt the same way. She's independent and doesn't want anyone to worry about her. She'd rather worry about everyone else. "It was three years ago. My first go around as a recreational therapist. One of my patients punched me in the face."

"And?"

She moved her head trying to force the truth out of her mouth. "And I was out cold for ten minutes. After that I took self-defense classes." For the first time she met my gaze. "You won't see me flat on my back anymore."

As though realizing her slip, she reddened

attractively. "Wait! That's not what I meant to say."

"You weren't on your back." After that, I stood up, paced her tiny office, annoyed with her and this situation. Why did I care so much? Simple. Because she cares. She went to Juliana's funeral. She let me make love to her in the most intimate way possible. It scared the shit out of me and seeing her again filled my heart. A heart I thought was long, long dead. "How long do you want to dance around this, Ilida?"

"Dance around what, Daedalus?"

She played dumb well, but I saw through it. Why else would she be so on guard around me? "You and me and this dangerous connection we have."

"I can't..."

"We need to talk about it. You showed up out of the blue at Juliana's funeral. What happened afterward, and the dream I had. I know you had the same dream."

"What dream?"

I sat down and leaned over, pinned her with my gaze. Her dark brown eyes widened with fear. "Is this a game now?"

"Do you know how arrogant you are, Daedalus?"

I leaned back in the chair, crossed my knees, enjoying the hunt more. I shrugged. "I've heard

once or twice."

"Just twice?" she said tightly.

A knock made her jump. Her office door opened before she could say come in. A man with dark red curly hair, beard, and mustache peeked in. From our first meeting, I knew I despised him. Unknowingly he told me why.

"How's it going?"

Ilida's posture changed again from alertness to positive vexation. Interesting. Thom makes her uncomfortable.

"It's going fine, Thom."

*Want to explain Thom the wonder boss?*

*I don't have to, to you.*

*You don't look happy to see him. One can only guess why.*

"Mr. Sqourakis, Ilida is the best recreational therapist I have on staff. Mike will be in good hands with her."

*Singing your praises.*

*I'm good at my job. "Thanks, Thom."*

*"Bye."*

The door closed. I waited until I heard the man's footsteps shrink down to a dull sound. "Your boss carries a torch for you."

"We're a family here. All of us went to college together with the exception of Sally, the nurse."

"Spare me *The Big Chill* analogy. He wants to fuck you, Ilida. Tell me, how many men do you have sniffing around you?"

"How many women do you have clawing at you?"

"I asked you first."

"I gave you one night, Daedalus. Just one. I don't owe you anything."

"I own your body, and you know it."

She jumped up from her chair and stared me down. "No we don..."

"Your heart is beating at a frenetic pace. You slept with him."

"It was a mistake. "

"I like a woman with experience. It makes life interesting."

You're staring at me as if you want me for dinner, Daedalus. I don't appreciate..."

I reached out and grabbed her hand—needing the contact. Then an electric current traveled up my arm, to my heart and back. God, bad mistake touching her. I wanted more and was beyond curious now. "I know. You're a therapist. You love your job. You love helping people, and I'm not being condescending. I'm talking about a different kind of therapy."

"I thought that was a one time thing?"

"It doesn't have to be."

"I know your kind. You want a toss then you move onto the next conquest. Who cares if the person being left behind was affected."

"For the record you don't know my kind. And



if you did, you'd regret it."

"I hate it when you get cryptic on me."

"I know I affected you."

"I can't do casual sex, and I'm on company time. I dr—I don't... Damn!"

"Dream, you were about to say?"

She pulled her hand away and cupped her face in her hands. "I wasn't going to say that."

I was pushing her. I had to pull back. She wasn't ready. "Freudian slips," I said quietly. "When you're ready to talk, let me know. This could be fun."

"The next time we talk it will be about Mike."

I stood up this time matching her stance. I was on working on pure animal instinct now. "Then again, maybe we'll be too busy doing *other* things to talk."

She gasped. "You're bold, you know that?"

"I'm honest, and you're blushing."

"I need to tell you Mike's schedule and when you have to come down for parent weekend."

"Then let's set up a time to meet and talk."

Before she could respond, the office door swung open again. A tall, round woman in flowing clothes stuck her head in. "Sorry, to interrupt, Ilida. I knocked before. We're ready to put Mike into Detox now."

Ilida was thankful for the interruption, I noticed. I needed the moment to collect myself,

too. Finally, with the subtle shift in her posture I felt down to my bones, she spoke.

"We can't let you see Mike before he goes into Detox, Daedalus. It's policy here."

"Can't argue with policy."

"I'll need your cell number to contact you in case there are any problems."

I jotted it down for her and handed it over. Ilida avoided making eye contact with me. I didn't want her to squirrel out of this so easily. "Let's talk the old fashioned way. Contact me telepathically."

"I don't..."

"The connection is already there. Let's use it."

I caught her that time.

"I should say no."

"That would be useless."

"Okay. Bully."

"I use whatever I can to get what I want, and you aren't complaining."

"Do you challenge every woman you meet?"

"Mike's schedule?"

"As soon as Mike comes off Detox I'll set up a schedule for him. It's similar to the other residents' here but certain activities will be tailored to his specific needs."

"Contact me telepathically with it."

"You seem comfortable with being a telepath."

She still doesn't know I'm a vampire? Any

practiced telepath would have known within first contact. She needs my help. "It's a part of me the way it should be a part of you."

"The phone would be much better for me."

"I can help you."

"I have someone who can help me already."

"Why haven't they been helping you lately?"

"I haven't asked."

She was lying. Whoever had been helping her in the past is no longer able to help her now. "It's a precious gift that can help others, and acceptance of self is everything."

"I'm helping others by counseling. I have my patients to attend. I'll check on Mike later and call you if anything goes wrong. I doubt it will."

"I will keep in touch with you. I'm not the easiest person to get in touch with in the daytime."

"Do you work at night?"

"Overseas phone calls. It's the nature of being an international business person."

"Wait! How are you?"

"I'm okay. Death and I know each other quite well." I closed her office door behind me and took a deep breath. I did a lot of that lately. As if my lungs couldn't get enough breath. Death and I were on an intimate basis. I cheated death by living and meted it out to my enemies. Now the situation was changed. My daughter was dead and I couldn't bring her back. Ilida's concern for

me... touched me in a way I didn't want to examine.

I walked down the steps of the Victorian home. Wind blew the short waves on the nape of my neck. With my thoughts, I commanded the car door to unlock. My sensitive ears picked up the muted click. Telekinesis was helpful at times.

I opened the car door, sat in the driver's seat, and then rubbed my forehead. Ilida's presence had followed me. On impulse, I looked up at her office window and caught her staring at me. She didn't bother to hide. I shut my eyes tight and forcibly kept my ass in the car. *I will not go to her.* I didn't do that sort of thing. There I went again, but every time I gazed in her eyes, I felt her concern. The vulnerability tried to creep in and take over. *I need good old-fashioned primal physical contact. If I can't exercise my grief by letting it run its course, then I'll get it beat out of me.* I turned the key in the ignition; the car started and in a shot sped down the road away from Ilida's eyes.

\* \* \* \*

She was on fire from his deep barrel voice, touch, his eyes, and his challenging language. For an intimidating man he had pretty eyes—disarming eyes. They made you want to stare at them for hours. She moved away from the window after

watching the gravel shoot out from under his tires. Something in her soul wanted to shout out to him, make him stay. She had the unmistakable feeling he'd wanted to get away from her. *Okay, focus on work, Ilida.*

*Do focus on work.*

Daedalus? *Daedalus? You can't do this. Don't make me use my powers like this.*

*You have to learn or someone could take advantage.*

*Like you are now? She couldn't.*

*I can break through your meager defenses, obviously. Help Mike and we'll speak again.*

His sadness overwhelmed her, but he wasn't the one to feel sorry for. He was dignified and tough. He would get through it. She didn't think she would. She sat on the edge of the windowsill. The strangest thing of all was she could still feel him around her, in her. It would wear off. It had to. The sound of knocking startled her.

Not again, she inwardly groaned. It was Thom her supervisor. "Come in, Thom." She had to put on her pleasant face and pretend she didn't know why he was in her office.

"How do you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Know who's behind your door. The glass window is frosted."

*I can read thoughts.* She wasn't about to tell him that. Thom was too normal. "I can make out the silhouette."

He shook his head, satisfied with her explanation. It wasn't a stretch. She was pretty good at differentiating the silhouettes behind her door. She sat down behind her desk wanting to pretend she was busy so Thom would leave.

"How did it go?"

"Went fine." Ilida pressed button, and then her computer screen lit up again displaying bats flying over a dusky sky. "Mr. Sqourakis is satisfied and thanks to you he feels Mike is in good hands. I'll check on him in a few minutes."

"Good. Don't forget I want two reports by the end of the week."

"Okay, Thom."

*That is standard procedure to give your supervisor reports by the end of the week. What is his problem?*

"You know him?"

"Um, Sqourakis? Not personally."

"He seemed into you."

He was into sex with her nothing more than that though she wished otherwise. Thom was being unduly concerned. It made her uncomfortable. In a hushed voice she said, "We've been over for months now, Thom."

"And that's my fault. I know."

"Not your fault. You and your wife separated. I had problems with my boyfriend at the time. We took comfort in each other. It was a one-night thing. I'm okay." She was more than okay.

Daedalus obliterated thoughts of other men from her mind, permanently.

"I—Look you can't turn feelings on and off."

"It wasn't meant to be, Thom."

Just watch yourself around Sqourakis. I've heard of his reputation with women."

"Thanks for the heads up."

"Sure," he said, as he closed her office door.

Ilida breathed in and out relaxing her shoulders and sweeping the meeting with Daedalus and her twenty-twenty with Thom. What a weird morning. With her mouse she clicked the sleep command on the computer. Her Batman screensaver came on. She swiveled her chair around and stared out the window.

This was real. This is what she desired. Working and taking care of people made her happy. Incredible sex was the least she could ask for out of life. The love thing wasn't working out.

Being with Daedalus made her remember she was different and would never truly be normal. She would give anything to not be privy to others' thoughts. Daedalus was so adept at controlling his powers. How did he do it? What was his secret? She should take him up on his offer: Over-the-top sex with him and reminders that she's different, and so is he. No sex with him and keep grappling for normalcy. Decisions, decisions.

He dated models. She wasn't a model. Standing

at five-foot five and a half inches, shapely with hair that refused taming, full lips and apple shaped face kept her out of the magazines. She smiled to herself.

She got up, walked out of her office. Tilly occupied three floors of a Victorian home. The recreational therapists' offices occupied the first floor. The detox rooms occupied the second floor and residence rooms where on the top floor. On the first floor all the indoor activities were done in the huge dining hall.

Mike took first priority for the moment. She walked up to the second floor and peeked in on Mike. He rested comfortably with his arms restrained. She grimaced at seeing him tied down. It was necessary in case he became violent. All patients, when in detox, needed restraining, but in her mind it was still draconian.

Lunchtime was underway and she had to report to her noseey friends and co-workers about Daedalus. He was the last person she wanted to talk about.



## Chapter Eleven

Terra paced back and forth. The sound of her heels clicking echoed in the small industrial-like room. "I know. I sensed another presence outside the club."

"It was probably nothing, Terra."

"No, it was. He sent someone to warn her. I bet you that's what it was, Hermes."

"Shall we find this person?"

"We shall send a drone."

"Another one? We already have ours in the field."

"Someone who can hide in plain sight to follow him."

"That is next to impossible. He sensed we were in his lair. I almost lost my arm remember?"

"Then we use what we have." She caressed his face with the back of her hand. "Pay Mike another visit, my love."

"Do you want me to turn him?"

"Not yet. Make sure he gets names and places."

If he did send a person to warn her I want to know who this person is."

"It's as good as done."

"In the meantime, we send the goods out to Brooklyn now."

"What part?"

"Park Slope and Downtown Brooklyn."

\* \* \* \*

The next morning, Ilida approached the detox floor. Mike was in one of the rooms, heavily sedated with morphine while drugs purged his system. She knocked hesitantly. Sally, the detox nurse, told her to come in.

Upon opening the door, Ilida ran to Sally and the flailing Mike.

"I thought he was sedated?"

"He is — was. He woke up screaming."

"Screaming what?"

"The sun."

Ilida looked around at the windows. Light streamed in, warming up the sterile-looking room. She quickly went around the room pulling down all the shades.

Mike quieted and went back to a peaceful sleep.

Later that night, Ilida curled up on the couch with her arm extended flipping the channels. She came upon the news report and lowered her arm...

*"Frightening reports have come in from Precincts in and around New York City. A new drug is making its rounds through the streets of Brooklyn and Lower Manhattan, called Red Queen..."*

"Beverly? Come here. You have to hear this."

Her roommate rushed out into the living room.

"What's goi—"

"Shush! Listen."

*"...Detox centers have reported the drug is highly addictive and it causes near mania in some addicts. There have been some reports that the drug gives the user near super human strength and a bizarre thirst for blood..."*

"That's gross," Beverly said, plopping down on the sofa next to her.

It was gross and the news report sent a chill down her back.

"Sisterfriend? We deal with this every day."

Ilida swung her legs down. "You know the new patient that came in yesterday?"

"His guardian is that rich man. I remember."

"I checked on him this morning."

"Okay?"

She scratched her head wondering how to say what was on her mind without sounding like a lunatic. "This will sound ridiculous."

"As ridiculous as addicts craving blood sounded?"

"Okay, well Mike was on morphine."

"I know, Detox. And?"

"With the doses you give patients when they go into detox they shouldn't be able to struggle with a two hundred pound former wrestler." With raised eyebrows, she locked eyes with Beverly.

"Hold up! Mike struggled with *Sally*?"

"He wanted the shades drawn. So I pulled them down," she stated as she made a pulling motion with her fist.

"Then what?"

"Then nothing. He stopped struggling with Sally then he went back to sleep."

## Chapter Twelve

Three nights later, Ilida parked her brick-red, late-model mini van on the corner of Seventh Avenue and Berkley Place in front of a church. She'd driven around in circles looking for a parking space but found none. So, parking four blocks away from her walkup apartment was the best she could do.

It was a surreal night in Park Slope, she found. Seventh and Union on the east side was blocked off by orange cones. Tractors dug up tar to get to the drainage pipe. It had been peaceful that morning – not much action, but now...

To top it off, a short man wearing white shirt jeans and a leather vest complete with fringe strode past her playing a lute. A man sporting shoulder length, brown dreadlocks and wearing an orange vest, with an iridescent white stripe running across the middle, stood in the center of the street directing traffic while he chatted up a blond-haired woman. A boy, biking across the

street, cut Ilida off as she tried to cross. He slid into home base; a loaded garbage can.

"Need help?"

The teenager waved her off. He mounted his bike and sped away, slower this time.

The controlled chaos did nothing to calm her nerves, though. She was off to a good start with Mike, but sensed there was something restless about him. He had confusion rolling around in that brain of his. It took all her might to not probe. She was so inexperienced she might end up hurting him and herself. Something she couldn't put her finger on.

She was still reeling from the surprise meeting with Daedalus. Seeing him again left her yearning to see more of him, and that was nuts. She didn't know him, which didn't stop him from making her hot all over with his challenge. *Need to cool off.* So she passed her block and headed to Haagan-Daz.

With every breath, she could feel Daedalus. His psychic signature lay heavy in the air around her. Her brain tingled and a gentle caress of her thoughts opened the door to her mind.

*You are exhausted.*

*You think? Not only am I exhausted I'm starvin' like Marvin.*

*Let's get something to eat and talk.*

She hesitated. Should she? Yes, she should. Talk about addiction. Was Daedalus her drug? She

wanted to see him, but was she ready for the big talk? And the standstill that would come later?  
*Where do you want to meet?*

*Cornbread Café.*

*You seem Greek inclined.*

*All ethnic food is good. I'm two blocks away from you.*

*I'll wait.*

The last time she'd seen him was at Tilly. He was dressed in a gray suit with white and olive stripe shirt and olive tie. He made a statement, with that Italian-tailored ensemble. As he walked towards her with the barest smile on his face, well...he got her attention again and every woman's attention he passed.

Ilida loved clothes but never gave men's attire a second thought. Now, she was willing to change her mind on that. The three-quarter length charcoal coat complimented his powerful stride. The stripes on his shirt made his long torso seem longer. She knew the gray pants wouldn't disappoint either.

*"Hello, Ilida."*

She deliciously shivered whenever he said her name. *"Daedalus."*

She expected a hug but instead he swept her off her feet then kissed her on the lips slowly, as if he had all the time in the world.

She didn't feel the cold as his lips moved over hers, expertly sucking her bottom lip. His tongue

swept passed her lips claiming her in a new way. Then, just as quickly, the kiss ended. He lifted his lips away from hers leaving her breathless, giddy and wanting more. *Good Lord!* "You should have warned me," she said as she tried to catch her breath and keep her cool.

"A hug after all we've been through would have been ridiculous."

He seemed unaffected and in control as usual. Was it planned? Calculated or not, it worked. "Okay, you're right, but..."

"I know."

They entered the restaurant. The waiter said anywhere, so they picked a table on the left, next to the brick wall.

After Daedalus seated her at the table, Ilida glanced at his behind. Just as she thought, she wasn't disappointed when the pants glided smoothly over his muscular hips.

After the waiter took their order, Ilida tried to relax and remain aloof about seeing him. The lighting was dim giving the dining room a cozy atmosphere. Shadows accentuated Daedalus' high cheekbones and generous lips. It also cast his occipital bones in deep shadow, his hooded eyes shielded from her view. The aloof angle wasn't working.

"How is Mike?"

"Doing okay. Sally is watching him closely and



there are two other drug detox technicians on duty at night."

He shook his head. His brows furrowed as he perused the menu.

"Mike had some serious drugs in his system," he said.

"Yes he did."

He seemed unaffected by what she said. Maybe the news was too much to take. "A new drug has surfaced in the City called Red Queen."

"I've heard of it. It's supposed to be highly addictive?" he asked.

She had a feeling he already knew that. Instead of arguing that notion, she nodded.

"What happened to the rival alcohol and substance abuse center in Suffolk?"

"They had some kind of weird virus break out there. Almost half of the residents came to stay at Tilly. Why?"

"Mike is from there."

"Really?"

"Uhm, hum. How are your headaches?"

He'd changed the subject fast. It was ominous and trepidation echoed in her mind. "Minor twinges. Thanks to your advice, I'm not downing Ibuprofen every night. My liver is probably a mess from all that stuff."

"I doubt it."

The waiter placed their food on the table. Ilida

inhaled hers. Daedalus moved his food around on the plate. She wondered if he was hungry. "About that talk?"

"Are you okay with what I did to you?"

Wow! He went right to the point. "I let you, remember?"

"I hurt you that night."

Ilida bit into her fried chicken leg, the coating crunched under her teeth, the juice coated her mouth, the succulent dark meat of the chicken leg tender and spicy on her tongue. Her mouth exploded with flavor. Smiling she wiped her mouth. "You shocked me. I shocked myself. I certainly didn't feel like you'd hurt me."

"Juice."

"Hum?"

He reached out, wiped under her lower lip with his forefinger. "Juice."

"Oh."

"I enjoyed it."

Which means he enjoyed her. He actually enjoyed being with her. *Holy...* She cleared her throat. "I don't do that sort of thing. I tend to give it all to the people I help."

He rested his chin in the palm of his hand. "Nun?"

That was the second time she'd heard that in reference to her social life. Okay, her love life could be summed up in one action: yawn.

Daedalus had reignited a spark within her that she couldn't let go. Actually, she'd been trying to extinguish it, but the nozzles clogged. It would be right to squelch it, wouldn't it? "I want to keep seeing you too, but you want to see other women. I don't want to sleep with you while you do that."

"And you don't want to compromise your principles any more than you have."

"And you won't change?"

"I don't see that happening in the foreseeable future."

"Then we're at a stalemate," she said sadly.

"A beautiful woman with principles."

She looked up at the ceiling wondering why God cursed her with the need for a secure relationship. "Don't do this to me."

"Do what?"

Before she could answer him the waiter appeared. "Sorry." The waiter's arm reached between them to place the check on the table.

While Daedalus took out his wallet, he kept his eyes on her daring her to take out money. Reluctantly she broke contact to take out *her* wallet. She placed her debit card down before he did.

He held her hand. "Your money is no good around me. Put your card back."

"I want to pay for my meal."

"You're annoying me, Ilida. Keep it up and I'll

hold you over my knee and spank you.”

She blushed remembering the waiter stood by patiently waiting.

“Excuse me,” the waiter said and then retreated.

Ilida smiled at the image of her splayed over Daedalus’ knee.

“Ilida? Your thoughts are damn loud.”

“Ignore what I was thinking.”

“Impossible. I have a boner the size of the Aegean Sea.”

Ilida giggled as she covered her mouth with her hand. Daedalus joined in.

“You make me laugh, Ilida.”

He made her remember she was a woman with needs. She would remember that for the rest of her life. Did she want to abandon that right now?

“I’m going to miss you,” he said as he cupped her right cheek.

She inhaled his scent of raspberries, copper, and a citrusy something. Her senses came alive around him. Shyly she lifted her fork and played with the scraps of collard greens on her plate. “Well, we could have – one last fling.”

A sensuous smile raised the corners of his mouth. His blue-violet eyes danced. “Is Beverly with her boyfriend tonight?”

\* \* \* \*

I kicked Ilida's front door open. She giggled as I kicked it closed while kissing her. Her fingers shook as she unbuttoned my blazer, shirt. I inhaled the breath out of her lungs, feeling her lips yield to me. It was primal, shocking. A moan escaped my lips or hers. I couldn't tell. I didn't give a damn.

My hands moved of their own accord to her hips, pushed her forward until she fell back on the plush rug. In the struggle to touch each other, she straddled me as we continued to kiss.

My cock pushed against the zipper of my pinstriped pants, and she felt it, too. As I became aware of it, she moved against me. Her sweet, musky arousal clouded my thoughts as her heartbeat filled my ears.

Illy's skin...? Good God, I was touching her? I laughed hysterically to myself. Soft wool brushed the backs of my hands. I pulled her sweater up, off her arms, pushed one bra cup aside, and seized a nipple with my tongue.

She gasped, writhing on top of me. Air covered my chest as she pulled off my shirt. Her warm wet tongue licked around my nipple. Instantly it hardened to a nub. The shock, the shudder ran straight to my cock.

She was overwhelmed. I sensed it. She wanted this, but was afraid. She didn't want to get hurt.

This was our last time together.

I dreamed about this, wanted this mad touching with her. I didn't bother to shield my thoughts. They were exposed to her.

My frantic hands unbuttoned her pants, pulled the zipper down, pushed the leg opening of her panties aside. I grasped her head and rolled her over. With her comfortably tucked under me, I played with her curly mound; I worshipped her throat, licking and nipping hearing the blood pound through her precious artery.

"Daedalus," she moaned hotly.

She pushed my pants down. Lifting my ass, I assisted her in freeing my cock. She felt my ass, cupped my balls. They pinched from her sweet caress.

I slipped between her legs and with one hard push filled her to the hilt. Her inner walls cushioned and closed around me. She was slick, hot inside.

I rocked inside her over and over again. Her breath came quick and shallow in my ear. Her slick folds greased my entry and retreat.

It wasn't gentle and I couldn't be, even when she cried out for mercy. I wanted to savor every moment with her, but when she crazily moved under me, raising and lowering her hips against me, my cock grew larger filling every space. My control broke. I rutted her, thrusting hard and fast.

Her ankles locked around my ass. Her organs wept around me. Arching her back, she cried out and gave me her sweet pleasure.

Red saturated her furniture, Technicolor vision submerged. My primitive self took over. Triumphant my fangs grew with the age-old need to take what was mine. I punctured her neck. Scalding hot from sex, her blood pumped out overwhelming my mouth as I shot my semen inside her.

She arched then flattened her back as I slurped from her neck. More of her arousal flooded around my cock. Twin streams of blood—one curved around to the back of her neck, the other ran down to her breast. I licked them, still seeing in red. In this state, I had no choice but to obey. It frightened me, yet it gave me strength. Subconsciously, I knew what I was doing and couldn't give a rat's ass.

Later, I discovered Ilida on her back neatly tucked under my arm: her head under my chin, and her arm around my waist. My hand was safely tucked between her legs. I don't do protective embraces. Her bra and panties lay on the floor next to her in pieces. Her skirt lay under the window.

It was hazy, but from the way I felt...I was sated. The taste of copper and her nipples hung around in my mouth.

What led up to this? I searched my mind and it came back to me. We were going to part ways. What a laugh. This isn't how you part ways. You say have a nice life, delete phone numbers from your cell and hope to never see the person again. I dreamed about this, wanted this mad sex with her again. If only I could have controlled myself.

My cock, hard as ever, was ready for seconds. It pulsed in punctuation, and why not? I was snug against her hairy folds. I'm a vampire werebat with over-sensitive skin. The hard nub of her clitoris pressed against me. Arousal and my cum continued to seep out of her. My cock bulged, nudged her. Greedy bastard! I'm in control now. I hope.

She couldn't be comfortable on the floor under me. I'm colossal compared to her petite frame. She moved her head to the side. Her bite marks visible. *Damn!* They were gruesome. Jagged edges of skin and blood outlined the one-quarter inch holes.

With a groan, I rolled away from her, hugged myself, as shudders of unfulfilled desire racked my body. My first priority was to take care of her.

I was naked and the blinds were up. I breezed that off. Nudity meant nothing to me. I placed her in her bed, covered and tucked her in and then pulled the blinds down. Nudity might mean something totally different to her.



I stretched out beside her, feeling the guilt take over me. Then I felt her come to. I had to do it. To preserve my honor or what I had left of it.

"Daedalus? She groaned stretched like a cat after a satisfying nap. I wanted to get between her legs again. My cock bobbed. I held the shaft firmly. It was sensitive to the touch and sap threatened to rise to the top.

"Go back to sleep, Illy. You need your rest."

"My body is buzzing. I don't think I'll sleep for ages."

\* \* \* \*

Ilida sat up feeling the effects of having sex with him. "Umph. My neck is soar." She felt wonderfully sated. She would feel full for days. It was the same feeling after having sex with him the first time. *Only this time he'll be the one leaving.* "Maybe it's for the best."

"We agreed as much."

"You read my thoughts while we made – while we had sex?"

"Some women would think that's an asset."

"You make me forget you're a telepath." Ilida's neck throbbed and pulsed as she watched him get dressed. Instead of turning his back to her, he faced her. She never thought Daedalus was the shy type – far from it.

He displayed his olive-skinned, muscular-yet-lithe body. The part of him that entranced her boldly stood straight out, thick and pointed towards her. Wetness promptly flowed from between her legs: his arousal and hers.

She wanted him but she wanted him normal. *He isn't normal.* She wanted simple, uncomplicated maleness. *He's overwhelmingly male complicated and...*

"And dangerous? Fucking a telepath must horrify you," he muttered.

He couldn't keep from listening in on her thoughts. "It unnerves me."

"Why?"

"I want someone... normal."

To be fair she had a tendency to listen in on his, but it wasn't deliberate. For some reason she still couldn't disengage from him. It wasn't for lack of trying. At the risk of sounding like a cell phone commercial she tried to block him, but to no avail.

"I admire your honesty, though I'm mystified as to why it didn't bother you the first time we had a toss."

His anger surprised her. She didn't think she fazed him. "I got carried away."

"You bet you did."

Was that pain she saw? Or was it wounded pride? "I want someone less knowledgeable about me."

"While you don't know yourself, Illy."

"I'll let that comment go."

"I can't let it go. I've done things with you I've never done with the other women I've slept with."

He buttoned his shirt closing off the view of his abs and pectorals. One button, two buttons... closed. He rolled down his sleeves covering his daunting arms. Why did he have to be so masculine? Why did she have to want him so much?

"How am I supposed to take what you said?" she asked.

"Take it any way you want to."

## Chapter Thirteen

“Be careful going back home,” Ilida said.  
“No one has ever wished me a safe trip home before.”

“I don’t believe that.”

“It’s true.”

She didn’t want to wish him a safe trip home. She wanted him to stay with her tonight. Before she could sensor herself, she blurted out. “Can I—?” Then she bit her tongue.

“Yes, Ilida?”

“Can I have a hug?”

He arched his brow as he pulled on his tailored pants. “A hug? While your sheets have fallen down to your waist exposing your beautiful breasts?”

Ilida didn’t bother to look down at herself. She covered her chest and hugged the sheet to her.

Daedalus continued. “I don’t need salt poured on the wound.”

“I’m sorry.”

"I'm attracted to you and it's dangerous for me," he confessed.

"It's dangerous for me, too," she said, feeling defeated and worn out. Fighting her emotions was too damn hard with him standing in front of her.

"I don't need you traipsing around in my head anymore than you want me traipsing about in yours."

With that, she felt his mind close off to hers like a steel door slamming shut. He walked out of her bedroom. She quickly got out of bed and searched for her robe. Before she could run into the living room, the front door slammed shut.

Ilida stared at the door, her heart breaking into a million pieces. It was his absence. Suddenly he was around her touching, kissing her then in a puff of smoke, he was gone. One minute she and Daedalus were making the love the next he didn't want it or her. It wasn't one sided. He wanted her, too. It had been written all over his face when he left.

Daedalus held back. Of course, he had to. He'd lost his daughter and on top of that, he had to deal with Ilida's mental intrusion. He's probably so confused and she added to it by seducing him, and that was so unlike herself.

*I don't seduce.* God, she questioned if she knew how. Her maternal instinct was stuck on go mode. Her neck ached again.

What was she going to do with her desire now? "You're going to take a damn bath, and you're going to forget about him," she said to the four walls of her bedroom. She marched to the bathroom, turned on the water in the tub.

Her bath was relaxing, tranquil but it didn't keep thoughts of Daedalus away. She kept herself from reaching out to him with her thoughts. She could so easily, but she had to give him space. He needed it.

In her bed, she tossed and turned for hours, and then finally drifted off to sleep...

*The curly hairs on his forearm tickled her neck. His imposing body pressed her against the fibers. His hands held her hips against him.*

*And the way he moved inside her...his hard chest flattened her breasts then moved against her nipples with each thrust. She was weightless only feeling his arms around her and his lips kissing her neck. There was sharp pain mingled with the sweetness between her legs. Salty thickness mingled with his kisses. The delicious tightening at the center of her body caused her back to arch. As she came, he swallowed her screams. He came too spilling his seed, bathing her organs. She was hot all over burning up. Her skin slick with sweat...*

"Good Lord!" Ilida jumped fully awake feeling him inside her still. She was breathless.

The shrill ringing of her phone made her jump. She reached over and answered it. "H—hello?"

"I'm going to score, Ilida."

She sat up, blinking her eyes. "Mike?"

"I need your help."

She groped for the light on her bedside table, felt the grooved, tubular shaped switch, and pressed it in. She squinted her eyes for the sudden illumination in the room. "Did you leave Tilly?"

"No, but man I need drugs."

"I'll... be right there."

Wetness coated her panties. She ran to her adjoining bathroom, pulled off her nightgown and turned on the shower .

\* \* \* \*

My feet felt weighted by anvils as I walked down the stairs of Ilida's apartment building. I kept my eyes focused ahead of me. My heart beat at a furious rhythm. By the Gods, I could still feel the taste of her in my mouth.

*Daedalus?*

*I know. I'm on my way.*

*We'll meet you there.*

I jogged down the terra-cotta cement stairs and opened the gate. One last time I looked up at her window like a fool. The light was on. It was so damn easy for me to connect with her thoughts, but I stopped myself. Duty called.

## Chapter Fourteen

“Ready Mike?”

“No.”

“What would you rather do instead? We could cook? Paint?”

Ilida’s limbs moved like rubber and shook with unsteadiness. It was 4:00 a.m. and Mike, her patient at the Tilly Alcohol and Substance Abuse Inpatient Rehab Center, needed intervention. He’d called her up two and half hours ago crying and desperately wanting to take drugs.

She’d been in the middle of a great dream about Daedalus after they’d made love. He would say they had sex. She couldn’t see it as sex. It was so much more, but doomed. After their second time making love, they both realized that it was fraught with too much emotional ammunition.

Yes, she was a hypocrite. She was a telepath and so was he. She wanted some semblance of normalcy and he wasn’t the one to give it. She made him vulnerable. Vulnerability was good but



not for him so they'd gone their separate ways. And what was worse, since she was Mike's counselor and Daedalus was his guardian, well, they'd see each other again.

She was well suited for this job, and parents and patients loved the results.

Ilida picked Mike up along with Paul, the security guard, and they drove to the Suffolk County Recreation Center. Tilly's employees and patients had unlimited access and she took advantage of it.

Paul stood by in case Mike had a violent outburst. He'd had many before she began treating him. He'd been kicked out of other rehabilitation centers and was labeled violent. Mike was at the end of his rope and Ilida had run out of options. He was teenager with no place else to go. She felt for him; yearning for a mother that would never come back.

"I'm not in the mood to swim."

He fidgeted and seemed fixated on her neck. Maybe he needed a place to focus on. "What are you in the mood to do, Mike?"

"Snort."

"What drugs did you take?"

"Dust and some other stuff."

He took heroin, but the other stuff made her worry. Mixing drugs was lethal. "Do you know what the other drugs you took are?"

He hunched his shoulders nonchalantly. "I don't know, some red stuff."

That gave her nothing to go on.

"Why did you call me, Mike?"

He shrugged "To stop drugging."

"So why not take a swim."

Like most patients in rehab, Mike felt trapped as if he had nowhere to go, no options, nothing. "I don't want to swim and I can't stop drugging."

Ilida pulled out an ordinary aluminum can and Mike stared at the can and hunched his narrow shoulders. She knew he was focused on his need to score; that he didn't notice anything around him. The can had been on her desk in her office for days.

"So? It's a Red Bull can."

She turned the can around for him.

"I? I can?"

"Yeah, you can do this. One minute at a time, one hour at a time and one day at a time. What are the alternatives if you don't?"

"It's hard, Ilida."

"I see that and I'm here for you. It's going to be hard, Mike. You might fall off the wagon, but we're going to come up with an activity you like doing that will distract you."

Mike jumped into the water and swam seven laps. From the smile on his face after getting out of the water, she could tell he liked it. It was

progress. Mike had the unfortunate label of aggressive patient. That was two months ago and four near misses of his fist later.

As he towed off, Ilida considered her next move to help Mike. He had so many options all he needed was to feel free to try them out. "Hey, Mike how about cooking?"

He hunched his shoulders. "I don't know. My mom and I used to..."

He shielded his eyes away from her, his shoulders jerked. Her heart went out to him. She didn't lose her mother. Her mother left to begin a singing career but it hurt all the same. Mike's mother died in an automobile accident, which turned his life upside down. Drugs and alcohol became his lifeline. Loss was loss.

"I know, Mike. From our first session together, you told me you liked baking. What if you joined the cooking group at Tilly's?"

"I'm physical."

"Like? Karate, Jujitsu."

"I always wanted to take Akido."

"I take self defense classes every Thursday at the Y. Let me see if I can wrangle space for you in the Akido class. "Forget it. I get into fights a lot. You know. Know one trusts me."

"I can talk to the Director. We'll work out something."

"I don't know."

“Look, it’s up to you. When you’re ready, let me know.”

It would be good for him. A way to relieve his stress and anger. She’d work on him, as always. “Try it out. I think your mom would be proud.”

After dropping Mike off, Ilida decided to stay at the Center. It was early Friday morning and driving back to Brooklyn would have been useless. She curled up on the leather couch in the office.

Ilida pulled the covered elastic band off her tight curls, covered herself with her quilted coat, and closed her eyes. All she needed was fifteen minutes of sleep.

\* \* \* \*

I watched the last section of the Tyrian Guard Headquarters go up brick by brick. I paid the men well to work twenty fours a day and not to ask questions about what was being built. Nothing could keep my thoughts from wandering to Ilida.

I gave up and cued into Ilida’s thoughts. Images of our limbs sweaty and entwined on her living room floor appeared. As if on cue, I tasted salty fluid on my tongue.

Navy blue sky gave way to swirls of yellows and baby blues. It wouldn’t do me well to be outside after 8:00 a.m., but since when did I ever

do what was right for me? That included smoking. With a mental command, heat gathered around the end of the cigarette. Flame sparked and I took my first puff. I promised this would be my last cigarette for the week. Funny, I could burn from the sun's rays but lighting a cigarette... Bog standard! Blessed with immunity to sun when on Santorini Island, but when I left the immunity faded. I couldn't complain. Now I can brandish fire.

I puffed my cheeks blowing smoke rings in the cool air.

"Another thing that surprises me about you."

"I didn't sense your presence, Alec."

"You weren't supposed to, little brother. What if I were Hermes? Or some other villain wanting to get rid of you."

I'm wrapped up in Ilida. Another lecture or grilling I wasn't in the mood for. "Are you here to watch the progress or annoy me?"

"Both."

"About what, Alec?"

The wind swept the hem of Alec's long coat. He could get the dramatic right. He leaned one arm on the oak tree. "Smoking is a disgusting habit."

I adopted the same posture and smirked, "It won't kill me."

"I'm worried about you."

That made two of us. "Nothing for you to

worry about."

Total silence, but I knew Alec had more to say. He was measuring my temperament, evaluating everything about me the way most vampires check one another. I took another drag. The noise of the construction continued.

"The woman at Juliana's funeral."

Ah! Now we get to the real issue. I crossed my arms. She's dangerous to my heart. "Does none of your business mean anything to you anymore?" Talking with Alec was like wiping an open wound with sandpaper.

"You smell like sex."

"I should hope so."

"What happened to Brittany?" Alec pressed.

"We broke up."

Alec smiled but the light didn't meet his eyes. My brother could be creepy at times. Since when did being Radu Wulf's sons guarantee lightheartedness.

"You moved on quickly."

"We had an open relationship." I didn't want to date a drug addict.

"Your new woman is human," Alec said.

"And telepath, no less."

"Be careful, Daedalus. Wait?" He stopped then whirled around. "Who Am I talking with? Don't let her find out about us."

I pulled the cigarette out of my mouth and

pressed the butt on the inside of my palm. I wrinkled my nose at the acrid smell of my flesh burning. The searing pain of my flesh burning hardly fazed me. Calmed and myself again, I stood toe to toe with Alec. "And what if I tell her everything?"

"Either you change her or..."

"Are you threatening me?"

"What if I am?"

"King means control freak for you." I took out another cigarette and lit it. Both of his eyebrows lifted. "When you see me you think you see a whimpering sap."

"You don't know who she is."

"I know exactly who she is. I've glimpsed inside her soul." As I took her mercifully. I'm a certified piece of shit.

I caught Alec's cool, knowing stare. He wasn't bothering to hide his perusal of my thoughts.

Evenly I said to him, "Don't give me a reason to forget you're the King of Vampires."

"So you do care about her?"

"I've dated human women in the past. What is so special about this one that you have to warn me?"

"I watched the two of you standing under your umbrella after the funeral. You seemed...involved."

"That night, when we were preparing to find

Juliana, Ilida's thoughts called out to me."

"How? You're one of the strongest psychics I know. How did she break through your defenses?"

"She's a stronger telepath than I. Maybe stronger than you."

"You don't think this was a trap?"

"For some cosmic reason my thoughts broke through her mental defenses. Ilida suffers from psychic leaks now—for a long time probably. We haven't been able to shake each other since."

"Sounds like you have a psychic connection to her."

It wasn't a question. Alec knew well the torture of psychically linking to someone. Except, Alec wanted it and has it with Tania. I didn't want this link with Ilida, ever.

"She should be watched," Alec demanded.

"For what? She's harmless."

"Your judgment is clouded."

"My judgment is never clouded. You know that."

"Sex and clear thinking never mix," Alec said.

I smiled wryly at him, "I'm inclined to disagree. I've always been able to think clearly after a good fuck."

"Too much information," Tania said as her cheeks darkened. She walked to Alec and wrapped her arm around his waist.



At times, I envy Alec. He's so happy and I'm not. There is something wrong with my picture.

"I think she's so sweet," Tania said.

"Where one is the other isn't too far behind."

"You're taking this too lightly."

"Ease up, Alec. I'm not the little brother you pretend to think I am."

"Either change her or..."

"I don't give two shits that you're the King of Vampires, Alec. Threaten someone I care about again and I'll shove my foot so far up your ass..."

"Whoa! What is with you two? She's just a woman."

"There really is only one way to find out isn't there?"

Before I could probe Alec, my cell phone rang. "Daedalus! It was Weesal calling with the information I asked for. "Well?"

"I know where the Jacquerie is nesting."

"Meet me at the Swollen Tit in two hours."

"I... risked my considerable ass for you." His voice high and cracking. "Would you um, um up the price?"

They didn't call him the Weesal for nothing. "You get what we agreed on." I flipped the phone closed, placed it in my pocket.

"Who was that?"

"My source," I said smiling to myself.

"You found the Jacquerie's hide out?" Tania

asked, hopeful. Her smile lit up her face.

"I'm going to the Swollen Tit to get the info."

"The Swollen Tit? Oh that's so gross, Daedalus," Tania said.

"I'm going with you," Alec said.

"The King of Vampires at a nude bar for Noseferatus? Keep your blue blood ass at home."

"Amen, to that!" Tania had her hands on her hips displaying her legendary attitude.

Time to go.

A laugh threatened to burst out of me. I kept it in as I walked away from the *happy* couple. "I'll give you two a report later.

\* \* \* \*

I parked two doors away from the Swollen Tit. The usual stench assaulted me before I approached the door. The bouncer, well and on his feet again, opened the door for me. "Thank you."

The usual cacophony of whooping, raucous laughter, hey babies and moaning greeted me as I entered. Then the music stopped. One stripper fell off the pole. Another stripper giving lap dances fell on her customer's chest. Glass broke. Curses vibrated off the walls.

The room went silent.

The bowlegged owner with the Scottish accent

waddled over to me. "Laddie, not expecting a row tonight."

"No brawls tonight. I'm looking for Weesal."

The bartender pointed to the curtained partition.

"Thank you."

As I pulled the curtain back the music started again and the whooping resumed. I closed the curtain behind me. The darkened hall housed seats that Nosferatus occupied. They sat in front of booths where strippers gyrated, swung their hips, opened and closed their legs. The scent of bodily fluids overwhelmed my nose.

As I walked in, the Nosferatus, sensing who I was, ran out of the back room.

Weesal sat in the far back in front of the last booth. His bald, vein-covered head bent back exposing his Adam's apple; his cupped hand rose then lowered. There was only one way to get his attention.

I kicked his chair. It flew against the wall. Weesal fell on his knees then moved back to his ass. I leaned down in front of the booth, tapped on the window. The stripper uncrossed her legs, giving me the view. "Take a break," I mouthed.

She blew me a kiss then pulled the blind down.

Weesal was still on the floor dazed and confused with his cock hanging out. What a nightmare. "My info, Weesal."

"Geez!" He backed up against the wall as I squatted in front of him. "Where is the Jacquerie?"

He fumbled, taking the cigarettes out of his pocket. I promised I wouldn't smoke again for another week. Damn!

Weesal's hands shook as he tapped the package of Marls on the side of his hand. He watched me with his white eyes. The cigarette peaked out. His hand shook and he kept missing his mouth. My brows must have dipped low, for he squealed then shoved the cigarette in his mouth. He fumbled in his pocket again for a lighter. Nosferatus aren't big on telekinesis.

He produced a lighter, covered the flame to protect it from draft. The flame lit his face in a small patch of orange illuminating the greenish-blue, criss-crossed veins on his face.

"Hurry up, Weesal."

He took a wobbly drag on his cigarette. "The Solarium Pharmaceutical Plant in Selden, Long Island. They like Manhattan clubs, too. They target teens." Blue smoke billowed out of his nostrils obscuring his face.

I took out the rest of the money I owed him. He took from them my hands and laughed smelling the bills.

I walked away holding my breath. I needed fresh air and daylight to burn off the stench, and total darkness to plan my attack on the Jacquerie. I

had a two-hour drive to Long Island and the first assembly of the Tyrian Guard ahead of me.

## Chapter Fifteen

Ilida infringed on my thoughts constantly.

It's been four nights since I've see her. I wanted. I wanted desperately what I could not have. We decided we weren't compatible. It was the right thing of course. Ilida is the sensible one, while I always want.

I made my calls to some of the members of the former Vrykolakas Clan—the members I knew who had the same ideals I had. They took the Intelligence Dossier test I developed for entry into the Tyrian Guard.

I hired Gauge to be the Weaponry master. He could make weapons out of anything. Since I apprised him of Terra's acidic blood, he told me he'd work on something to counteract it.

I didn't expect Gauge to be at this meeting. He doesn't do groups. My communications expert, Jared Corrinthos, is a wiz with computers. And last, but not least, Barry Chen, my most important right hand man, will be the Strategist/ Expeditor.

If I'm killed, he takes over.

I sat on the edge of the circular desk waiting for Corrinthos and Barry Chen to meet me.

They came in dressed head to toe in black. Uniforms were similar to mine, except I added spikes to my wrist guards.

Corrinthos, a swarthy Hispanic male with dark eyes and a gray wavy streak on the left side of his head, sat down to my left. Barry Chen, a towering, Chinese- American with hazel eyes and cropped spiky black hair, sat to my right.

What would Ilida think of me in charge of a team of assassins? I can't go one minute without mentioning her name or thinking about her.

Corrinthos, Barry Chen and I contacted each other in telepathic code. Vampires and telepaths have a nasty habit of eavesdropping, so being overly paranoid was imperative in this case.

"How are the uniforms?"

"Tight," Barry Chen said.

"Use powder. Now that you all know each other, I have something to throw in your laps: Shepherds Alcohol /Substance Abuse Recovery Residents Center were placed under quarantine two and a half months ago.

"Are we virus hunters now?" Barry Chen smirked.

"Don't joke. We might have to start searching for lost puppies next. The Tilly Drug and Alcohol

Abuse Recovery Home, Shepherds' rival, has taken in half of Shepherds' residents."

"I heard about that. The CDC couldn't figure out what the virus was or its origins. They had to shut the place down."

"I think it was a new strain of the Haemo virus."

"A new strain?"

"It isn't a new strain. Terra Escalante the leader of the Jacquerie developed the Red Queen drug that's circulating the clubs and streets of New York City. She is a biochemist and did something to her blood to make it toxic."

"Red Queen?"

"Right. She's been making Zombies with the drug from humans and vampires."

"What does that have to do with Shepherds and Tilly?"

"I became the unofficial guardian of a teenager who was from Shepherd House. He's now at Tilly. He broke into my home high on Red Queen."

"Terra is making zombies from teens already addicted to drugs?"

"Tilly House is next."

"Then you'll need these."

"Gauge?"

He walked into the conference room sporting a shortened haircut. He placed a huge case on the table in front of me, opened it revealing a slick



looking gun with a cache of bullets. I picked up one bullet. A white liquid flowed in the casing. "What is this?"

"That is the base that will neutralize zombie blood."

I crossed my arms marveling at Gauge's inventive style with weapons. "It looks like milk."

"That's because it is."

"Milk a cow and our troubles are over?"

"That simple, Daedalus."

"I have a feeling Terra will keep going after the ones I care about. You should keep a low profile." I couldn't resist the taunt on my tongue. "Not that you don't."

Gauge grunted. "Your pretty little friend might be next."

"Daedalus has another girlfriend?" Corrinthos said, sounding excessively interested in my life. They all could smell her on my skin. Vrykolakas were trained to sniff out females. Barry Chen kept his mouth shut, but Corrinthos is a Vrykolakas and still thinks sharing women is the norm.

"She's none of your business, Corrinthos."

"Knowing you, she must be a hot piece of ass."

"Knowing me if we continue on this vein I'll rip your throat out."

"I wouldn't dream of taking your trophy doll away."

"Good."

"Do *you* like the prototype?"

It seemed more and more that Ilida might be in danger, not immediate but it loomed in the background.

"Follow me and I'll test them out," I said to Gauge.

All of us descended to the basement where the dojo and firing range is.

I pressed a button, and then stood with my arms out holding the gun. It was heavy metal. I squeezed rounds off, hitting the target with relative ease.

"You're good."

"Thank you, Barry." Gauge evaluated the holes in the target paper. "I'll take three hundred of these."

"Coming up," Gauge said.

"Any questions?" I said to Chen and Corrinthos. "No? See you later."

"Where are you off too?"

"Where do you think, Gauge?"

\* \* \* \*

Why was I here in Park Slope of all places? I promised myself I'd have limited contact with Ilida. I seem unable to keep that promise. I jumped from rooftop to rooftop, flipping in somersaults to ease the thud of my landing. I avoided the patches

of ice on the roofs.

Stealth was everything to a Ninja. When you hunted prey, you hunted silently. I wasn't out to kill my prey. I only wanted to watch her.

I landed on her rooftop, sought out her thoughts. It was so easy. She was so unpracticed in using her telepathy she didn't realize I was near. Her psychic signature was so strong that it sent heat to my cock as I climbed down the fire escape. The trees were bare and didn't provide coverage, but I was clothed in solid black and almost invisible. Not even my great size would be apparent to an onlooker. I grabbed hold of the wrought iron handrail, flipped around and landed on her fire escape soundlessly. I sat in a classic Spiderman pose on the edge of the fire escape.

Ilida was sitting at her small desk typing on her laptop. Her right side faced me. Her eyebrows turned down in a frown. She was concentrating on writing her report on Mike.

She stopped typing, shook her head, and began again. I sensed pain in her shoulders. Her muscles were tense with it. I looked down shaking his head. I wanted to touch her neck, massage the tenseness out of her shoulders. Lull her to into a relaxed mode.

I couldn't resist. I stole into her mind cloaked from her consciousness eased the tense muscles in her shoulders. She stopped typing, touched her

neck and shoulders.

My cock hardened as he watched her touch her herself. It was innocent purely innocent but as she pressed and massaged herself I touched her in her mind. She blew out a breath and resumed typing.

I wanted more.

Her dark amber hair pulled up in a bushy ponytail. She wore a sleeveless top with matching pants. Her dark mustard colored skin exposed. She was braless.

Her finger glided across the keyboard and. With a flourish, she pressed one key then leaned back. The whirring of the printer caught my attention. She would have to bend down to get her printed-paper. She twisted her waist towards him and reached down to get something. The movement caused her breasts to lean to one side. Her top gaped open giving him a view of the valley between her breasts. I imagined capturing one globe and sucking her nipple. Her nipple closest to me grew taught and pushed the fabric of her top out.

She stopped typing again and clutched her breasts caressing her nipples.

I wanted more.

Instead, she surprised me. In her mind she me in front of her. I sat on her desk caressing her nipples, rolling it between my fingers. Shivers went through my body echoed in hers. I grasped

the bar of the wrought iron fire escape to steady himself.

I was caught like a fish in an angler's net. I couldn't pull out of her mind as she went even further. Her hands traveled down in her pants. Her pubis hair a mass of tight-coiled curls. She lightly rubbed her clitoris back and forth. It moistened, fluttered. Her womb contracted. An invisible hand caressed the head of his cock. I smelled her arousal. Through her, I caressed her smooth, wet button. It glided over my fingers. My cock engorged with blood bulged until I felt it would explode from its leather confines.

I took a deep breath, commanded my fingernails to grow, and jumped on the wall next to her window. I grasped the bricks and climbed up. I wrapped my arm around the roof ledge and jumped over, landing on my feet, not so gracefully this time.

I craved sex, wanted her, but she needed my protection more.

## Chapter Sixteen

Wall-to-wall people walked in opposite directions at varying degrees of speed. Two men played guitars and sang Beatles' songs, wearing the sixties Beatles-inspired wigs. Ilida bent down and placed bills in their guitar cases while other passengers walked past pretending not to notice them.

I couldn't ignore the smell of urine, human feces and mold around me. Oh, the joys of smelling a subway station. My lungs threatened to close on me. I concentrated and forced my mind to think of pleasant scents. I always loved the smell of roses.

We were supposed to meet tonight, but I got a tip that she might be in danger. It started as feeling then I got confirmation.

Ilida has an easy gait, with a slight limp. Her long goose down, off-white coat did nothing to hide her curves. I'm an ass vamp and Greek by birth. I love a voluptuous woman. Ilida has

curves. The fluorescent lighting made her coat look green. It turned everyone a bad shade of green. She made her way to the platform and I followed.

It was rush hour and the subway platform was crowded. She stood towards the front - too close to the yellow-striped edge for my comfort. I'll remind her later about it.

I registered various smells from the humans around me: perfume, cologne, rancid body odor, dirty sneakers, Jock sweat, and nine-to-five sweat attacked my nose. On top of those mellifluous notes lay the scent of roses. Ilida smelled like fresh-cut roses.

I felt the tenseness in the air from her. She peered around her. Her shoulders hunched somewhat. She probably sensed me. Something was in the stale, dank air of the subway station, and it smelled like decaying flesh.

Wildly, I peered around the platform. He or it was here, waiting to strike at Ilida or me. Discreetly, I held the handle of my gun and waited. The screeching of the train in the tunnel made everyone stand straighter—on alert. Passengers moved to the front of the platform. The train rolled into the station, heralded by a gust of wind.

It was in front of me—too close to Ilida. It couldn't sense my presence. I have superior

shielding skills. Four zombies were thirty feet on a diagonal to my left. Keeping my mind blank, I pushed my way to Ilida. Waiting passengers grumbled at my rudeness. A little girl behind me cried, asking for her dolly she'd lost.

The train's twin headlights illuminated the tunnel walls as it pulled into the station. The zombie reached its hands down. I sprung yelling at everyone to duck. I knocked the zombie away from Ilida, grabbed her arm, and pulled her away from the edge and death.

She struggled against my grasp not looking up to see who was pulling her. We jumped over the ducking bodies on the platform. Shots rang out over our heads.

"What the — Daedalus?"

"Come on!" I pulled her against one of the many metal columns supporting the roof of the station. I had a view of the staircase. I pulled out three clips of ammo and handed them to her. "Hold this! Get down!"

Thugs in black appeared, firing bullets.

Terra used anti coagulant bullets. Deadly for vampires, but thanks to Gauge I had my own deadly weapon, bullets that will neutralize zombies, Terra, and her thugs' acidic blood.

"Clip!"

Ilida's shaking hands handed it to me. I shoved it in, swung around, and aimed at one. He ducked,



missing one of my bullets then ran as I kept shooting. I missed him again. Shit! Her thugs continued to shoot. I shot back, backing up to Ilida. I'll get them soon enough.

I felt coolness on my leg. I ducked down and behind the column. Ilida was shielding the crying girl. Where was her mother?

I ran over to them shielding them from the gunshots. "Don't ever do that again!"

One zombie collapsed as blood spurted from its head.

"I couldn't leave her to get shot."

"Two clips." She handed them to me. Quickly, I injected the clips. With both guns loaded, I fired, hitting all three Jacquerie. Their skin turned to milky white ash.

"Above my right left ankle."

She handed me the gun. I flipped it up, catching it around the handle and hooking the trigger.

"I think the police are coming. You can tell them what happened."

"Can't do it."

Running footsteps made us look up. A woman with short brown hair parted on the side, tears in her eyes and a frantic heartbeat ran towards us. "Jill?"

"Is that your mother?" I asked her.

The little girl nodded. Her tear-streaked face and brown eyes bright with fear reminded me of

Juliana's. "Go to your mother."

The woman ran to her daughter, looked at us, then ran away, clutching the girl tightly in her arms.

"Why can't you tell the police?"

"This will feel disorienting."

"What?"

Five cops ran up to us holding guns. "Halt! You're under arrest."

I didn't bother to answer. I pushed Ilida's neck to the left side, pushed down her coat collar, found a nice patch of skin and bit down. I commanded my body and hers to burst into a flock of bats. The officers shot at us in confusion. We simply flew up the staircase away from them.

We landed on the roof of her walkup building some time later. The bats blended to human form. That should have been more difficult to do. Ideally, you need to give a human three bites and exchange blood to make one transform. I licked her neck to seal my bite marks closed. It was something I'd deal with later. I had to get her into her apartment.

I carried her up the second staircase. I traversed my way to the fifth floor. Using telekinesis, I unlocked her door. The latch clicked open the door swung in without benefit of keys or any physical movement. Shutting the door, I marveled at the décor in her apartment. It was cozy with

stripes and flowers. Very feminine, spring like, but not saccharine. She has taste.

She was still unconscious. It was an amazing feat not performed by many. If she weren't afraid of the paranormal, she would be proud of herself. I tugged off her coat and hung it up on the brass coat rack next to the front door. I pulled her hat off next. Her hair was pulled up in a bushy, wavy ponytail. Waves shown at her temples.

Her couch was covered in a blue, white, and yellow striped slipcover. Winter isn't her favorite season I suppose. On the side table, next to her couch, sat two pictures. A man, tall with salt and pepper afro and an earring. Interesting. Her father. She loves her father. Another picture. A younger man, tall good-looking with deep, dark skin. Her brother, I hope. I studied the younger man's face. His eyes reminded me of Ilida's-that curious liquid brown. He must be her brother. I continued to study his picture wondering why I cared if he was her brother or not. I placed it back on the side table in the same position.

Her energy was in every object. There was another energy here as well. She must have a roommate. There wasn't a scent of sex in the air, so it must be female.

I had to make some calls; cover our asses after that shoot out. I dialed the first number I always call when there's clean up needed.

"Detective Matt Rodriguez."

"I'm sure you heard."

"The Jacquerie."

"That's right. I need the security tapes from the subway station. Five officers saw us."

"I hate sweeping their minds."

I rubbed my forehead, fatigue trying its best to slow me down. I know the position I placed Matt in, but I wouldn't have handled it any other way. "I'll meet you tomorrow for the tapes."

"Later."

I pressed "Send," flipped my phone closed. In my body, I felt her shift. It's hard to explain—it's like feeling someone come alive throughout your bones, nerves, and flesh. Her consciousness awakened, making my brain tingle

I sat on the edge of her couch, held her shoulders as her eyelashes fluttered. It was innocent. It made me harden anyway. "Wh—what happened?"

"Easy, Illy."

*Easy? Was he kidding?*

The last thing she remembered was me shooting at men. They shot back and they had pale faces. She recollected the smell fish. Someone must have had a bag of fish from the market. She remembered too much. I have to be slick about this or she'll remember me hypnotizing her. I have a slim, two-to-one chance of this working.

As she tried to sit up her mind teetered and tilted. "The room is spinning."

"Lay back down. You're home."

I pushed her back gently against the throw pillows.

Her thin brows arched and her eyes glittered with fear. "I have to ask you again are you FBI?"

"I'm the leader of a clandestine law enforcement agency. That's all I can tell you."

Ilida scratched her head, confusion etched in the creases on her forehead. She pulled the ponytail free then rubbed her hair, loosening the coiled curls. "This law enforcement agency is so secret that the NYPD doesn't know about you?"

I merely nodded my head. Either she would figure it out on her own, or I'd tell her. I She will turn me away if I do. She hates being psychic. She'll hate me being a vampire. It's a no-win situation, as usual.

"What happened back there?"

I rubbed my five o'clock shadow realizing I'd created this mess. "Someone wanted you dead."

"Why? What the hell did I do?"

"It's not what you did." She wouldn't hurt a fly. "It's who you hang out with. Me!"

At that ominous statement, her heartbeat thundered in my ears reverberated in my chest. Precious, hot blood pumped through her veins. The outline of her veins in neon lights showed

through her skin. I turned away hoping she didn't see my red eyes.

"Who were they?"

"The same people who killed my daughter. The Jacquerie."

"The Jacquerie," she repeated. "But they didn't look human. I—no, they looked like zombies?"

She covered her face with her hands. With my legs shaking, I went to her, held her, squeezed and caressed her shoulders. How comforting it was for me to touch her again. "I think you're too much in shock to remember the details accurately."

"Maybe you're right. Are they a gang?"

"They're drug dealers."

"Did you interrupt their drug shipment? Is that why they went after your daughter?"

"They want power. I'm in their way."

She considered what I said. It wasn't much. I danced around the truth, as all vampires must do, until they can trust. Deep down I knew I could trust her if I let myself. Before I do, I want definitive proof.

She sat up again and I helped, lifting her head and shoulders off the throw pillows. Her hair was like soft yarn in my hands. "You have to pack a bag and come home with me."

"What? No, no way. No how. I can stay at my father's house."

"And bring the danger to him?"

"I don't know what's going on, but I'm staying here. I'll go to the police and tell them what happened. I won't mention your name. I mean, shoot outs in the subway station...and that little girl..."

"Calm down and think. They followed you. Someone told them where you were."

"I don't tell anyone except my roommate. She's not some assassin. She's a recreational therapist with an over-active sex drive."

"I followed them as they followed you."

"You followed me?"

"This is too much for you now. Don't remember anything about what happened."

"Stop it! I don't need hypnotizing." She took deep breaths closed her eyes tight then opened them breathing evenly and slowly through pursed lips. "I'm okay."

"You are a strong woman."

"Yes I am and I'm going to survive this. You are going to the police and report what happened. And..."

"I don't think so, Ilida." I took off my shoes and began unbuttoning my shirt.

"What are you doing?"

"Making myself comfortable," I said as I took the shirt off, pulling my arms out of the sleeves, careful to keep facing her.

"Why?"

"I'm staying with you."

"No, you're not!" she said holding her hands up in a halting manner. "I don't know what you're mixed up in, but you can't stay here."

I dropped the shirt on the couch behind me then slowly pulled the notch out of my belt buckle. "I'm taking control of this, and you if I have to."

"I don't like that look in your eyes."

"Then you know I'm not kidding. I'm staying here, at least until tomorrow morning," I said then unzipped my pants to the middle of the placket.

She stood there, fixed her sweater, pushed her shoulders back, and wiped her nose on the back of her hand. Her eyes riveted to my partially unzipped pants. I was tempted to... I diverted my thoughts to her safety.

She knew I was right, and she didn't want to be alone. The 'staying away from each other' idea wasn't working.

"It's a sofa bed. It's comfy." She walked away. Her hips swinging right to left in her skirt. Her door creaked open. The scraping of wood against wood meant drawers opened and closed. A curse, then I heard a closet door opening. Fabric shuffled about, and then the balls of her feet fell lightly on the hardwood floors. She appeared much calmer.

"I think this might fit you. You're super tall though. This is a little short."



"Thank you." I held it up. Saw the front placket. Why did I think she was untouched? She's beautiful, sweet... maybe too sweet. No one is that nice anymore, but she'd shielded that little girl in the station. She's the angel, and I'm the classic troublemaker.

"Men's pajamas?"

"A leftover from my ex boyfriend."

"And you kept them?"

"It wasn't out of sentimentality. I didn't remember I had them until now." Ilida cleared her throat as she walked past me. She pulled the shades down. "I'll let you get comfortable."

She disappeared again. The swooshing sound of fabric again. She's taking off her clothing. Something I should continue doing. I unbuttoned my pants, let them fall the floor and pulled off my socks. Did the usual strip down.

The sound of running water got my attention. She was taking a shower. A slosh of water? She felt the temperature of it.

It was obscenely easy to read her thoughts. Ilida wants me. I want her, but I don't quite trust her yet. There was one way to get the truth out of someone. Good fucks made loose lips. So does pain, but that's my last resort.

\* \* \* \*

A Greek God was taking off his clothes in her living room.

*He's probably hungry. Most men eat like there's no tomorrow. He's tall and has to eat to keep himself going. Okay, okay. I'll order Chinese. Everyone likes Chinese food.*

Before she could order food she had to get out of *her* work clothes. She did and took a shower then donned gray, drawstring, lounge pants and a yellow T-shirt.

She pulled the covered elastic band off her head releasing the ponytail and combed it out. After smoothing her hair and gathering it tight, she twisted it making a tiny chignon in the back of her neck.

It took her less than fifteen minutes. She padded out of her bedroom and around the corner as if it was an ordinary night. "Are you... hungry?"

*Oh Lordy, Lordy.* He faced the window as he folded his striped black and gray shirt up. Smooth skin stretched over impossibly sculpted muscles. A stylized bat tattoo covered his left bicep. The pajama pants she'd given him hung dangerously low on his hips.

He gave her his attention. His eyebrow arched. "Not now."

"Are you sure? You should eat something. I have Chinese take-out menus, pizza? There's a Greek restaurant on Adams Street."

He held his left arm, looking vulnerable,

gorgeous. The man she wanted stood in the middle of her living room half-naked. "You order something."

"You don't want Chinese? Okay, how about Japanese. Narabuki has good food and they deliver pretty quick. Or how about..."

"I'm not hungry for food, Illy."

She blinked trying to guess what he hinted at. Before she could step back, he was in front of her and way too close.

She froze as his nose and mouth came dangerously close to her neck, the dip of her halter tank top.

"You're shivering."

She couldn't talk. Her breath caught in her throat. The wetness between her legs was unbelievable. His nose stopped right where her neck tingled. He inhaled her. "What are you doing?"

"I think you know," he said smoothly, with a tinge of danger in his voice.

"I—I"

"I what?"

She couldn't think. His hands smoothed her butt. Her pajamas were useless against the heat of his hands. She liked having her butt rubbed.

What other fantasies did he mine from her thoughts? He lowered his head. Her left nipple, the most sensitive, he sucked through her tank

top. She closed her eyes and lost herself in the sensation.

Then the impossible. His hands cupped her naked butt. She gasped from the touch of his rough hands.

"I have ways of making you talk, Ilida."

"W—what? I..."

She felt weightless and found herself held tightly and moved to her bedroom. He dripped her on the bed unceremoniously, lifted her top and captured her nipple in his mouth. She arched her back moaning loudly.

"You like this, don't you?"

"Yes," she breathed out.

"Want more?"

"Yes!"

He sucked on her nipple, nipping it, pulling it between his teeth. While he rolled her other nipple between his nimble fingers. She grabbed anything within reach of her hands. The comforter bunched in her fists.

It was wild the way he overtook her and had her moaning on her back with abandon. He let go of her nipple, continued to roll the other between his fingers. He kissed the valley between her breasts, licked the underswell of her breasts, and kissed a trail to her belly button. He licked her there. She jumped from the strange numb sensation of his tongue there.

He hooked the waistband of her pajamas, tugged it down over her hips, pulled it off her legs.

"Oh how sweet—lace panties. We won't be needing them," his voice dripped with disdain as her panties dripped with arousal. He twirled them around his finger then tossed them away like trash.

"I have ways of making you talk, Ilida," he repeated.

"I-I don't under—"

"You understand all too well. That is the problem."

He cupped her heavy, swollen breasts in his hands. He let go then pulled her tank over her head and threw that away as well. She didn't care. She watched his eyes. They were red then blue then black.

He bent down and what a glorious display of muscle that was. His body rippled with it. She reached out and traced the line that ran from his pectorals to below the waistband of his pajamas.

He sucked in his breath and pinned her down again. "Don't move."

She listened, watching him as he stared at her breasts. He twisted her pajama pant making a long single rope, grabbed her wrist.

"Daedalus?"

He said nothing and she couldn't break his grip.

It was like iron. For the second time that night she was afraid of him and he didn't care. He wrapped it around her wrist three times, tied it, then tied the other end around one of the wooden vertical bars of her headboard.

She was naked, with her hands tied. He opened her legs lowered his head. His breath danced on her inner thighs. His fingers raked through hairy mound barely touching her clit. His hands smoothed them making her jump.

"What is your name?"

"You know my name."

"I don't know shit when it comes to you." he lowered his head more. She stiffened as his breath abraded her clitoris. "What is your name?"

"Ilida Davis."

His hot tongue gave her a quick lick. She gasped.

"Where were you born?"

"Long Island, New York," she said, breathless.

He pinched her clitoris. She gasped at the sudden pain and the quivering in her body.

"Specifics, Ilida."

"Baldwin, Long Island, New York."

"Very Good. Who are you parents?"

She hesitated. As barbaric as this was, she wanted more. He was torturing her sexually and she wanted... more.

"Ilida?" His finger traced the opening of her

vagina. Her hips gyrated following his fingers. "I hate to wait for answers."

"Hortensia and Franklyn Davis."

Another lick and this time he sucked down running his tongue along her folds.

"Do you know Terra?"

"No."

"I almost believe you."

He sucked her clitoris making her jump. Her thighs clamped on his head. Viscously he pulled them open exposing her to the air. He flicked her clitoris again.

Her arousal coated his five o'clock shadow. He watched, then licked his over-ripe upper lip, and then stood up.

"Scarves?"

She didn't answer him. She wasn't going to give him the satisfaction, even though her mind came up with an image of where they were.

He smiled as he got up and found the scarves hanging on the inside of her closet door. "Don't forget I can read your nasty thoughts."

He plucked four scarves from the closet, closed the door behind him, and then he crawled on the bed over her.

"No," she cried.

He laughed. "Token resistance turns me on," he growled, as he tied two scarves together. He grasped her ankle and tied the scarf around it then

tied it around the wooden post of the footboard. He did the same with the other, then he sucked her again, hungrily, like he was starving for her juices.

His tongue wouldn't let up. It teased her, slithering over her. Her body convulsed, stiffened. He snatched her hips, pulled her to him. He buried his face in her as she came.

Her orgasm lingered—took forever to ride itself out. She lay there limp. Her body felt as if she'd run a marathon.

He pinned her with his hard gaze. "Are you telling me the truth?"

"You know I am."

He lay across the bed, his hands between her legs. He propped his head on her knee. "Telepaths can manipulate minds." He kissed her kneecap as he lazily rubbed her sensitized clitoris. "Make you see things that aren't there. Make you hear things. Are you mentally fucking with me?"

"No," she moaned.

"Would you like me to *fuck* you?"

"Yes," she begged.

His hand cupped her. She moved against him, wanting him. He shoved his fingers inside her. Her walls closed around him. In and out he pumped her. She moved against his fingers. Her hips rose off the bed.

"Your delicious tits are bouncing," he said, as



he bent over her and seized her nipple in his mouth.

Beams of pleasure made a triangle from her breast to her vagina and back. Her left neglected nipple tingled and swelled. She was lost, not caring what he did anymore. In the morning, she'd curse herself but for now she wanted him and that's all that mattered to her.

One last orgasm wrung out of her. He pulled his hand out of her, licked his fingers one by one, watching her as she watched him. Afterwards he untied one ankle.

"Don't kick me."

She didn't have the strength to do anything, but she couldn't resist baiting him. "And what If I do?"

"Then I'll have to teach you a not-so-nice lesson."

"What is your problem?"

"I needed to know."

"All you had to do was ask."

"Don't come off indignant. You released your tension."

"You can be a son of a bitch sometimes."

"I know."

From that look he gave her she believed him. He leaned over her and she got a tantalizing view of his nipples. They were dark brown and taut. He was breathing heavily and she could hear... a

roaring in her ears. Compelled, she darted her tongue against him feeling the nubs.

He shuddered, hissed in his breath. "Stop or I'll flip you on your back."

"I won't hurt you, you know."

She ignored him wanting the feel of him in her mouth. Once her hands were free, she grasped his waist kissed his nipples.

She was too late to deflect his hands. He held down her arms pinning her to the bed. His nose inches from hers.

"You are hardheaded."

"You can trust me with your heart."

He said nothing in response, just gazed in her eyes with a hard, merciless stare.

## Chapter Seventeen

“Trust is hard to come by.”

I’m too close, too ready to take her every which way I can. I bit her already. If I bite her again she’ll know. She’s not Maiko, not yet. She could turn on me like Maiko had. I don’t think I could survive that twice.

“I like to think I’m easy to trust.”

“First you want me then you want to stay away from me. Which is it?”

“You wanted to try bondage.”

“It was light bondage compared to what I’ve done in the past.”

I’m a bastard. I know it. I’ve always known it. I’m hard to get along with. I kill too easily and I loved too readily — and end up fucking that up, too. I won’t do it to myself again, not even for Ilida. But I couldn’t let her go. Her nipples...with every breath her nipples rubbed my chest.

“You feel it too, don’t you?” she said, as she slid her hands under the waistband and felt my raging

cock.

"I feel my cock bursting through these pajama pants."

She knows too much, seen too much. I should kill her. That would make Alec the happiest vampire on earth. I'm not into making others happy and I hate rules. She's staying alive. "I'm going," I said, as I jumped off her bed.

"Why are you leaving?"

"This isn't good for either one of us."

She reached out to me and I felt myself weakening. What I wanted was to lay down with her again, drive into her, force her to her knees, and be pulled into her deeper and deeper. This had to stop. There were no walls between us now.

She shuffled out of bed forgetting her nakedness. I turned my back to her not wanting to look, but finding my head and eyes had a mind of their own. I turned around.

Behind me, I could hear her climbing into her wrinkled pajamas. The air vibrating around me changed as I felt her bend down. Fabric rubbed against her skin. She grimaced at the sight of her torn up bra and panties.

I couldn't move. My feet wouldn't listen. She opened drawers, took out...a T-shirt, and pulled it down over her head. Her footsteps came closer, closer.

"We need to talk this out."

"We need to work hard staying away from each other."

"Someone hurt you in the past."

"Yes."

"Who?"

"My first wife. She thought I was a freak."

"You aren't a freak."

"But you want to stay away from me because I remind you that you're different. Same damn thing."

"Maybe I was wrong."

"You need to convince me."

Her voice, a powerful force that lured me, and I struggled like a beached whale on dry land against it. The air next to my arm vibrated. She was behind me, about to touch me. I spun around, held my hand up stopping her. "For God's sake don't!"

She froze, dropped her hands. Her lips swollen. The look of confusion and replete showed clearly on her face then she asked, "Would you please tell me what I did wrong?"

"You could never do anything wrong." *You're perfect.* "If I touch you I'll be inside you again. It will be raw. I can't afford that, now or ever."

"I don't know why I can't stay away from you."

I reached out to Ilida aiming for her cheeks. To touch her... I moved my hand behind my back. "You need to eat. Preferably meat."

Slowly, I walked into the living room located my clothes. I'd been with other women, other vampiresses in the past. I've had many sexual encounters too many to count, but never had I wanted a woman like a... drug. Brittany with all her fire and beauty never tempted me with one touch.

"That's a strange segue."

"Have you ever wanted something so bad you'd give your left side for it than when you got it you were afraid of it? Well, that's me."

"I don't understand."

"You bring out feelings in me I don't ever want to deal with." She could break down my defenses. I've seen and been through too much already to let that happen.

"I'm sending you mixed signals."

"You have psychic hang-ups you need to deal with."

"It's not a hang..."

I heard it first; the unmistakable key in the lock. The door swung open. We met Ilida's roommate's surprised expression. She walked into the apartment. Her dark brown eyes went from Ilida then to the floor. Oh, shit! Ilida's torn underwear.

"Hello," she said walking in like an officer ready to inspect barracks. Her anger beat off her.

"Beverly. You're home."

"I live here. He doesn't."

"Nice too meet you, too."

"Whoa, Beverly this is Daedalus. Daedalus this is Beverly my roommate."

"Hello," I said. She kept her hard eyes on me while I tucked in what was left of my shirt into my pants, lifted my coat off the coat hanger.

"Don't leave yet. I want to talk about this. Privately!"

She wouldn't leave. Beverly was determined to stay where she was and listen to our private conversation. She loves Ilida and doesn't want her to get hurt.

"Could we have some privacy please?" Ilida asked.

"Why? So he can get rough with you?" Beverly crossed her arms.

"That's not what happened and it's none of your business, Beverly."

Right, enough of this. With one thought, I froze time around us. The TV, Ilida's pit bull friend, the stove clock, microwave clock and the fridge stopped. The cars outside stopped moving. All except Ilida and myself.

She looked at me uncertain then glanced at the clock then at Beverly.

"Oh my God! What did you do?"

"Froze time."

"Are you showing off for my benefit?"

"I wanted to talk without Beverly going ape shit on me."

Ilida touched Beverly's arm. It was stiff. Beverly's full lips were frozen at a strange angle.

"Does she know? Can she hear us?"

"She won't remember what's been said. Your friend wants to kill me. So many assassins so little time."

"She's projecting. She has a boyfriend – difficult guy like you."

"We agreed to stay away from each other. Nothing is working."

"I started this."

"Yes, and we keep going around in circles. Lock your door behind me."

"Hey, what about you protecting me?"

I faced her as I slid my arm through the coat sleeve. "I didn't say I was leaving you unprotected," I said and almost faltered when I looked down at Ilida. She was in her bra and her half-fastened pajama pants. The taste of her nipples lingered in his mouth. I shut his eyes as I opened her front door. "Don't let anyone in. That includes me."

"What about Beverly."

"Don't you want some peace and quiet?"

"D'?"

Once I heard her lock click, I was satisfied and walked down the three flights of stairs. I couldn't



leave her alone. The threat was still out there waiting for a chance to strike. I opened my mind, unblocking telepathic signals and sought the one person I trusted with my life. Gauge.

*Daedalus?*

*I need your help, Gauge.*

*Just name it.*

I opened the front door dreading leaving her. *I need you to look after Ilida until morning.*

*Not hard. She's easy on the eyes.*

*And off limits to you.*

*Shouldn't you be doing this?*

*Something else has come up, Gauge.*

*Show me where she lives.*

\* \* \* \*

Ilida turned the dead bolt then bottom lock. She checked the door then Beverly moved her hand and continued her "I can't stand Rich men" rant. The oven clock and microwave beeped. She'd have to set the clocks again.

Beverly looked around her, confused. "Where is he?"

"He's gone."

"Obviously. He was just here."

"You were so into your rant that he gave up and left."

Beverly straightened her suit jacket then crossed her arms. "Good, my mouth chased him off."

“Uh-huh.”

Beverly pivoted around then marched away, talking to herself. Her bedroom door closed.

Ilida rested her weight against the counter, shocked by the power he displayed. At least he unfroze time. How much more was Daedalus hiding in that strange and powerful head of his?

## Chapter Eighteen

Alec stared out the window at the high-rise office building while he waited in the office of his good friend, werewolf and master detective of Canada, Horatio. They could have met in an unofficial capacity but he wanted Horatio to know it this was extremely important. The job needed to be done quickly and under the radar. Though Daedalus didn't use his psychic powers largely, he was extremely adept at utilizing them.

If Daedalus had paid attention, he would've known that he was out of the country, but Daedalus wasn't paying attention. Daedalus should have tracked him down at LaGuardia Airport for an explanation as to why and where he was going without the Queen. He should have demanded to know when he'd be back. Alec was sorely disappointed when Daedalus was nowhere near the airport.

Alec had a right to know whom Daedalus was

inviting into the camp. He was the King and had to protect the Kingdom at all cost. So why did he feel such nagging guilt?

Alec felt his brain tingle. It was the feeling he and all vampires got when other vampires and werewolves were near. He could see Horatio in his mind with his buttery face, handlebar mustache, and physique of a Roman gladiator walking down the hall towards the office.

The door opened behind Alec and he stood up, happy to see his old friend who'd brought him so much: Tania and Daedalus.

"Thank you for meeting me at such short notice, Horatio." He said holding his hand out to him. Horatio held it. They shook hands then hugged warmly.

Horatio was famous for giving bear hugs that could crack a human's ribs.

"It's been too long. How is Tania?"

"Tania is great. She sends you and Luisa her love. By the way, how is my 'little sister'?"

"She whipped our clan into shape. She's a good leader," he said with a sweeping arm motion.

"Please sit down."

Alec unbuttoned his suit jacket then settled into the grey, ergonomic chair. "Thank you."

"It sounded urgent on the phone."

"First, I want to thank you again for finding my brother."

"I know how it feels to be disconnected from your family." He stood up and made his way to the mini bar. "Want a drink? I have the best blood in Canada. Or would you prefer some meat chum."

"Blood, please." Alec crossed his legs. "A woman I'm suspicious about is seeing Daedalus."

Horatio stood in front of the mini bar pouring blood into a tumbler. "Does he know you want to investigate his woman?"

Alec could tell from Horatio's body language—the way his shoulders hung, and the slight movement of his eyebrows—that Horatio was uncomfortable. He was sensitive to it even though Horatio had his back turned to him. "He knows I don't trust her."

"What's her name?"

"Ilida Davis."

"Born in America?"

"In New York." Horatio handed him the glass of dark red life. "Thank you." Alec examined the rich color. "I don't know which Borough. She's African-American mixed with Caucasian. It's subtle but if you examine her features long enough you'll see it."

Horatio shook his head and whistled, drawing the sound out slowly. "Daedalus will be pissed off when you give him the file. He gives feral a new meaning." He pushed away from the desk and

walked to the small kitchen. "Mind if I eat something?"

"Your office. I can handle Daedalus's wrath." Alec watched Horatio take out a blue plastic container, lift the lid, and with tongs plucked out two-inch clumps of chicken innards. He snatched a clump of it with his teeth, chasing it down with water. "I've never known you to back away from investigating werewolves or vampires."

"You're brother has a rep for slowly demolishing anyone who gets in his business. You might be included in that."

Alec shook his head as he wandered over to the window staring at nothing in particular. He had a right to protect his family, even if that meant controlling whom they saw and when.

"You're messing with his heart, *Amigo*. That's dangerous."

"His feelings are irrelevant when his safety is at stake."

"What's going on with Daedalus?"

"A rival group of vampires killed his daughter," Alec said. Even then, Alec couldn't believe that the niece he barely knew was no longer around.

"How is he?"

"Whatever he's feeling he won't tell me or lean on me for support." Alec had to admit that deep fissure in his gut wasn't indigestion. He should

have been the first vampire Daedalus went to for help. Instead, he went to an outsider.

"You think this woman had something to do with it?"

"Possibly. She established a psychic connection with Daedalus without the aid of blood."

Daedalus never mentioned if he'd bitten Ilida or not. That's personal between vampires and their mates. *But what if Daedalus doesn't know he bit her? If that's the case then – no, Daedalus is on top of his game. Nothing could distract him not even grief for his daughter.*

"This Ilida Davis could find out sensitive things about you and the Kingdom."

"And tell the wrong person about us." The wrong person being vampire hunters. The Jacquerie and hunters on his plate were the last things he wanted. One problem at a time was all he'd asked for.

"Do you know where she works? Does she work?"

"She's a recreational therapist in Long Island."

"Interesting. I'll suss her out for you," Horatio said.

"Thank you. I'll keep your name out of it."

Horatio could take of himself. He was a werewolf smart, cunning, but he didn't have to draw him more into the storm between him and Daedalus. "Have you ever fought a vampire with twenty-five percent wolf in him and who can

morph into a large werebat?"

"Can't say that I have."

"I hope you won't ever."

\* \* \* \*

The next morning Ilida, readied herself to embark on her two-hour-long journey to Long Island. With keys jangling in her hand, she opened the door to a man leaning in the doorway. She jumped back.

Short black hair, high forehead, hooded hazel-brown eyes smiled at her. Olive skin and five o'clock shadow made her pause. Something about him reminded her of Daedalus. Maybe it's the olive skin. Ah, the lips. While Daedalus's upper lip had a pronounced yummy M shape, this guy had a longer version of it.

"We do look similar don't we?"

Then she remembered. It was Daedalus's brother Gauge. Another handsome psychic. She was surrounded by psychics. The very people she didn't want to be associated with. The idea ticked her off. *Can I have my normal boring life back, please?* Where it was safe, predictable and not filled with gorgeous men surrounded by mystery. Thanks to Daedalus, if she went back to plain old nice guys, she would be bored.

He filled up the doorway with his height—not



trying to come in, just standing there watching and waiting respectfully. He leaned on one leg, both hands clutched the doorframe. "So you are my protection?"

"That's right. Daedalus asked me to watch over you."

"Can I say I don't need protection?" I only want to see Daedalus, she wanted to say.

"The threat is real and Daedalus would kill me if I'd let you go to work alone. I'm Gauge, his twin brother," he said as he held out a long elegant hand.

Ilida took his offered hand and shook it. He had big calloused hands as if he'd been working with them all his life. "You don't look like him."

"We're paternal twins."

"My roommate should have protection, also."

"Taken care of."

"How?"

"Daedalus, of course."

So he thought of everything except that she wanted to be with him. He was keeping his end of the deal staying away from her. That is what she wanted after all, wasn't it? After she locked the door behind her, Gauge followed her down the stairs. His footsteps, she noted, didn't make a sound. He's like some panther or wolf, like Daedalus. This was becoming unbearable and she couldn't keep that high school question from

coming out. "Does Daedalus hate me?"

"He doesn't hate you. I don't know what happened with you two recently but I can assure you he doesn't hate you."

She couldn't feel him, not a tingle—nothing, and the result made her feel alone, like she was the last person on Earth. "Why don't I believe you?"

"I like you. Reading my thoughts would probably be better."

Daedalus talked about her. How much did he know?

"There isn't much he can hide from me."

She remembered him now. He'd held Juliana's body in his arms, but he was badly burned? Now he looked as if he'd never been in a burning building. "You were there when Juliana died."

"Daedalus told me you tried to warn my niece. For that you have my eternal gratitude."

His eyes softened towards her. Ilida had to shield herself from the sorrow there. "I'm sorry I was...too late," she said as he locked the front door.

"Juliana did what she wanted. She was uncontrollable so don't blame yourself for her death."

"You should be blaming me not consoling me."

"Would you rather I hate you for the rest of your life? Would that bring her back?"

“Y – you brothers are strange people.”

Gauge was as good as his word. He escorted her to Tilly House, and promised he would be there when she got off from work, but not before her nosey co-workers saw him.

Gauge made a quick exit at her urging and she fielded questions coming from them. She held them off, promising to fill them in at lunchtime. She had to make copies for the morning meeting. She was safe until Beverly cornered her in her office while she prepared for the residents’ forty-five minutes.

“Who was the hot, white chocolate?”

“He’s a... friend. Yep, just a friend.”

“Just a friend looked good.”

“You and Kwame are together,” she reminded her.

“I’m not dead. Tell me about your friend.”

“He’s Daedalus’s brother.” She didn’t know what to call Daedalus – her almost lover, her non-boyfriend. He’d balk at that label “boyfriend.” He didn’t want to be tied down. “Just a friend, that’s all.”

“Why did he bring you to work?”

“Why all the questions? I’m sure other men have brought me to work before.”

“Yeah but they weren’t white!”

“He’s Greek.”

“Okay, Miss Thing. He’s white with flavor,” she

stated making an 's' in the air with her finger.

Ilida burst out laughing at Beverly's nonsense. "Would you get out of here, please?"

Beverly gave a guttural laugh as she sauntered out of her office. "Oh, hey, did you bring your toothbrush for tonight?"

"What's tonight?" she slapped her forehead when it dawned on her. "Oh crap! I forgot."

"I'm going to get breakfast I'll get you a toothbrush."

"Thanks, Bev'. You seem to know my schedule better than I do."

"Someone has to remind you."

"Yeah, right."

Tonight Ilida had the misfortune of being the overnight counselor. She also had the misfortune of missing Daedalus—as much as she wanted to forget him, it wasn't working. He managed to penetrate every corner of her consciousness.

Four nights ago—they always met at night—they'd met for the last time. They'd disclosed they wanted different things out of a relationship. He wanted sex without attachments and Ilida wanted a relationship and sex with a normal non-psychic person. They'd made love, which probably wasn't the smartest thing to do. So why did she continue to feel it after four days. Why was she falling in love with him?

She checked her watch. Twelve on the dot. She

had to check all the residents to see if they were in their rooms, fast asleep. She tiptoed down the wooden stairs that creaked horribly no matter how light your step was. She opened the door to the first room on her left. Two girls, Mandy and Ricci, occupied it. They were sleeping. Mandy had kicked off her covers. Ilida tiptoed into the room, pulled the covers up, and tucked her in. Ricci snored. Smiling, Ilida closed the door behind her.

She checked the room to the right. Two boys occupied the room. They were sleeping. They were all in their beds, so far. She checked the last room on the floor. The room Mike and Tim occupied.

She steadied her hand and pushed the door open. Tim was in his bed sleeping. Mike...wasn't in his. She squatted down, bent over to peer under his bed. No Mike. "Shit!"

She pulled up the shade and saw Mike jumping over shrubs, running like a criminal on *Cops*. After hurriedly telling Sally what happened, she left her in charge then ran out of Tilly to her car.

"Let's take mine it's more reliable."

"Gauge. I forgot you were here."

"I didn't think I was unforgettable."

*Fuck, fuck, fuck!* If only she'd monitored everyone telepathically, but if she'd done that it would have given her a headache. *That kid!*

*Ilida?*

Inwardly she groaned. The night was getting better by the minute. Daedalus would kill her after she told him how lax she was. Ilida concentrated hard and forced a wall between her thoughts and Daedalus's.

Mike ran with incredible speed. She'd never seen anyone run so far. What was more remarkable was that she could make him out through the blur.

Six miles later, they trailed Mike to the Long Island Railroad. After they paid their ticket, they slumped low in their seats. That time of the night the train cars were full but not crowded.

Wetness ran down her back. *Damn kid!*

"You have to tell Daedalus."

"I know."

After almost an hour she felt safe enough to send her thoughts outward looking to Daedalus.

*What can I do for you, Ilida?*

His voice cool and remote. His emotions controlled. She shouldn't be surprised; it was her idea to not see him again. She probably interrupted his time with some blonde. *Mike ran away from Tilly and we're following him.*

*By car?*

*We're on the Long Island Railroad. It looks like he might be going to Brooklyn or the City.*

*How did he get away?*

*He was on my watch when he slipped out. I'm sorry.  
Be my eyes.*

He cut off contact but Ilida could feel him shadowing her thoughts—seeing what she was seeing.

## Chapter Nineteen

*Fucking Kid!*

After piggy backing onto Ilida's thoughts—seeing and feeling through her eyes—I followed Mike to a club. Hell's Kitchen Ninth and Thirtieth Street. I told Ilida to go back to Tilly and I'd handle Mike.

I should have known Mike would pull something like this. The Red Queen drug must still be in his blood stream after I purged it from his body and going through the detox. Fucking drug!

Mike walked fast, with purpose. His chain swung back and forth as he swaggered. He pulled up his hood. There were only two clubs in this radius—one human, and the other vampire. I needed backup just in case. I searched him out using an impersonal pathway.

*Barry?*

*I thought I wasn't supposed to start yet?*

*You aren't.* Barry my older brother's newest



acolyte. He was a cop before his curiosity got the better of him and got him a sizable bite on his neck. Luckily, Alec and Tania found him and changed him. The one who bit him has not been found yet. *Are you still with the NYPD?*

*Yeah, until Friday.*

*I need you to keep the police diverted for a while.*

*What's going on?*

*Possibly an impromptu drug bust.* Mike turned the corner as I cut off contact with Barry Chen and then I saw my nightmare, Ilida Davis, run around the corner after him with Gauge behind her. I bunched my fist. I told her to go back to work.

Gauge shouldn't fight. Not here, where he could go into a cannibalistic fury.

*I'll take it from here, Gauge.*

*I can help.*

*Not now and you now why.*

*Call me if you need me.*

I sprinted across the street. She argued with the bouncer. She didn't know the password. She got in his face then jumped back. She couldn't move any further. A wrought iron handrail held her in place. The bouncer opened his mouth, hissed at her—aiming for her throat. She gut punched him, jabbing him alternately with both fists.

I jumped in front of her, shielding her from the bouncer. With my distended claws, I slashed him across the face. Blood flew outward. The sound of wet skin tearing satisfied my lust for the fight. I

slashed his chest next. His eyes widened with shock then anger. Copper filled the air.

I shoved him away with one hand, while with the other I unsheathed my sword. He fell backwards over the handrail. Then growling he flipped the iron handrail landing in front of me. Blood dripped down his face. His suit was soaked with blood.

*Daedalus.*

*I'm in control.*

*You're feeding off my bloodlust.*

I was. I felt the surge of animal fury – the need to kill. I held my sword at his throat. No one touches my woman. Ilida came first and foremost.

*Yes, think of Ilida.*

Slash marks in a diagonal ran from the Bouncer's face to his chest. His facial bone peaked through the striated muscle.

"She's not your meal," I growled.

He blurted an expletive as his jaw dropped to the ground. He knew who I was. Word got around fast. Keeping the sword trained on his neck, I backed him down the stairs. Then he ran with preternatural speed down the block. I unleashed my fury on Ilida. "I told you to go back to work!"

She backed up, staring into my eyes.

"What?" Damn my eyes. I forgot.

She shook her head as she rubbed circles on her forehead, as if she could rub away what she saw. Stubborn woman.

"It's my fault Mike ran away. I have to bring him back."

I sheathed my sword, the panic still there as I thought of what the bouncer could have done to Ilida had I not been here. "This is a dangerous club."

"What was that all about?"

"He was about to get nasty."

"I was handling it! It's just a dance club." Her brown eyes glinted with urgent anger.

"You were about to..." I stopped myself remembering she doesn't know, or she's in serious deep denial. The bouncer showed her his fangs!

"Go back to work before someone else sees you." Ilida is one step closer to finding out my secret.

"The only place I'm going is in there."

"You can't go in there."

"It's just a club, Daedalus."

"You're determined aren't you? Take your coat off."

I waited for the argument; almost anticipated it with joy.

Air streamed out of her mouth. Her heavy eyelashes fluttered. "Wh—? It's freezing! I'm not having sex with you out here in the cold."

"I wouldn't dream of it. Take it off."

"I'm tempted to ask why."

"I have to rub my scent over you." Rub my

scent, bite her. Same thing.

"I'm sorry I asked."

With suspicion in her eyes, she took it off. I'll say that I was surprised. She rarely listens.

I then took off my leather jacket. "Unzip your turtle neck."

I craned my neck around hers, rubbing my exposed skin on her. Her skin was cool and soft against my face. Her pulse beat against my eyes, nose, lips. I opened my mouth against her artery and tasted hot blood. Perspiration and her own pleasant odor were aching familiar. I could swim in her, but I had to cut this short. Tame my desire. I licked her neck closing the wounds. As I lifted away from her, I met her eyes. They were soft and dreamy.

She cleared her throat and asked, "Are you done?"

"Oh, yeah. I'm done." So done, my cock hurt.

"Should I stroke you and call you Felix the cat?"

Denial is an island. "Shield your thoughts. Let's get in there as unobtrusively as possible."

She stepped behind me. I opened the doors to the club. A cacophony of thoughts, sounds and lights assaulted me. I quickly adjusted.

"Whoa!"

"You wanted to come in here."

Ilida stared at the woman blindfolded with black ribbon, naked and hanging by her wrist as

two vampires sucked both her nipples. To an average observer it looked exactly like that, but I knew better. Another vampire joined them. He ate the vampiress while she screamed with her orgasm.

The whole club smelled like sex.

"Come on!"

Similar scenes made Ilida pause. A male vampire lying on his back while two vampiresses took turns sucking his cock to the rhythm of an unknown techno beat.

I pulled her a long, pushing through the throng of leather-clad, swaying, and gyrating bodies, expecting trouble. She had to come with me. If I left her on the dance floor looking innocent and human, she wouldn't last. I have to protect her in case there's trouble and that means she comes with me. That certifies there will be trouble.

"I've never heard of this place. Have you?" she said.

"You don't get out much, do you? Stand back." With that, I unsheathed my sword.

"That's really dangerous, you know."

Purple-pink light swirled off the blade. The dancers around us moved back. Someone hollered "Enforcer."

So much for subtlety.

I whipped out my gun, keeping my eye on the crowd, handed it hand over shoulder to Ilida.

"Hold this."

"I—I"

"Take it!"

She took it, held it out.

"If anyone moves, shoot."

"I've never used a gun before," she whispered.

And they heard. A vampire moved towards her.

"Flip the lid up." She did and a beam of ultraviolet light burned a dancer's inner elbow. She screamed and ran away. The dancers moved, giving us plenty of room. I pulled Ilida into a back hallway.

Her eyes were wide with fear of what she did and who I might be. I smelled Mike's scent in the air among the blood and semen and lubricant smells. "This way. Keep the gun aimed behind you."

I followed the scent into a room. It was empty save for a rumpled bed and a syringe. I braced myself and touched the syringe. Images of Mike shooting up Red Queen, running into the night, high and filled with unimaginable cravings. I put the syringe down. "He's gone."

"We have to find him."

"You have to go back to work and report he's missing."

"While you go out looking for him."

"Let's hope I turn up something."

"Can I put the gun down now?"

"Relax your arm, but stay alert."

We found the back door that led to an alley behind the club. The coast was clear. The music started up again in the club. They forgot about us. After exiting the club, Ilida surprised me.

"You aren't just a telepath are you?" She asked handing me the gun. It shook in her hands.

"I was waiting for you to realize it."

I put the safety latch on the gun and slipped it in my holster.

"I won't even begin to ask what else you are."

"You already know. I can see it in your mind." Blocks of images of me fighting in the club and in the subway. Her face displayed fear and a terrible wonder.

She leaned against the wall holding her forehead. She desperately wanted to deny it. "It's impossible."

"But here I am in the flesh and leather."

"Those kids in there..."

"Are what I am, more or less."

"And you are probably the best person to find Mike."

I admired her calmness. I expected her to scream, I fucked a vampire. "Now that you know, will you be okay?"

"I don't know if I *really* know. I'm probably having a strange dream."

"We're a long way from Kansas, Ilida. I'm the real thing."

"Yeah the real... thing."

She slid down the brick wall ready to blow.

"Ilida? Ilida!"

\* \* \* \*

After taking Ilida back to work, and making sure she wouldn't go into shock, I looked for Mike. He was gone, disappeared in the naked City streets. The cobalt blue sky gradually brightened to a white orange blue sky and I had to get home before someone mistook me for a corpse.

Finding Mike would have to wait.

I had to meet Barry Chen in my office for a private meeting—a headache and lust wasn't going to fly right now.

My strategist/expeditor went by the name of Barry Chen, only. That was fine; since I knew him from my Vrykolakas days and had helped him and others escape, I didn't make a colossal deal out of only using his last name.

Barry Chen along with one hundred or so others had been held under Manus control back in Santorini. He participated in the Breeding Circle. I wonder if he knows about the children he sired? He's lucky; sometimes ignorance is wonderful.

He's my second-in-command, trustworthy and



can articulate my needs to the Guardsman at verbatim. Now, I was waiting on him to betray the Guardsmen's trust. But what I didn't want from him was a lesson in teamwork.

"Keep this between us, Barry Chen."

"Let me reiterate. You need backup."

"I need building plans *now*."

"You did a good thing killing Manus and setting us free."

I saw it in his coffee-brown eyes. He was going to do whatever he could to not give me the building plans. "Now you owe me, Barry Chen."

"I don't want to help you in this suicide mission."

"Unfortunately for you, you don't have a choice."

"I could alert the King and Queen."

"Please do." They'd hired me to eradicate any and all threats. That's what I'm going to do. Alec can't have it both ways. His Enforcer days are over.

"Why don't you want back up? Why did you hire us?"

"This is personal. I don't want the loss of life on my conscious."

He scratched between his short, dredded black hair with defeat. "What is the name of the building?"

"Solarium Pharmaceuticals in Suffolk County."

His fingers danced over the keyboard. The white lights from the computer screen glowed on his golden skin. He stood up from the LAN system booth, pressed a button on the way to a large LCD screen. "This is the building plan for Solarium Pharmaceuticals. You have six floors."

"I want to place explosives on each floor."

"You could walk in there and unhook the Bunsen burners, but I know you like being sneaky."

"And that would take up more time and there is the possibility of me getting caught."

"How much of a body count do you want?"

No amount of bodies could bring my daughter back to life, but this attack on the Jacquerie would make Terra think twice about hurting someone I cared about. Or it would drive her nuts. Either result would be great. "I want a sizeable vampiric and zombie body count, low human body count."

"If you place explosives near the labs, you will get your wish."

"I don't want to hurt the humans. I doubt if they want to make drugs to harm their own people."

"Warn as many as you can, then get them and yourself the hell out."

## Chapter Twenty

Once five o' clock hit, Ilida packed her bag with files and her hand-held digital tape recorder. She yawned for the umpteenth time that day as she grabbed her coat and closed the office door behind her. She arched her back, rubbed the ache out of it. Strange, she never had problems with her back.

What a terrible day. After calling Mike's father and informing him about Mike running away, all she got was a terse thank you and a hang-up. Mike's father expected him to run away, so it wasn't news to him. The stress of losing Mike wore her out. And finding out Daedalus was a vampire, didn't help. She was adjusting, and Daedalus was as worried for Mike as she was, even though he didn't show it.

"Hey Ilida. Would you take over the seminar tonight for me?"

"What's up?"

"I need to spend time with Kwame."

"Beverly...?" Her best friend had a knack for making her love life a priority and making Ilida pay for it.

"Please Ilida. We had an argument and he called wanting to patch things up. I wouldn't have asked you, but you have nothing planned."

*Gee, thank you. I have no love life; therefore, I can take over your job. No problem!* Beverly could really drive it home when she wanted to and Ilida wished she could tell her to buzz off. "Tell Kwame I said hello."

"I won't be home tomorrow since it's Thanksgiving eve. What are you doing for Thanksgiving Day?"

She bent down placing her bag on the floor, wrapped a crazy striped scarf around her neck. "The usual. I was thinking about going to my father's place tonight."

Most of the residents went home to family for the four-day holiday weekend. It was her first Thanksgiving in two years she had off. She yearned to be at home with her father, brother, and... stepmother.

"It's pitch black out and snowing hard."

She started slowly down the hall. "I'll be fine and I promise I won't speed on the back roads."

"Are you getting along with your father's new wife, yet?"

Ilida stopped walking. "I get along fine with

her. She's just not..."

"Your mom?"

"I don't even know my mother anymore. It's stupid isn't it?"

"Have you heard from her?"

She hunched her shoulders. "Last I heard from her she was taking Paris by storm."

"I didn't know cabarets where the 'in' thing."

"Apparently they are in Paris. Bobby Short retired so it's anyone's game now."

"You don't think you'll see her anytime soon?"

"I haven't seen her in two years. Too much time has passed."

She'd left when Ilida was barely out of third grade, then floated in out of her life since. They had no real connection. Still Ilida missed her. Or missed the idea of her. It changed from day to day.

"Yes, I know."

"By the way, my dream man had blue-violet eyes."

"Blue-violet? Exotic. Hey, he sounds like..."

*Like Daedalus?* "Do you know how many people on earth have blue-violet eyes, Beverly?"

"He may be a grump but he's a hot grump."

"Yes, I know, and stop salivating—you have Kwame."

"See you Monday," she said, as she took off her scarf.

\* \* \* \*

I sat in the war room at the Tyrian Guard headquarters, surrounded by my vampires. This was a new venture for all of us. I knew most of my men and had only met a few of the new men recently, like Barry Chen.

I picked him as my Strategist/Expeditor. Alec and I developed an intelligence test much like the Armed Forces uses to weed out undesirables. Barry Chen passed the test.

Gauge I hired as the Weapons Master. He built customized weapons for a select clientele from all over the world. My communications expert is Jared. He only goes by the name Jared. He's a whiz on computers. Vampires need computers, as humans do. It's a way to stay modern.

The rest I hired from the former Vrykolakas Clan.

I'd liberated them centuries ago so they and I could live the life of our own choosing. They almost died under Manus's rule. The only way they could leave the clan was to be beat out. Eighty out of a hundred vampires survived the beat out. Forty of those eighty vampires are with me here now. They were loyal to me. I can't let them risk their lives on this personal mission. Other problems needed tending to.

"All of you want to know what's going on?"

One of the men spoke up from the back. "Why are you going out alone?"

"This is my personal fight tonight with the Jacquerie. If you help me, it's of your own choosing."

"What did they do to you?"

"They broke into my home and found a picture of my daughter, Juliana. They hunted her down and killed her soon after."

I looked each of them in the eye. Neither of them gave me any indication of backing down. They were determined to help me. "They made this crusade of theirs my personal business. I have to protect someone I care about. There are other issues going on around the country and the world. Barry Chen, your Strategist, will inform you of them."

"I want to help."

"So do I."

"Me too."

"This I do alone."

"Daedalus?" Ms. Sulken, the Treasurer walked in. "It's your brother."

I felt the urgency in his voice. I sensed something wasn't right earlier. Alec is a heavy. Everything doom and gloom. I took out a pack of cigs, tapped it against my open palm, dislodged one, and shoved it in my mouth. So, I got there a little before our specified meeting time to relax.

Admittedly, my mood plummeted as soon as I saw him.

"You've changed your outfit."

I hated it when he got past my radar. "I wanted the change. We're not here to talk about my taste in clothing. What's going on? Is Tania all right?"

"Tania is well. You however need to talk with someone."

I pivoted on my heel as I looked up to the gray night sky. "I'm dealing with Juliana's death in my own way. Why can't you all mind your own damn business?" I commanded a flame to spark on the end of my cig. Blue flame, then white, alighted it.

"Your little friend, Ilida Davis."

"She's not up for discussion."

"Yes she is, especially when her very presence threatens the Kingdom."

"You mean threatens you. What has she ever done to you?"

"It's what she might do—what she has done to you already that I'm concerned about. I slipped out to North America two days ago. You had no clue I'd left."

"I know you left, and I let your ass fly away."

"Your job is to keep abreast of my and Tania's whereabouts. As Enforcer it's your job to know where we are."

"I know you went to Ontario, Alec. Anything else?"



"Is there anything else?"

"Daedalus, what's wrong with you? This woman—she has a beautiful ass and your head is so far up in her that you can't see. She's clouding your judgment."

"Still don't trust her, huh?"

"I have reasons not to."

"I don't want to know your imaginary reasons."

"You don't care?"

"Damn straight!"

"After you read this you'll change your mind."

Alec held a manila envelope out to me. I stared at it, trying to stamp down my anger. "What the hell is this?"

"Ilida Davis. Take it. What's wrong? Afraid you might find out something unfavorable about her?"

"I showed her my unfavorable side and she still trusts me. Do you know how that feels, Alec?" I took the envelope from him. "And try to stop yourself from going behind my back and butting your imperious nose where it doesn't belong."

With a mental command, the envelope sparked with blue flame then burned in my hand.

"You ass. She will destroy you."

"Ilida is no threat to you, the Kingdom, or to me." I let the smoldering file drop to the floor of the roof. "While you and Horatio were playing *Spencer for Hire* in Canada."

"I followed Ilida from her self defense class in

Manhattan."

"Was she really in self-defense class?"

"Not only was she in self defense class, but she also has admirers besides me."

"She's seeing someone else

"Hermes and some of his thugs followed her to the Thirty-second Street subway station. Hermes tried to push her off the tracks as the train rolled into the station."

"I'm listening."

"We had a shoot out."

"For the other humans to see."

"It couldn't be helped. Ilida shielded a little girl from getting shot. So you see, she isn't a part of Terra's plan. Terra knows about her and is trying to kill her."

"You should have read the file anyway."

"Whatever is in her background I'm sure she will tell me herself, in due time. I have a date."

"With Ilida?"

"With Terra."

"You're going to confront her alone. The Tyrian Guard should be with you."

"This is personal."

"I should override you."

"But you won't. And just my luck it's beginning to snow."

## Chapter Twenty-one

This was becoming tiresome. My second time going after the Jacquerie. This is how Terra became fixated on me before. I still didn't understand why? Everyone had a motive for doing something. What was her reason for killing Juliana?

After this Ilida might become a target. I have to stay away from her if it's possible. Every instant I thought of her like a lovesick puppy.

As silent as a jaguar, I swung making a full circle then leaped to the next water pipe.

I was surprised. No heat sensors. No laser trip wires up here in the ceiling. I couldn't call Terra an idiot. She's a crafty one, so there had to be booby traps somewhere. *She's probably waiting for me.*

I waited against the wall, then walked calmly down the hallway of Solarium Pharmaceuticals. According to the building plans, a lab was coming up to my left. Loud, frightened, voices floated out

from the open door.

It was time to introduce myself. I walked in nonchalantly. The lab workers hovered over something in the far corner near the window. One of them froze then jumped.

"Who are you?"

Three men and four women in white lab coats stared at me like they were about to collapse from heart attacks. "Your friendly neighborhood Ninja. Get your friends out of here as quietly as you can."

They froze. The humans here were certainly forced to make Red Queen for Terra. I was sure of it. I could smell their captor, Terra. She was here. Terra had them in deep fear. "Now!"

They scattered like rabbits. I inspected what they'd hovered over minutes before and hit pay dirt. Some kind of substance wrapped in brown glossy paper and secured with butchers string. It smelled like Red Queen. Thanks to Mike breaking into my home and having to purge it out of his system, I know now how it smells. An unforgettable smell it is. Makes opium smell like roses.

I opened my black bag of detonators, slipped one in the middle of the stacks of wrapped drugs, then placed the rest in inconspicuous places on the floor. I made my way to the third floor and got the workers out of there. This was too easy, of course.

I smelled a trap. She's been waiting for me to...

"I'm so honored."

"Did you think I would ignore you forever, Terra?"

Her cold blue eyes, almost like mine, softened for an instant. She wants me in some way for some reason. What does she want? She already killed my daughter and tried to kill Ilida. She knows I won't let her get away with it.

"You still don't see me do you?"

I unsheathed my sword. "What's there to see?"

"You might make a mistake by killing me."

I swiveled the sword around. "I'll be doing everyone a favor."

"They might disagree."

The tingling in my brain spread down the back of my neck to my ass to my legs. Her zombies surrounded me and one of them was Mike.

"What's wrong? Afraid of chipping a nail?"

"Your girlfriend is vulnerable in that little drug rehab home. Anything could happen tonight."

She's right. If I hadn't insisted on doing this alone, she might have protection now.

Nine zombies followed Mike out of the lab. I know where they're headed. I held the tip of the sword against Terra's neck. "What do you want with me?"

"You haven't learned your lesson, yet."

"What lesson, bitch?"

She sneered at me then blinked her eyes and those foul smelling zombies charged me. I pivoted kicking zombies out of my way. I parried with my sword – chopped. Limbs fell, followed by heads. I dodged splatters of blood; some fell on my face burning holes into my skin and bone.

Talons scraped my shoulder. Blood oozed down my chest. I turned stabbing it in the chest, pulled my sword out then cut its head off.

A zombie jumped on my back, embedded its fangs in my shoulder. I spun, making it dizzy, and tossed it off me pulling my skin with it. It fell, knocking other zombies down creating a domino effect.

Zombies sniffed the air, smelling my blood. I growled.

They came at me again—buried me. No air. Claws slashed and scraped, dug into my skin; huddled over me in a football trap.

Terra's shrill voice made it worse. "Ready to give up, yet?"

My daughter's and Ilida's faces flashed before my mind's eye. This was for them. I had to succeed. I pushed once, and then twice with a hard nudge, pushed the Zombies to my right off me.

One breathed its foul breath in my face. I pulled him off my shoulder grabbed his arm and leg and used him to fling the others off me. One zombie

fell, knocking over a lab table, releasing gas.

I pulled the remote switch activating the bombs.

My ears nearly bled from the loud explosion, but I had no time to cover them. The force of the blast knocked hurled me through the window. Shards of glass scraped my back, neck, and scalp. I landed on the hard snow. Flames leaped down around me. More explosions leveled the lab. Foul blood joined the smell of burning metal and gas. I was still alive. Barely. I managed to crawl out from under the destruction then collapsed.

The constant sound of sirens and the harsh horn of fire trucks made me move again.

\* \* \* \*

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm hosting the seminar tonight, Thom."

It seemed to be her lot in life. Covering for people, working late, and not getting any sleep.

"It's Beverly's turn to host."

"Beverly had to take care of personal business."

"You've been here since three this morning. Don't you think your pushing it?"

Yes, she was pushing it. She was about to collapse on her feet, but the seminar had to go on. It helped fund Tilly House. Her eyes were watery and she moved as if each limb weighed a hundred pounds. "We all have to pull our weight around

here."

"I can manage the seminar. You go home."

"Isn't your wife missing you?"

"Do you miss me?"

"We aren't together anymore, Thom."

"We had something."

"That lasted five minutes." It was a moment in time between two friends. It shouldn't have happened, but it had and they put it behind them. Or so she'd thought. It wasn't her imagination when Thom came in looking curious and jealous and found her and Daedalus talking. Thom and Daedalus exchanged a look that established territory. Ilida was the territory! "You and your wife are back together again. Don't ruin it."

"Are you seeing Sqourakis?"

"Thom!"

"Hey I've heard a lot about him. He's a shark with women."

A shark with women because he's afraid. Everyone is afraid of risking his or her hearts. She didn't want to be afraid but his psychic prowess scared her. She wanted normal. *Thom is normal but off limits.*

*Daedalus is normal but isn't.* Daedalus made her feel things that disturbed her, invigorated her. The man rang her bells.

"I know about his reputation. Go home, Thom."

"You're off for two days starting Monday."



"Don't be silly, Thom. I have Mike to help."

"I mean it! I don't want to see you until Wednesday." She could use a few days off to recharge. To not have to go anywhere after the blizzard would be heaven sent. "Who will handle Mike?"

"I will. Just leave his file on my desk before you leave tonight."

"Thanks, Thom."

"Hey? How are you getting home?"

"I'll drive slowly."

It was something she put off pondering about. There was bound to be food left over. She'd make a sandwich before the seminar was over; tuck it away in plastic wrap. She'd have something to snack on while driving.

"Drive slowly all the way to Brooklyn in this blizzard?"

"It'll take me three hours instead of two."

"Ilida Davis, the martyr."

"Bye Thom," she said waving. *I'm not martyr am I?*

Ilida checked the residents to make sure they were in their rooms. She did roll call and when she was satisfied, she told them good night and walked down the stairs.

The platters of food ordered from Apollo Restaurant came. She set the tables in the back of the dining hall. She made sure there were enough

chairs for the scheduled guests, and she laid out the Styrofoam cups, soda, juices, and water.

Half an hour into the seminar and she was restless. Luckily, she was in the back of the room. She got up softly, walked to the refreshment table, and poured herself a cup of Mountain Dew. She gulped it down then lifted the cup away from her lips. The metallic smell of blood hit her, making the soda in her mouth turn to bile. She ran to the bathroom around the corner and spit it out in the toilet. She washed her hands and walked out of the bathroom only to encounter the smell again.

She gave the guest listening to the speaker one last glance then she moved to the foot of the stairs. The smell was much stronger, now clawing at her. The silence and the darkness loomed before her. She clutched the handrail...

"Ilida?"

"The guests are ravenous."

"Oh, well there's food. Want to help me?"

## Chapter Twenty-two

Thirty minutes later, the guests were eating food and talking and laughing. Ilida excused herself and made her way to the foot of the stairs. The smell of blood was stronger. A heavy feeling came over her as she took a step up the stairs.

It was a struggle to lift her leg up to the second step—as if something didn’t want her to go up there. She flipped the light switch on the staircase. Something psychic... She looked around her. The guests were preoccupied eating. She closed her eyes pushed the force up the stairs. Once she got to the top she was winded, and her head began to throb.

A foul, heavy feeling came over her—encased her heart. *Evil*. The word flashed in her mind. Something awful was happening. Ilida opened her mind to it. She should’ve kept her lessons up with Cassandra.

Ilida turned the corner of the landing and slipped. Had she not caught the wooden

guardrail, she would've slid in...blood? She stepped back and jumped at the sight of her bloodied footprint. The metallic smell made her nasal membrane sting – her nostrils flared.

The first door she came to she opened without knocking. It was dark. The smell of blood permeated the room. Two of the residences lay in their beds. Joann was still, but pale. Mandy convulsed. Blood dripped from jagged holes in her wrist. "Mandy?"

"I'm going to get help."

She tore a piece of cloth from the bed sheet and tied Mandy's wrist with it.

"Ilida?" Her voice sounded like sand paper.

"I'm going to get help." As she said it, she made a step to the door.

"Vampires."

"What?"

Mandy's eyes slowly rolled up at the ceiling then she lay still. Ilida stepped back horrified. Sweat ran down her back. Slowly she looked up at the ceiling. Twin red dots stared down at her, moved as though disembodied. The red dots faded into the darkness. She bolted for the door. Something hissed at her then it pushed her to the floor. Sharp daggers dug into her neck scraped down her back. She fell to the floor.

She screamed, kicked her attacker's face. She had to get help. Get the people downstairs out of

there. Once she was free she yanked open the door. Running blindly, she collided into something large and hard. She jumped back clutching her breast.

Panic like she'd never known before threatened to make her black out. It was the man from in front of the club with that woman. *They killed Juliana. Have to call Daedalus.*

"Ilida? Leaving so soon? You wouldn't leave your favorite patient to dine alone."

Wary she looked behind her. Mike! His eyes were red, sunken in, with pinpoints of light as pupils. His mouth covered in—she gulped down bile—blood. He didn't look like Mike, he looked like a monster out of her nightmares. Mandy's words rang in her head.

In a blur, Mike had her lifted in the air by her throat! She struggled and grasped his wrist. He was too strong; he pulled her closer to him, his mouth opened. His teeth long. Saliva dripped from one fang. His breath reeked of stale blood. She struggled to speak. Her vision blurred. Her breath came in fits.

Heat gathered in her head. She was going to die like this. She had to fight. Fight now. Her brain tingled, light burst from her eyes. A sizzling sound blocked her hearing. Energy gathered in her head and with incredible force burst out of her, hitting Mike.

He went straight through the wall back to where Mandy and Joann lay dead.

With a sudden burst of adrenaline, she pushed the man back. She jumped on the steps. She screamed as pain radiated from her trapezoid to her shoulder blade. She lost her footing but held onto the handrail, breaking her fall. Her head began to pound. The man stood in front of her.

*Daedalus!* She was picked up by the collar of her sweater. "You'll have to forgive Mike. He's a teenager. I can make this good for you if you don't struggle." Then he licked his lips. "I never fed on a telekinetic before. Did I hear the name Daedalus?"

Ilida's self-defense training came back to her. She kicked the man in the face. He fell back. Ilida landed on the edge of one of the steps. Ignoring the pain, she jumped over him down the stairs. She made a right turn.

"Everyone Get out!" her next words caught in her throat.

Bodies lay everywhere. The smell of blood, now familiar, saturated the room. Crazy, thirsty looking? They looked like the residents of Tilly. They leaned over the bodies. Some wiped their mouths of blood. They all looked at her and stood up. Ilida ran to the front door, grabbed her coat off the hook. Cold air and snow greeted her.

*Ilida?*

His voice sounded faint, weak. Did they get to

him, too? Then she felt the pain in her shoulder, legs. She felt wetness there. He was hurt and she felt it. *You're hurt, Daedalus. Tilly house is being ...*

*They'll go after you. Get the hell out of there.*

*I have to go back find someone who's alive.*

*No! Go to my brother on Fiftieth and Lexington. You can't help anyone now.*

\* \* \* \*

She was hurt herself. Her vision began to blur. Her body began to shake. *She couldn't hold onto her keys. Won't make it.*

*Wake up!*

Daedalus loud deep voice echoed in her head, splitting it in half from its intensity. Her eyes fluttered open and her body flooded with strength. *I'm up. Can't keep talking now.*

She pulled off her sweater, rolled it around her fist, and punched the window of her car door. She unlocked her door, pushed the glass off the seat.

\* \* \* \*

*Can't keep talking.*

That was it. She was gone and I was still laying on the snow, battered, bruised and losing copious amounts of blood by the second. Carefully, I lifted my head. It was like lifting an anvil. Too tired. I wanted to sleep. Just sleep...

*Get up, Daedalus! Get the hell up! My inner voice*

continued screaming at until I lifted my head off the snowy ground. Flakes collected on his lashes and nose. A pool of blood spread out under his shoulder. Terra. Should've killed her when I had the chance.

I'll find out what payback is soon enough, if I can't find blood and shelter, fast.

My pelt of short hairs covering my body was useless against the biting cold seeping through my skin to my bones. Frostbite wasn't far off. Only the stuff of life would get me through this.

I needed blood. There was no way around it. My wounds were too numerous to count. I didn't want to think about what my body looked like without the short hair. *Probably like crumbled, goat cheese.* Flying wouldn't help much, either. I'd used up too much energy morphing to my bat form.

The bleak weather added to my misery. I'm on my way out to Never, Never Land. Dying would be so easy now. I'd lived six centuries too long and seen too much death and dying. A majority of those deaths were by my hands. I'd never thought Death would come back to bite me in the ass.

Groaning I rolled onto my back. *Have to keep going. Ilida needs me.* Seeking revenge would keep me alive. I'll live for it. The way Manus taught me.

*If I can find a donor I'll make it, but there's nothing here except an abandoned house, trees, miles, and miles of the white stuff.* One of my earlier questions was



finally answered since moving to Long Island. Yes, you can get stranded here, and it's hell when it happens.

My bat grew more insistent for blood. My wolf lay dormant for now.

Then, my hearing zeroed in on the sound of a car driving, and chaotic frightened thoughts. Through the cold wind, I could smell its exhaust fumes. Ah, heartbeat pumping furiously.

The white scene before me glazed over in red. My bat self awakened to survival alert. God, have pity on the woman who was on her way to me because I would not. I needed the liquid sustenance so desperately, like an addict needs crack. My humanity switched to automatic shutdown.

The sound came closer and closer. The deep echo of the driver's blood beat my eardrum. The stinging brightness of headlights blinded my bat. The screeching and sloshing of wheels trying to stop in deep snow... I thought to move.

Metal bunched and curled like paper against the outside of my knee. Hot wires tangled around my thighs like octopus tendrils. Fear from the passenger reached out to me. It's psychic origin familiar, but damned if I could get a lock on it. There was fear from her.

The force of the car pushed me up then over its roof. Elbow broke, collided with sharp edges.

Indescribable pain. My wolf howled. My bat screamed for shelter now. I landed on my clawed feet and made a dash through the snowy landscape.

\* \* \* \*

The loud thud echoed in her ears. Her eyes widened in horror as something large and dark flew up and hit her windshield. Plastic cracked ominously before she could hit the breaks. It bounced up. Loud bumps on the roof of her car made her flinch. Wheels skidded. The car spun out.

She rode the spin, pumping her brakes. It was so dark and the hit happened so fast. Her hands frantically moved the steering wheel to the right with the flow of the car. "Oh God, please don't let me flip over," she cried.

The car tilted on its side, shook then plopped down, bouncing her in the driver's seat. With her hands, she pushed up against the ceiling of the car until it stilled. She sat there taking deep breaths. "Oh, God, thank you." Whatever she hit was out there and not so lucky.

The cracked windshield had fogged over. Her legs felt stiff. She unclenched the muscle and took a deep breath. She rubbed the windshield with the hem of her coat sleeve. Steam billowed out of the

hood, which was bent up on each side like the wings of a paper airplane.

Black bears are indigenous to Suffolk County, Long Island, but they hadn't been seen since the thirties. Maybe one escaped from the zoo and made its way here. She had to find out for herself.

With shaking hands, she unhooked her seat belt and unlocked the door. "Wait, where's my flashlight? Glove compartment!" She reached for the compartment door, opened it, and took out her flashlight. "Blanket, Ilida. Get your blankets!" Ilida took three steps to the fender. It was bent outwards and something dark and splotchy was scraped across it. She swallowed hard. Blood!

She walked to the trunk of the car, took out her blanket, keeping her flashlight aimed on what she was doing. Praying silently that she wouldn't get mauled, she flashed the light on the road and the tall cornfields to her left. A path had been made in the snow. It must have run through there, whatever it was. With five wool blankets tucked under her arm, she crouched down and followed the path of the pulled down cornstalks.

She pushed the frozen cornstalks out of her way as she walked. It had enough energy left to run a good distance away. She lost sight of her car as she followed its path.

She breathed in the frigid air through her teeth, warming her lungs. Nothing could warm the icy

froth around her heart. She'd never injured an animal before. It had been an accident, but she still felt responsible.

In the shaft from her flashlight, she saw something dark lying on the ground. As she got closer and shined the light on it, she realized it was still. Deathly still. More death... Startled, Ilida jumped back. *That can't be right.* It was too svelte to be a bear. Bears were bulky, massive. This...man?...was tall, with long ...furred legs. She moved the flashlight beam over its form. It was masculine and curled in a fetal position. The scent of fresh blood wafted through the cold air. A gently curved back covered in short fur.

She must have bumped her head on the steering wheel. Nevertheless, she reached down, her hands shaking as she touched him. She felt strong muscles under her gloved palm. Then she moved her hand outward. Something thin and bony, like an arm. Quickly she spotted it with her flashlight. It was long wide, with webbing. An image popped in her head of wings. "Wings?"

"I'm seeing things, right? Wings?" Long, muscular legs and huge... *No, no, it's not the time to be looking at its genitalia.* It moved, bulged, became slightly erect then. She moved back, almost dropping the flashlight. Something grabbed her ankle in a fierce grip. She fell down. "No!"

A large three-fingered hand covered her mouth

cutting off her scream. What she could only surmise to be webbing covered her lips. Tiny hairs tickled her nostrils. Chilled tears ran down her face. She peered about wildly looking for a way to disarm him and then for a heart-stopping moment, he looked into her eyes. His blue-violet eyes bore into her soul. *Blue-violet?*

He looked at her curiously, and then his eyes narrowed in an accusing way. She couldn't see anything but him. The bat-man had wide, powerful shoulders. His skin was cool and she could faintly smell the blood seeping from his wounds. His pointy ears, hooded brows and bald head held her immobile. His hold was... gentle? Maybe it was, but she had a feeling he could twist her neck with ease at any moment. If she was dreaming, she should've awakened by now.

"Be quiet. You aren't dreaming."

## Chapter Twenty-three

Something moved, flickered in my chest as I stared down at her. It could've been my heart trying to stop for all I knew. I hadn't been hurt this badly since that night in the lava tombs in Santorini.

Chunks of my flesh and had been muscles torn from my body then as it was now. I vowed I'd never let that happen again, now look at me. Manus thought whipping me to death would make me submit. It hadn't. It had the opposite effect. This latest test wouldn't get me down either.

"Get me...inside that house, now!" I growled.

Ilida's sweat, blood, and fear stirred me despite the pain pulsing through my body. My right leg felt numb.

Ilida wasn't moving. She was too scared to budge, but I couldn't consider her feelings now. I needed to get well fast. With an iron grip, I pulled her up by her arm. The pain tearing through her

muscles tore through mine. "Up!"

I pulled her up with one hand as I rose from the snowy ground. Blinding pain ricocheted, making me double over. I needed to stay still for a moment. Then my ears picked up the sound of tires on snow coming closer.

Can't be seen. Not in bat form. I needed cover, fast. Faster than the eye could see I ran towards a large tree with hanging branches. It was far enough away from the road. I commanded his bat wings to cover me, making a canopy of protection from the snow. Those six steps took a lot out of me. I never thought I'd find myself in a weakened state, ever. I watched Ilida walk towards him.

The driver spotted her car. He wanted to check on her. Nice of him, but if she can't get him to leave. No! That's my pain talking. I won't hurt Ilida. I won't! "Car coming this way," I said to her.

"What?"

Time was running out. The snowflakes drifted across her face, landing on the tip of her nose. Pain competed with my desire for her.

Headlights illuminated the snow-covered trees and slushy road.

"Male driver...coming to check...on you. Do you know him?"

She hesitated in answering me and my temper was about to explode. "Answer me!"

"I don't think I know him."

I grabbed her wrist, pulled her down to the snow. Looking up to talk to her wasn't the most comfortable thing to do now.

Both of them watched the car slow down to a stop. Its headlights illuminated the landscape. The car came to a stop and the driver got out.

I squeezed her hand tighter, almost crushing it. Sheer will kept me behind Ilida. "Tell — driver — to leave."

Air billowed out of her mouth as she breathed. Her fear was tangible, and she was in pain. I smelled the blood coming from her. Pain vibrated from my shoulder to my shoulder blade. I got the impression of torn skin.

I waited. That driver was concerned — a Good Samaritan and her only hope of escape, but I needed blood and I couldn't let her... escape. *Fuck, fuck, fuck!*

"I'll tell him to leave. If you let go of my hand."

"I'm trusting you to come back." Slowly, I released her hand.

I watched her walk unhurriedly to the Good Samaritan. Though the snow absorbed sound, I could pick out her soft voice. The driver walked towards her. She stepped to the side keeping her attention on *him*. "Hi there?"

"Did you have an accident?"

"A slight one. With the slippery stuff on the ground. It's bound to happen." She brushed the



snow off her forehead. I could hear the smile in her voice and the fear. She wanted him to leave now. She's smart.

"Are you okay, Miss?"

"I'm fine, really."

"Don't leave you car door open like that."

"Oh yes. You're right. Thank you," she said waving.

He nodded his head. Instead of walking back to his car, he looked around. *Damn! Get in your car, please, she pleaded to herself.*

The Good Samaritan walked back to his car, got in and drove away. She swept her head back. Snow continued to fall around her, on her. She wished she got in the man's car to safety but her nurturing sense got the better of her. That was good for me.

The animal in me dominant, I wouldn't let her get away. I had to feed to recover and she was the perfect vessel to feed from. The thought made me want to howl in triumph.

\* \* \* \*

Pinpricks of ice fell on her cheeks and lips, melted then ran down her face. She was so close to her car. She could get into it and never look back. She would lose respect for herself. It was her fault he was in so much pain. She could feel the multiple

injuries he had. Maybe it was empathy and her overactive imagination. After all that happened tonight, she must be a delusion. Wasn't he like the others who attacked her and the residents at Tilly?

She stared down at him. He lifted his head. Her breath almost blocked her sight of him. He was going to kill her, she knew, and the thought made her knees go wobbly. His eyes were eerie pinpoints of light in the dark, snowy night. The sharpness of his deep, gruff voice snapped her to attention.

"That abandoned house to your left. Now!"

She struggled to get him to the steps of the old house. He was almost seven feet tall and loaded with muscled bulk, and all of his weight was leaning on her. His wings folded against his arms. She could barely believe her eyes. Bat wings!

His thin, clawed feet crunched the snow and ice. He grimaced with each step. His pain filled her chest cavity. She sucked in cold air. It filled her lungs, blocked out the sudden pain.

"Try to lift your leg, okay?"

Ilida handled his weight not well, but well enough. His voice sounded like gravel—rough-hewn with a hint of an accent. Monster shouldn't have accents, but this one did. Still, she couldn't believe it.

"Believe it."

"It's not a costume is it?"

"No," he ground out, as he tried to make a step.

Sadness. She felt it in her soul as if it was her misery. How? "Don't talk. Y—you're in pain. I can call an ambulance."

Ilida felt something warm and liquid on the inside of her shirt. She had to take care of the slash wound, but he needed help first. She decided he wasn't like the one who attacked her earlier. He was in pain and need... something.

As they painstakingly approached the steps, the door suddenly swung open. She moved the flashlight so she could see who it was. She gasped. An exodus of water bugs, field mice, and rats ran out of the house. The sight of them made bile rise in her throat. Hurling not an option now, she told herself. They scurried about trying to get away. From what, she didn't know, but she moved her sneaker-covered feet so they wouldn't get any weird ideas.

Shaking she looked into his eyes.

"You would have found them disgusting, doctor."

"I'm not..." She cut her statement off. She'd been in pre-med and on the verge of going into the medical program at Brooklyn Downstate. She'd changed her mind and went for recreational therapy instead. "As soon as you're able you're going to go wherever it is you were going and I'll be on my way."

Her mind screamed, "Run." She hated bats and she opposed the urge to withdraw. He needed her.

"Running is not an option."

"What are you?"

After a time he answered her. "I'm exactly what you see."

They stopped in front of the rickety wooden steps. *There's no such thing.* She chanted it repeatedly in her head, but what had she encountered at Tilly?

"Trust what you see."

"We should go inside. Can you lift your leg up a bit? I'll help you."

An angry animal growl made her stiffen. "I don't need your help!"

Silently, bravely, he lifted his right leg. Excruciating pain throbbed in her right leg as he stepped up. Questions forced their way through the wall of fear in her mind. She could feel not feel their pain. It was too intense, intimate. He was animal clearly, but also human. How was that possible?

Finally, they made it to the top of the stairs without falling through. The wood was old, brittle—it wouldn't take much for their feet to fall through. Right then, her eyes zeroed in on his feet. Correction, five-clawed feet. She opened the door and helped him inside. There was an old couch sitting with the back in front of the window. "I'm

going to help you to the couch.”

“You don’t like bats.”

His voice silky and menacing caused her too shiver. He was talking about himself.

“Lean against the wall.” She looked over her shoulder at him. She needed this job to be as sterile as possible. Too bad she wasn’t a doctor. He needed two of them to keep up with his wounds. She unfolded the blanket and laid it across the old, smelly couch.

“You’re right. You shouldn’t trust bats.”

Her back stiffened. She heard the warning in his voice. Slowly, she faced him, and then he shot towards her quicker than her eyes could see. Growling, he pushed her against the wall. Air blew out of her lungs. Dust flew off the wood panels from the hard contact and into her mouth. She coughed, choking on the cloud of dust.

“No, not again!”

His eyes were blood red with pinpoints of light in the middles. Moonlight glinted off his fangs as his mouth widened. He pulled her neck to the left exposing the delicate skin covering her artery. Hot breath strangely scented with fruit brushed her flesh. His grip was brawny. She waited, anticipated his contact—dreaded and quaked with want for it.

His grip on her shoulders was fierce. Silky hair tickled her covered her eyes, blocking her view.

His teeth, sharp like the tips of scalpels on her skin. Searing pain froze her limbs. She gasped, stiffened as his teeth dug into her flesh. A strange sensual heat filled her pelvis. Then his body went limp.

She stood frozen for what seemed like forever. His body slumped over her. She didn't dare move a muscle, lest she wake him.

His fangs were still imbedded in her neck. She couldn't stay in that position forever. He would wake up eventually and try to kill her again.

Ilida peered down at the top of his head and shoulders. Moisture covered her thighs. His blood, no doubt. She gripped his broad shoulders, pushed him away from her. She clutched his head, pushed him up and back, and braced her self for the pain that was sure to come next.

She sucked in her breath through her clenched teeth. Her skin lifted with his teeth as they popped out of her neck. Once she was free of him, he slowly slid down the length of her body, bringing her down with him. She bent her knees and caught him in her arms.

Cooled blood trickled down her neck. His breath coppery and sweet barely brushed her chin. She couldn't ignore the shivers skittering up and down her spine.

Was it his closeness or his breath on her neck? How could she have been in pain and then

felt...she didn't know how to subscribe it. She knew a minute longer and she would've let him do what he wanted. His size sucked up all the space in the tiny house. How could she have...how could she have shivered in anticipation?

She could barely get her arms around his large trunk. She pushed herself up lifting him with her. His skin was on fire and red... beads of sweat broke out on his furred forehead. Fever. "Urhg, my God you're huge." *I should let him hit the floor after what he tried to do.* She knew she wouldn't leave him, though. It was her fault he tried to attack her like a wild animal.

She dragged him, valiantly ignoring his state of undress, to the couch. Soft dots landed on her hands. After laying him down ungracefully, she ran her flashlight beam over her hands. Her fingers were sprinkled with a dusting of fur. Her breath came quickly. She touched the skin on his upper arms, ran down the length of it, pushing off sheets of short fur and blood. His muscular arms were bare now. She did the same to his shoulders, arms, chest, thighs, lower legs, and feet. Then she wiped the fur off his face, starting with his high forehead and hooded eyes.

They were light in color, Ilida remembered. Probably blue, she thought. She wiped the rest of the fur off his high, slanted cheekbones and strong square chin. She stroked the slight indentation in

his chin.

"Oh...my God! Oh-My-God!" Daedalus! Had to be or why would she feel the tingling in the pit of her stomach.

Most of him was uncovered except for his lower half. Cautiously she looked down. The area she had diligently avoided gaping at no longer shamed her. She stared at his penis covered in a forest of hair. It arched away from his body as if in invitation. She ran her hand gently down his groin. It bulged and swelled in her hand as the fur fell away from him.

She felt moisture on her hands. Sticky. He was impressive and she was ogling him like a sex-starved woman. She was a sex-starved woman, but it was no excuse.

It seemed to beckon her and her cheeks grew hot thinking about how he would feel in her hands again. She was like a naughty schoolgirl flipping through the pages of *Forum*. She ran her hands down his long shaft feeling his rock-solidness and ridged veins. The tip was soft and it pulsed under her fingertips. A beautiful male.

He was an amazing specimen of male beauty who was dying right in front of her eyes. This is why she'd left medicine. Seeing someone die in front of her was too much. And now Daedalus?

She ran her thumb and index finger up the pointy top of his ear, pushing the fur off.



“Ridges.” Three horizontal lines on what should be the incurve or helix of his ear. He didn’t have a helix. She searched for the ear canal. It was larger and definitely not human.

## Chapter Twenty-four

I felt her warm jittery fingers on my skin as I came to. My... skin? I didn't feel the protective covering of my hair anymore. It must have come off. I was that weak and she knew what I looked like now. Cloth abraded my temples. She was wiping my forehead. Then I felt the weakness as I lifted my hand. It shook embarrassingly. Vrykolakas don't ever shake.

I touched her wrist, circled my hand around it. Her wrist is dainty. Though I knew her daintiness belied her inner strength. Why should I care about her inner strength? All I could do was stare at her, baffled by my confusing emotions. I hate confusion and hated my emotions even more. "How long was I out?" I flinched. My voice sounded gruff to my ears.

"Half an hour I think."

"You're still in danger from me. The weaker I am the more..." *The more blood he'll need?* I heard her inner voice struggling.

"I know," she said.

She's scared and confused. I should bite her and be done with it. Every time I thought of the quickest most common sense solution, the instinct to protect her rose up strong to obliterate it. "So why do this? You've seen the worst of my kind. Get out while the getting is good."

Ilida wrapped my arm with rolled gauze. She was gentle and sure of what she was doing. Most humans and vampires bothered with me because they had no other choice. Fear usually made you do things you didn't want to, but she wanted to help me. *Stubborn woman.*

"I hit you with my car. I have to take care of you."

"I've never taken you for a fool."

"I know that, too."

*I know.* She knew absolutely nothing of what he could do to her. Or what he would do to her. "I could have killed you. Do you know that?" I waited for her answer. Her voice always soothed me. What a joke! Anything would be soothing on my deathbed — death couch.

"Your fangs made a pretty nasty scar on my neck. Is that good enough for you?"

That wasn't good enough for me. I wanted her blood, needed the sustenance. I'm dying from loss of it and... she knows it. As all humans, when confronted with the paranormal she was in denial

of it. Mere stitching and wrapping was only a balm.

"I need to leave." Then I felt the intrusion of someone else's thoughts. Alec.

*Where are you?*

*Stuck in a cabin.*

*Not by yourself, I sense.*

*Bring some clothes when you find us.*

*You're dying. Did she have something to do with it?*

*She's trying to save my life. You can't rescue me, yet. The blizzard has us all grounded, and I can't keep talking like this.*

*Get your rest. We'll find you.*

My hearing tuned into Ilida's voice. "You can't. It's snowing hard out," she said as she looked back at the dirty window. "We're stuck with each other until it stops."

I gritted my teeth at the prospect of having to stay here with her. From what I could see through the dirty window it *was* snowing harder than before. Even if I had the energy to fly out of here, my wings could freeze from the frigid temperature. The longer I stayed, the hungrier I would become. I had to do something. I couldn't maintain control. I marshaled my strength, slowed my breathing.

"H—How did you become a..."

Her voice only served to lull me into a relaxed state. Her voice shouldn't relax me. It should incite me to bite her. The thought saddened me.

Nothing moved me. Emotion was foreign to me. Despite my caution, he answered her, "Vampire? But you guessed that."

She made a face and it tugged at my heart. I hadn't learned to curb my stinging tongue. "You're not just a vampire are you?"

"Werebat vampire." Pain throbbed in my shoulder. Her pain. "Your shoulder, Ilida."

"You're my main concern."

"God forbid anyone care about you." As absurd as the situation was I couldn't help but smile. Ilida had a certain stubborn magic about her. "You can still laugh after what happened?"

"Better than screaming for Prozac."

"You joke when under stress."

"When I'm scared I do, unfortunately."

"Your shoulder."

"I took care of it while you were out. I didn't think I could bleed so much."

At the mention of the word, my eyes glazed over in red. Her heartbeat pounded in my ears. The beast inside me reared its ugly, hungry head.

A flash of alarm shone in Ilida's eyes.

Her alarm snapped me back to sanity. I closed my eyes then opened them to find her standing away from me, ready to fight.

"It's okay. I won't hurt you." I felt like an ass as she warily watched me. She was the last person I wanted to hurt or scare.

“We need more light,” she announced.

Her face displayed so many emotions at once. She was on the verge of becoming hysterical then she calmed suddenly. I needed to control my tendencies for her sake as well as mine. I knew I looked like a monster, but I didn’t have to act like one.

I watched her retreat to the kitchen. Curses were flying out left and right from her pretty mouth. From the sounds of doors opening and closing on rusty hinges, she was rummaging around.

I perused the cabin. My eyesight was impeccable under normal conditions, but tonight was anything but. After having hand-to-hand combat and being hit by a car, I couldn’t focus without straining. I could see in the dark still and that was something.

Intricate cobwebs hung from the ceiling joists, table, and chair, everywhere. At least all the creatures fled when I commanded it. At least something went right tonight.

I turned towards the sound of her footsteps. She had a funny walk. Her right foot shook before stepping down. Scoliosis. Why didn’t I notice before? Because you were in her pants, Daedalus. One foot is shorter than the other.

She emerged from the kitchen stronger and braver. “I found matches, a few oil lamps and

bowls in the kitchen," she said shakily as she sat on the floor beside the couch.

I grabbed her wrist, and without knowing it, my finger caressed the pulse beneath her skin. Then my hand slid down to hold hers. Ilida's was cold and soft as a silk. Cold hands warm heart humans say. "Don't be afraid of me, Ilida."

Silence from her end.

I didn't blame her. If I wasn't used to the paranormal and suddenly had it hoist up in my face, I'd be anxious, too. She slid her hand from mine, flipped open the matchbook and tried igniting matches. One by one, she lit the oil lamps. I felt bereft of her touch.

I shut my eyes to focus my vision. The blurred outlines of the objects around me became harder, clearer. *I did the rats a favor by making them leave.* What came to mind was not the Four Seasons Hotel. Not that I'd ever been there, but I was certain it was better than this dump.

Tattered curtains adorned the grimy windows. More dust, thicker than blood, lay on every object left in the house. There was an upstairs. Good. *If the second floor doesn't fall down on top of our heads, it will be great.* To my far left, stood a boarded-up fireplace. Things were looking up, except the hunger pangs showed no sign of leaving.

I needed blood and a distraction from my hunger. With dogged determination, I watched

her as she pulled on gloves and what she was doing. Reaching out to her with my thoughts, I determined she was frightened of me. She was coming to grips with me, though. She couldn't be sure of who or what I was.

Her wealth of medium, amber, wavy hair gathered in a... ponytail? Useless gadget. I will see her with her hair down, run my hands through it. Her skin—a yellow ochre and raw sienna with swirls of lilac like an African sunset. Her fingers poked and prodded my bruised flesh. I should have bitten her by now but that would be rude after all she's done for me. She saved my life before. For that I will always be grateful even after I'm gone.

"This is going to hurt," she said quietly.

"Sorry?"

I sucked in a breath, as she pushed her hand through a deep slash in my side. I tried to ignore the pain away. Vampires feel sensations ten times stronger than humans. Sometimes heightened senses are a bitch. Thankfully, she pulled her fingers out and I breathed a sigh of relief. Alas, more blood flooded the wound, seeped out. She swore again.

Her shoulders slumped. Sweat broke out on her forehead and upper lip. The stress was getting to her, but I would have never known if I couldn't read her thoughts. She's steely.



I eyed her examining the depth of blood on her gloved fingers. "Not too deep." She pulled off the gloves then donned a new pair. She was unknowingly leaving evidence.

Evidence meant death in my world.

If circumstances were different, if they'd been on Santorini she would have been mated in the Breeding Circle to make more clan members. Which was worse? Rape or death? "We need to clear the air before I..."

She cut me off, angry for me thinking that way. "Don't say it. You aren't going to die."

"I...need blood, Ilida. I know what they tried to do to you, but I'm not like that."

"They killed the kids and the people I hosted a seminar for. They're evil."

"Your friends aren't dead not in the way you think." They won't be the same. They'd be better off dead.

"Oh great, more paranormal machinations."

"I'm...not so innocent myself, but I would never intentionally hurt you. I don't want to hurt you."

She nodded her head agreeing with me. That was a start.

"I tried to warn you," I said.

"I'm so out of practice. I didn't pay attention at first. After what happened at my apartment I didn't want to be hurt again."

I'd hurt her by thinking she was connected to Terra, knowing that she wasn't. I'm a prick sometimes.

"How did you get away?" I asked.

"I didn't want Mike to touch me..."

"Mike?"

"I'm so fucking sorry I brought him to you."

"You didn't know. Anyway, I somehow forced him back."

"How? Vampires are...ten times stronger."

She told me what happened. My beautiful avenging angel is a warrior in disguise. "Telekinesis."

"My aunt hinted that I have other powers I haven't tapped into yet. I have to get back to Tilly. I can't believe I left them."

"The storm is worse and we'll need reinforcements." I coughed. Felt liquid in my throat. I couldn't give in to the void, not now. I had to avenge Juliana and keep Ilida safe. That would keep me alive.

Like cool feathers brushing my skin, her fingers caressed my forehead. Warmth. Her touch comforted me.

"You've got to keep talking. I don't want you blacking out on me again," she said.

She was right. Talking would force me to stay alert. *Her* voice forced me to stay alert. Its soft yet firm notes intrigued me. This was another side of

her I didn't know existed. She's so methodical in trying to determine how much physical damage I have. "I got a tip on one of the Jacquerie's hangouts. I storm-trooped the place half-cocked. Had my ass... handed to me on a silver platter."

"They're vampires like you?"

"Not exactly like me. We... come in variations."

"You aren't supposed to exist." She moved the oil lamp closer to inspect my wounds. The light danced across her high cheekbones. The whites of her teardrop-shaped eyes bright like milk. She checked my torso again for more wounds. My body tensed with every touch, from pain and desire.

"Psychics aren't supposed to... exist either."

"You need to be in a hospital, now."

"And be ...dissected for study? No, thank you."

She stared at my folded wings, the bits of fur on the wooden floor, and I knew she understood. Once again, I was privy to her thoughts: *He was right. It would be a media circus. I would be harassed, thrown in a cage, and killed eventually.* She understood me.

How many centuries had I kept these secrets to myself? I doubted Brittany would have understood my silent fears and me.

Ilida swore. "There's only so much I can do for you in the middle of nowhere."

"You have a gift... for swearing."

She couldn't suppress a smile at that. Friends had often told her about her colorful language I heard her think.

"Does it bother you?"

"It... amuses me."

Everything about her I found refreshing, beguiling. Too bad, I was about to ruin it. That was my lot in life, ruining good things. She looked towards the window. Snow continued to fall in thicker clumps. I studied the musty upholstery as blocks of her thoughts flowed into my mind. She was going to try to leave me, or it was on her mind too. She's caught between her survival and duty to me.

"My father thinks I sound like a sailor."

He's uptight, I wanted to say, but couldn't find my voice. I could hardly believe I wanted to defend her.

"You kill don't you?"

"Not unless they deserve it." From my position on the couch, I heard her heart rate speed up and the roar of her warm, warm blood pump through her veins. The way her sweater contoured her breasts as she cleaved for breath was enticing, as always.

"You have a dark sense of humor."

"That wasn't a joke. I kill."

"I guess you would have to," she said as she parted the blankets covering me. Her hand

accidentally brushed against my over-exuberant cock.

I captured her brown eyes with mine. How could he feel pain and lust all together? It was the hunger for blood. That's it, but I knew better. I think I've always known.

"Sorry," she whispered.

What was I going to say? Damn you for giving me a boner? I appreciated it. At least I'm alive and able to feel. We've been down this road before.

"You have a lot of wounds."

"I went in without back up."

"You went after the Jacquerie by yourself?"

"I seized the opportunity."

"Does everything have to be a gamble to you?"

Before I could answer, she cut me off. "Don't bother I know the answer. I have to get more medical supplies out of the trunk. By the way, I'm *only* a recreational therapist," she said as she pulled off her plastic gloves.

I nodded my head. *Could have fooled me.* She acted as though she knew what she was doing. She could be a doctor if she wanted. "I'm sure you know what to do."

"I think so."

"Have some faith and please try to come back."

She stood up, a mere five-feet six inches. Her quilted coat seemed to swallow her up.

"And what If I don't?" she asked as she reached

for the flashlight.

"You know you will. You're a good person. A real Florence Nightingale."

She sighed, pulled on her hood, and opened the door. Snow blew in, then she closed the door behind her.

\* \* \* \*

As Ilida approached the car, she waved her flashlight around hoping she wasn't being watched. How bizarre her night had become. She hit the man she loved with her car – something out of a nightmare, for sure. Yet, they conversed as if... As if it was a normal thing.

*How does he live like that? Does he have friends? Family?*

Snow piled high on top of the hood and around the wheels. She had to kick the snow away a couple of times before opening the door.

She sat down in the driver's seat. Her hands gripped both sides of the steering wheel. He was going to bite her eventually. He was just biding his time waiting for the moment. She should start the car and drive like...No! She couldn't do that. She hit him with her car. She should be responsible for him, but what would he do to her afterwards? How would she defend herself against a seven-foot tall bat-man?

Her thoughts and fears made her body move sluggishly. Her feet felt as if lead weights were around her ankles. Moving was becoming difficult, knowing what her fate would be.

Ilida unlocked the trunk, took out her EMT-sized first aid kit. It was an old habit from her pre-med days that refused to die. Her pink bag held everything a doctor would need in the field.

She opened the door to the abandoned home. The wind refused to let her close it. With a hard slam, it shut. She briskly walked over to him with her first aid box in hand. "How are you?"

"As okay as I... will ...ever be."

"I have to give you something to knock out the pain. I have morphine and lidocaine."

"Not... necessary, Ilida."

His voice sounded worse than before—heavy with fatigue. He's slipping away. *Keep him talking, Davis.* "Why won't it be necessary?"

"Y—you'll need a year's supply of it to deaden my pain."

"I can't do this to you..."

"You have to, or I'll bleed to death."

God, this was all her fault. Her hiding from herself caused this. Cassandra warned her. If she knew how to control and use her powers effectively, she wouldn't have run. "I don't want to cause you any more pain than you already have."

"Just do it!"

She donned a fresh pair of plastic gloves, as she looked him in the eye. Her hands shook furiously as she threaded a needle. After a moment, she took a deep, cleansing breath and said, "I'm going to push the needle through your skin now."

Daedalus gravely nodded his head. He was being brave, she thought. He should kill her for what she was about to do.

His teeth clamped together as she pushed the needle through his olive skin. Blood dotted through where the needle exited and entered. The pain reverberated throughout her body. *This is what animals and people go through when doctors work on them.* Repeatedly, she threaded his skin back together. Tears welled in her eyes. "I—I'm sorry about this."

From the orange glow of the oil lamp, she could see his face had paled even under his dark skin. *I can't do this to him.* She touched his forehead wiping the sweat off. When she pulled her fingers back to continue, it was a reflexive action; she looked at her fingers and saw red. Confused, she checked his chest, careful to not hurt him any more than she had. Red dots covered his chest. "You have..."

"Red... sweat."

Her own forehead dripped with sweat as well when his large hand wiped her forehead. She



trapped his hand and held on for strength, comfort.

"Don't l—lose it now, Ilida."

His skin was clammy and it shook. She held his hand tight then lowered it.

"We're going to get through this together. Okay?" She hoped. His skin color had an unhealthy pallor to it. Quickly, she sewed the gashes on his arm and the side of his chest. Next was his thigh, the true point of impact. She moved the lamp along his leg to investigate. It was puffy and she saw the edge of what looked like bone sticking out of his skin. Blood continued to ooze. She threaded the needle again.

She bent down to pierce his skin with the needle when she froze. Remarkably, the broken bone and torn skin tried to seal up. Despair filled her chest when the wounds would open again. "How did you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Your skin. You're healing up or trying to."

"Vampires heal faster than humans."

She processed the information, filed it away for later, then moved on to the next task. "I broke your leg."

He nodded. His face made a pained expression, then he gritted out through his teeth, "My femur is broken... in two places."

If she could set his leg, relieve the stress there,

then maybe he'd be able to heal himself sufficiently.

He obviously knew his body well. Better than most people, in fact, even through pain. A lone chair sat to the side of the room. It was just what she needed. After covering him with the blanket, she stood up on aching knees. "I'm going to set it."

"You do that."

Ilida picked up the chair and banged it against the wall as hard as she could. It took her two whacks when finally the legs broke off from the seat. One broke in half. That was okay. The long one would stabilize his leg. The other would be there to assist. "I... still have to sew up your leg."

"We've... passed the point of... no return. What is it?"

"Nothing." Ilida wrapped his leg up in gauze, carefully making the splint. Stress appeared around his eyes and mouth. His eyes hypnotic. They changed from violet to red and back. Like at the club. She'd dismissed it then as her over-worked imagination.

His face, overall, was gaunt. His cheeks and eyes sunk in making the redness appear ominous. His skin was a jaundiced yellow. To make it worse foam bubbled up out of the corners of his mouth. He really resembled a rabid animal. He'd warned her but she wouldn't listen of course. He wasn't like the others. Was he?

"You can't... hide any...thing from me."  
"Take my blood, Daedalus."

## Chapter Twenty-five

“**F**uck!”

My gums itched bringing forth fangs. They lengthened from my thirst and anticipation.

The little blood I had left boiled in my veins. She invited me to take her blood. It's a powerful aphrodisiac for vampires. You never refuse that sort of invitation. I'd be the first to.

I couldn't do that to her in this condition. Not once did I look away from her. I waited for her to take back the offer. Instead, her sad brown eyes pleaded with me. I looked away from her.

“You have to, Daedalus.”

“I ...don't...have to do anything but die.”

A tear ran down her high, round cheek. “Do it!

Her voice, her eyes pulled at me. I weakened. I cursed myself as I tried to halt the urge to collect that tiny drop of water.

I will hurt her, might even kill her in this state. Fear twisted my gut for what I might do if I bit her. Never mind the psychic implications. That

was a concern for later, if I was still alive to worry. "D—do you know what you are inviting me to do?"

She shook her head calmly looking like the sage she is. "You're skin is yellowing and there's foam at the corners of your mouth. Do it now before you go rabid."

I looked that bad? I'd never let myself get that ravenous. I shook the rambling thoughts away. "Do you trust me not to kill you?"

"Hurry, before I change my mind."

She had pretty, eyes laced with bags. I dug into her soul until I found her subconscious. A male could stare at them for ours on end. I sent the suggestion of peace and contentment. I crooned to her, in her mind, like the familiar lover I am. Her fears quieted down. On some level, she knew I didn't want to do this.

Her eyes were shadowed. She was scared. I understood why, but she had to trust me or the experience would be bad for her.

"You've lost a lot of blood, already. I can't let you die because of my fears."

"Illy..."

"You do what you have to."

I growled my torment. "Do you trust me? I can't...bite you unless you do."

"I trust you. While you tried to push me away I trusted you," she said, as she lifted me up and

bent down meeting my lips.

My anticipation peaked, and my cock sprang to life. Her artery pulsed like a beating drum. It called to me— begged me to partake. I bit down.

\* \* \* \*

Ilida couldn't stop the tiny quakes in her pelvis. She could barely understand the need she had to let him do this. It was strange, but she felt compelled. As his teeth penetrated her flesh, she gasped. The pain astounded her then a curious heat invaded her neck, streamed down to her shoulders then to her breasts and torso. Her nipples hardened to nubs. She reached for his arm and held him.

His muscular arms tensed under her hand, as if he was holding something back. He drew blood from her neck slowly with soft suction. Then she felt his fangs dig in deeper.

Somewhere in her subconscious, she knew it was penetration. As his penis bulged and knocked against the zipper of her jeans she ached for it and his mouth worked against her neck.

## Chapter Twenty-six

I woke up, my body buzzing with life. My cock pulsed. I held it, watching it jerk. Pre-semen and blood beaded on the tip of the head. My brain nagged me. Ilida?

I saw her. She lay in a puddle of her torn clothing. Her clothes ripped from her body. Her legs open, sex exposed. Arousal glistened on her hairy folds. Then it came back to me—how I ripped into her neck and her body. She gave and I took and took. I wanted more.

I shuddered looking at my hands. My hair fell off. I was in human form. We're both vulnerable to the cold. I picked her up brought her to the couch. My blood evaporated off the couch and blankets. We didn't need any more barriers to keeping warm.

Ilida's a hardy one. The bites I gave her were barbaric. She should be no more than a pretty corpse. I'd bitten her neck twice. Pricks decorated her shoulders. Blood smears colored her nipples.

Her waist...I nipped there, too. She was still breathing. I'd heard of those bites before—the mating bites of the Hymeneal ritual.

I should have been angry but... I have a lust for life, sex with many women. I lead a dangerous life. Now I'll be tied to a woman who'll want forever. I can't give it to her. I don't want to give it to her. I can settle for sex and an occasional rescue of her, but that's it. I can't deny I have a protective streak when it comes to Ilida.

I flinched. Her body was cool, too cool. I caressed her shoulders and arms. I had to get rid of these hideous bite marks. I licked her neck, shoulders, nipples. A light moan escaped her lips. She wasn't awake but in a twilight slumber. I have an internal clock, as all vampires do. It was somewhere between two and three o'clock. A while before dawn, before I fall a sleep. Then she'll have to keep me warm.

I watched her chest gently rise and fall. Her nipple touched my left rib then receded. The lamplight, still burning, gave her skin a warm glow of orange and purple, making her nipple seem all the more appetizing. Just then, the memory of the taste of her nipple in my mouth nudged me. Instinctively I licked my lips, bent down, opened my mouth. I stopped, held back, gritted my teeth. My hunger was powerful, like a lion unable to hold back from its fresh kill. Yes,



she was mine to take whenever, in whatever way possible, but I 'm not a beast.

I ran my hand over my face, gripped my short hair. My body protested my need for restraint. Something warm and wet impinged on my struggles. Ilida's tongue darted out at my nipple, moistening it. I looked down, ignoring my fight, with my body, to see Ilida licking my nipple. Her muscular leg wrapped around my hip. My cock ready as ever rose toward her waiting hole. Was she awake? Was she dreaming? I couldn't move until I knew for sure. Then her mind fed me blocks of images of what she wanted—what her body ordered. Like a mindless sexual thing, I happily entered her.

Slick, hot folds rubbed against my cock. I pressed in her, wanting to feel everything about her, wanting to remember every bump of her inner walls.

The friction blew my mind. She was tight. Her hips rose to greet me with perfect precision. Like angry frantic pistons, we bucked. My balls slapped against her. Our thighs rubbed against each other in some tortured dance. Her leg muscles quivered in my hands. Her body deliciously tensed around me. I kept moving, wanting to prolong her beautiful torment. Hot cream exploded from her around my cock. Her inner walls pumped me until I screamed, shooting

my cum inside her.

Her scent made me wild with a consuming passion. She lay there limp from desire. A lazy smile touched her face. I couldn't be sated. Grasping her ass, I pulled her to me, lifted her legs over my shoulders, and lowered my head. I pressed my nose and mouth to her honey scented folds. My reward: her deep shudders and trembling thighs. I licked all the moisture from between her legs while holding back the need to bite her clitoris and gorge from that little thing. Oh hell! I bit down ceasing to care.

A jolt went through her body, zapped me as I bit and sucked from her. Her body gave that glorious stiffening and she came. Cream drowned my nostrils, coated my fangs.

\* \* \* \*

Ilida jumped, feeling something long, hard, and cold on top of her. She felt it, felt him. Daedalus? His hair caressed her chin. His soft, short, wavy hair. It wasn't a dream. The whine of the wind, the groan of the walls... It was real. So was the moisture between her legs.

She rubbed her chin against his hair, his forehead. He was so cold. Still. While she felt hot, lazy, sated. The evidence was between her legs. Her neck ached as if he did bite her there. Her

breasts equally sore. She became aware of his mouth at her nipple; his wisps of cool breath blew against it. Moisture from his mouth ran down her breast. She held his cool motionless head to her, and felt for a pulse. If she could hook him up to a monitor, his heartbeat wouldn't register. He's legally dead.

She knew better.

It was ridiculous.

It couldn't be true, but it was. Daedalus, a walking, breathing vampire. The evidence lay on top of her.

He did unimaginable things to her last night without a twinge of guilt. She invited him into her body. He did things to her she never allowed the previous men in her life to do. Every inch of her body he used for her gratification and his, and she gave back to him.

His body was hard as a rock. His abs six-packs of ice. She didn't think he had this in mind in keeping her warm. This had to be dangerous for him. Tentatively she reached out and caressed his back. It wasn't that bad really. His skin was immovable but it felt like skin—hard skin. She continued to caress him, getting to know his body, and his scars. They were thick and raised. He'd been whipped? Maybe? Repeatedly flogged. The scars weren't given a chance to heal. Chunks of flesh had to have been removed to produce

scarring like that. If that thing were alive, she'd kill him for what he did to Daedalus.

These damn scars. What was he like before that vampire hurt him like this? She felt as if someone took her most prized possession away, messed it about, and then gave it back to her.

That's okay. She clutched her stomach; it roared and rolled. She couldn't move to do anything about it. Daedalus unknowingly had her pinned down to the couch.

\* \* \* \*

I shot upright from the sounds of Ilida's stomach protesting it's the lack of food. She turned her body over, facing the couch. She raised her knees. A human reaction to pain.

"Starving. Stomach hurts."

I couldn't let her linger like this. I had to bring her over fully.

"You can't, please. Not yet."

She'd read my thoughts. The idea made my cock harden. I kept my thoughts deeply hidden, but she culled them out like harvest pulled from the earth—like marrow from bone.

She grasped my arm. Her skin cool. "I have food in the trunk of my car."

She was right. It had gone too far already. I feared we were going to fall off the goddamn cliff

with the blood and sex. "I'll find your keys."

"You can't go out there. You'll freeze to death before you get to the car."

"I won't. I hate the cold, but I can take it better than you." I found her keys in what was left of her coat. Feeling beastly and triumphant at the sight of our sexual carnage, I declared, "Be right back."

As I ran to the door barely seen, I commanded my body to morph to bat form. My wings sprung out. The extra hair would shield me from the cold, but I'll need more blood to recover from changing so much.

A foot of snow covered the roof of her car. A snowdrift barely three feet tall blocked my way to the trunk. I kicked and scraped the snow out of the way. I felt like it took me hours to do it, but it only took ten minutes.

My hands were blocks of hairy ice. My talons were numb, so were my feet. I willed my body to continue. Soon I'd be in the not-so-cold climate of the cabin. I unlocked the trunk, found the cooler. The wind carried the scent of food.

I pushed the door open and slammed it shut behind me. The thin walls of the cabin groaned and shook with the force of it. We'll be lucky if the ceiling doesn't collapse on top of us.

Damn! I had to heat up the food somehow. I almost fell into despair when I spotted the fireplace. I remembered watching while Ilida tried

in vain to patch me up.

Floorboards nailed to the fireplace covered it. I pulled them off, one by one. Nails scattered. I felt Ilida's eyes on my back watching my every movement. She was curious about me. I've had sex with numerous women. They and I never let it go any farther than that. I shouldn't entertain her curiosity, but it felt good to be thought of.

I broke the floorboards in half, quarters, then tossed them into the fireplace, snapped my fingers and the wood burst into white and blue sparks. Cinders crackled. Soon we had a roaring fire, safely contained. I laid the food, still wrapped up in its foil, next to the fireplace as close as possible without it burning up.

I met her eyes. She gazed back at me. It was only matter of time before I fucked her again. For now, I had to keep her warm.

## Chapter Twenty-seven

“We’re one of the most powerful creatures in the world and we get snowed in by a blizzard,” Alec said.

“Daedalus will be all right, Alec. You would have felt it if he were dead.”

“That woman is with him.”

“You mean, Ilida.”

“That woman.”

“Why do you distrust her so much? What has she done?”

“She...” Before he could complete his sentence, the doorbell rang. “Who is that? My night gets better and better.”

Alec opened the door not needing to ask who it was. Vampires sensed each other even a vampire/werewolf hybrid, the only one in the world so far, could be detected. “Gauge.”

“Where is he?” he said as he walked into Alec and Tania’s apartment without being invited. “Come in, Gauge.” Alec counted to ten. He would

tolerate Gauge for Daedalus' sake. "Stuck in Riverhead, Long Island."

"Shit! That must be driving him nuts."

"Not anymore than it's driving me nuts."

"You're worried about him."

"He's my brother, too. He's stuck with...Ilida in an abandoned cabin."

"He'll be fine. I can imagine what they're up to now."

Alec recognized the feral gleam in Gauge's eyes. Daedalus and Ilida were bonding.

"You aren't worried about the outcome."

It wasn't a question. They both knew Daedalus to be an acrobat. Alec only wanted to be sure his brother wasn't getting in too deep. *But he is.*

"He can take care of himself."

"Until he gets into trouble."

"You two are having a decent conversation. I never thought I'd see the night." Tania said in passing.

"You aren't Radu," Gauge recognized.

Alec heard Tania's footsteps freeze.

"I hated him, still do. In that, we have something else in common."

Gauge nodded. Layers of wild, long, black hair swung around his face. It was startling how he and Daedalus are paternal twins but didn't resemble each other, except for the occasional turn of the head. A simple gesture they shared. Both



brothers were loners and ruled by passions.

"Can't you sense his thoughts? It should be natural since you are twins."

"Daedalus is an exceptional blocker. I do know he's been getting the ride of his life, so I wouldn't worry about him."

"Too much information, again," Tania said. "I'm going upstairs to read a book. Try not to kill each other in the meantime."

\* \* \* \*

"How is your stomach?" he asked, quietly.

"Gassy. It's been better," Ilida said.

It cramped from lack of food. So, she was alive for another freezing night, and the struggle to keep her in that state showed on his face. Something had to give soon.

His face spoke volumes to her.

"I'll be fine soon, Daedalus."

"You should let me change you."

"Uh-uh. I'm not ready for that yet."

"Not ready or the idea scares you?"

She took a deep breath then belched. "Both."

There he went again. Aloofness showed on his face. She was saying the wrong things to the wrong person... vampire. Whatever!

"You're running out of time. I don't know how long we'll be stuck here in this cabin together." He

leaned forward. The blanket wrapped around his waist fell open. His lower region shadowed. "I chased the rats out but with the food on the floor they'll want to come back."

"If I eat big meals twice a day, I should be okay."

"I've bitten you three times already," he said, ignoring her last statement." Then he covered his mouth in mock surprise. "Oh my bad. It's been four times."

She wanted to slap him so hard his brother would feel it. "You bit me when we made love last night?"

"I bit you in the apartment, in the subway as well as here in the cabin after we had sex last night. I bit you the first time we made love."

"You didn't."

"I did. Think back, Ilida."

The aloof expression on Daedalus's face changed to cold hardness. His violet eyes turned icy blue. He bore into her eyes, waiting as a chill grew between them.

"Why don't I remember?"

"I didn't remember until after I woke with your taste in my mouth."

"That's bull! I thought you fed to live only."

"I've developed an appetite for you."

Just what she wanted to hear. She gives a vampire a voracious appetite. He gave her one in

return, though it's an appetite for all of him.

"So now what?"

"There's more. I shared blood with you once."

She couldn't help but touch her throat. She ran her fingertips over the bite marks. The jagged wounds pulsed. Reminding her, she was his.

"If I share blood with you again forget about going back to your old life."

"I swallowed your blood?"

"Not without protest on your part." He smiled. "You wanted to live. You swallowed my blood."

She remembered the salty sweet taste in her mouth. She shivered wrapping the blanket tightly around her, but it wasn't from the cold.

"You must hate the idea," he taunted. "You think we're all the same, Ilida, willing to bite anything that moves."

"And you're like a wounded child or animal striking at whomever might hurt you. *I* don't think you're like those other vampires."

"Well now. Why don't I believe you?" Daedalus's mouth took on a cruel twist. "Should I fuck you again to get the truth?"

"Read my thoughts. You have no problem doing that."

"A good fuck might work best."

Despite the fear coursing through her, she felt an unpleasant, hot desire. She didn't know which emotion to hang onto first. She wanted him.

He was in her blood, and she was going to give him whatever he wanted. "I think you're trying to scare me. But I've been scared enough for a lifetime."

He crawled over to her as if stalking her. His big erect penis swung back and forth like a pendulum. She still cowered against the couch.

"I'm not trying to scare you, Ilida. Changing you might be the only way to save your life," he said as he leaped on top of her.

The cold rotted floor greeted her back. She bit her lip and parted her blankets. "You would make a wonderful relief counselor, you know that."

"Do *you* know I bit your clitoris last night?"

She followed his gaze to the hairy curls between her legs. Her clitoris convulsed. Her folds wetted. Her body and her erratic feelings had nothing to do with reason. He turned her on and that was the God's honest truth.

He didn't lower his hips to hers, yet. He touched her with his eyes and audibly sucked in air.

"You're already wet. Is this what frightened rabbits do when they want someone, but just can't take the leap?"

"I'm not a frightened rabbit."

"No you aren't. You're a beautiful, brave woman who can more than deal with anything that comes from this moment forward. Get used to

the new you."

She didn't want to get used to anything. She wanted to go back to the way her life was before Daedalus blew into it. She gave him a right punch in the shoulder for it. "Go to West HI!"

He cocked an eyebrow. She knew it would have hurt an ordinary individual, but not him. She knew he read her thoughts then.

"You scare me, Illy."

He lowered his head for a moment then gazed at her hard.

"How?"

"You make me vulnerable. I *don't* like being vulnerable."

She believed him. His voice echoed around her and over the crackle of the fire. "Why do I make you vulnerable?"

"Because you care."

His expression was lustful, hungry. She found her body responding. "Where I come from, caring isn't so bad."

"We're in a life and death situation. I have to think clearly. You don't make me think clearly."

She was so dense. Did he really care? Was she just another bed buddy until the next conquest? "Why are you telling me all of this?"

He shrugged. It infuriated her. More walls for her to break down. "Call it verbal diarrhea."

"Maybe you're being honest with me for a

change."

His eyes blazed. "I'd rather fuck you than be honest now."

He was honest and cold. Ilida didn't know how much more she could take of this. He hovered over her naked. His muscles felt tense under her hands, like he was holding back. He *was* holding back. He would have been inside her now. His eyes glowed red in the darkness of the cabin. "Daedalus?"

"I love the way you say my name."

"You're stalling."

He paused, gazing at her notionally. "I have to feed."

"I know."

"How, Illy?"

"Your eyes are red so, I have to eat to feed you, right?"

"I have to keep you warm and feed you to keep you alive."

She forced her body to settle down and take what he was about to give, and take, from her. It was difficult with her pulse racing. "The fringe benefits?"

"Sex and feeding can be separated by a practiced few."

She gasped and bucked once as he rubbed the head of his penis against her folds, against her clitoris.

Breathlessly, she asked, "Did you ever feed from the women you slept with?"

"No." He bent down. His lips kissed her neck. She shivered. Always she shivered. Her body bowed as he entered her slowly.

He stretched her as he pushed inside. The hood of her clitoris widened as he hotly rubbed against it. She was so sensitized her tiny glands felt every shove he gave her. Her hips pressed against him.

"Oh... Daedalus!"

Startled, stiffening pleasure, then awaiting orgasm seasoned Ilida's cry. He took his moment. His fangs dug into her flesh as he moved against her.

He grew bigger inside her, harder than before as he drew out the prized liquid from her neck, and then the dance began.

It wasn't elegant the way they humped against each other. On the tiny couch, their movements were restrained but...effective. She arched into him meeting his hips. Her arousal seeped around him coating the couch underneath her.

Daedalus buried his head in the nook of her neck, seeking nourishment, seeking solace? Abruptly, he lifted his head from her neck. She rolled her forehead against his shoulder. He pummeled her hips; pushed her into the sofa.

Daedalus' eyelids shut and he threw his head back. He grasped her hips. Ilida shuddered, then

her body stiffened again. He thrust so far into her that her orgasm barely registered. She only felt the sweetness it left. At last, Daedalus fell over the edge and flooded into her. Her toes curled as another orgasm hit her.

She caressed his neck, played with his hair. Her touch sent jolts through his skin. He barely noticed when her fingers made their way to his shoulders. His body stiffened when she traced the scars on his back. He jumped off her, pulling out of his warm, wet haven.

\* \* \* \*

The smell of their lovemaking released into the air.

"What happened?" she asked. "Is it the scars?"

"The scars are none of your business."

"What?"

"You heard me!"

"I gave my blood and body to you twice. You owe me!"

I raised my fist at the wall, ready to punch it. Instead, I pivoted around, stalked over to her, grabbed her shoulders, and pinned her against the musty back cushion of the sofa. "My scars. My business. Remember that if you want to stay on my good side through this ridiculous ordeal."

Ilida's eyes were saucer-wide with fear; her



body was rigid with tension.

Guilt seized me. "Don't be afraid of me."

"You're still scaring me." Just then, the blanket that was wrapped around her shoulders crept down on one side. It held its position anchored on her nipple made swollen by my ardent sucking. I realized I was too close to her. My eyes drifted to her full lips. "We're getting deeper and deeper into trouble."

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you feel it, Ilida? We can't keep our hands off each other. I have to work hard to stay angry with you. I didn't ask for this!"

"That night you were upset, afraid for your daughter. Your fear and anger was so overwhelming that it gave me a headache. I don't know why it was you and not someone else."

"You're sure about that? You popped into my head uninvited and set up camp without permission."

"It wasn't supposed to happen. My aunt had dampened my telepathic powers to save my sanity."

"Really? Tell auntie she didn't do a thorough job. We're blood bonded! The Hymeneal has started."

"Would you let go of your rage for one minute and tell me what that means?"

I stalked over to her and grabbed her about the

shoulders again. "It means, Ilida Davis, that we are blood bonded for eternity. I feel what you feel. You feel what I feel. If I bleed, so will you. I can read your thoughts, and unfortunately, you can read mine, and the sex is blindingly hot. When the blood calls for it, we won't ignore it. We're as good as married. Vampire style."

Both of us looked at where our skins touched. Familiar warmth invaded my limbs, and my cock saluted her. I moved away from her and paced the floor, then squatted in front of the fireplace. I couldn't walk with the ever-ready hammer between my legs.

"You hate the closeness, don't you? You probably hate me."

"Hate you? How?"

"First you comfort me then you try to scare me. I don't know if you want to kill me from one moment to the next."

"I... love you."

"Oh please! Don't say that if you don't mean it."

"I never say what I don't mean."

"Then you said that to calm me down. In five minutes you'll have me fending you off."

"You're probably right there. I love you."

"Don't believe you. Sorry!"

"My life was fine until you jumped onto the tail end of my private thoughts that night," I said

over my shoulder. "But I don't... hate you." I realized, as the thought froze in my brain, there was a thin line between love and hate.

"I guess it's too early to tell me how you feel. I'm not very good at the relationships thing," she said.

I stopped pacing, shook my head as looked up at the dilapidated ceiling. I didn't dare say anything further with how I felt. He was still sorting it out. "That night was the end of my privacy," I said.

"You can't stand to have anyone know the real you. Too bad, Daedalus. I'm getting to know all of you."

"Why aren't you running away?"

She smiled wryly. "We're stranded in this cabin during the worst blizzard ever."

A tortured whisper broke through my lips. "You should be running like a bat out of hell." Then louder, I said, "Why aren't you?"

"I guess the same reason why you can't. We're hopelessly entangled."

"Hopelessly entangled... That sounds right." He watched her play with her lip. "I take risks every night, and now I have this job..."

"What job?"

"I'm Head of Security for the King and Queen of Vampires." I made an unintelligible sound after watching her frown. "That was too much

information, wasn't it?"

"Your brother and his wife?"

"We're all around you."

"And you're..."

I sighed wanting to end this bit of the conversation. "The Head of Security and the Prince of Vampires or Enforcer. Whatever is easiest to say."

"You risk your life every night."

"I do, and that makes us too different."

"Are you talking your way out of this?"

"Knowing me will put you in danger. Look at what happened to my daughter."

"I had a taste of that in the subway station and Tilly House, remember," Ilida reminded him. "And I survived."

"It will get worse before this is over."

"I'm not entirely defenseless, Daedalus."

"You hate using your powers, and you haven't told me why."

## Chapter Twenty-eight

“You want a confessional?”

“Why not? We have no place else to go.”

“You haven’t told me about the scars.”

Ilida peered around her anxiously. The cabin creaked and whined with every gust of wind. The ceiling groaned as if it carried a huge weight on its shoulders. *It’ll be a miracle if the roof doesn’t collapse.*

It would be a double miracle if she could convince him they can be together, but that was a wasted wish. He didn’t want any part of her except what was between her legs. He was a playboy through and through, or was he?

“How about it?”

“Five years ago I was an intern and had my first patient, an elderly man having a heart attack. I assisted the doctor in trying to resuscitate him. We worked on him for half an hour. His wife was outside, frantically pacing around wondering if the argument they had earlier was worth it. I blocked out her thoughts wanting to concentrate

on her husband. Ilida took a deep breath then let out. Tears stung her eyes.

"And then what?"

"I thought I had control of my telepathy. I did. Then while I was working on him his spirit, his thoughts, reached out to me begging me to save him. He wanted to tell his wife he loved her. I tried to ignore him. He insisted, then in a flash of blinding white light he died. I felt him slip away. You know there really is a silver cord attached to our spirits."

She flinched. His finger tenderly wiped a tear away. "I'm sorry."

"From then on, I just wanted to be normal. I stopped my lessons with my aunt."

"You are normal. It's what makes *you*, *you*."

"You have no problems being a vampire? You ever wanted to be anything else?"

He shrugged. "This is all I've ever known."

"Vampires are born vampires?"

"Mostly. Some have been changed. We call them acolytes."

"Was your brother's wife born a vampire?"

"He changed her, then she became his queen a year ago. After that incident you went back to school."

She nodded thoughtfully. "My father wiggled out about it. He wanted his kids to be doctors like him."

"Your brother is a doctor?"

"An emergency plastic surgeon here in Long Island."

"You have quite a family."

He'd said that as if he felt inadequate. Was he kidding? His life seemed more vibrant and fun than hers. "My family is just as dysfunctional as everyone else's: my mother running off to Paris, my brother the chauvinistic pig and ambitious surgeon."

"I can't imagine leaving you."

She laughed bitterly, then wagged her finger at him. "But you will." She hugged herself trying to warm her limbs.

"I won—?"

"Let's talk about you."

"You want to hear about my dysfunctional family? Could take a while."

"My train is late. Let's hear it."

"I..."

As he answered, the ceiling groaned. Ilida flinched then jumped at the wood sprinkling on her shoulder. The next thing she knew she was dropped on the couch. Daedalus lay on top of her shielding her. With a loud splintering whoosh sound, wood and snow fell to the floor.

"My God!"

A five-foot mound of chunky snow lay where the table used to be. Rounded cubes of snow

melted into the weathered hardwood floors. Daedalus's welcomed weight pressed her into the couch. Something else pressed into her, too.

"Are you okay?"

Her gaze fell to his generous lips. "I'm fine."

They both stared at the mess on the floor.

"It could be worse," Daedalus said.

His deep, gravely voice made her toes curl. "You don't call the ceiling falling down on us bad?"

"It's a good sized hole but not the whole ceiling."

"So how do we keep warm now?"

"Come on, Illy. You can figure it out."

She figured it out, all right. The answer was right between his legs. The way he looked at her, as if he wanted to devour her, was the answer she needed. The Hymeneal they were in...he could break her heart. He didn't want forever. He just wanted right now. She was being sucked in deeper by the hour. God help her, she wanted him, too. "I've been reduced to a rabbit in heat."

"I know it's the blood talking, but we have to keep warm."

"Can't we just lie together really close?"

"Fine. Let's try it. If it doesn't work then we'll..."

"Make love."

Her body reacted to his heat—straining for



closer contact. Her lips thinned into a grim line. She fit him too well, as if some cosmic force bound them together, and there was the Hymeneal—vampiric marriage, he said.

She could find less desirable males to be married to. “What do we do about the Hymeneal?”

“Go with it. To rebel against the Hymeneal is to injure me and yourself.”

“You’re shivering.” He reached down and felt the soles of her feet then her toes. They were freezing to the point of numbness.

“I’m okay.”

“No, you’re not.”

“We can’t.”

“We’re wasting time.” Slowly Daedalus lowered his head. Her eyelids fluttered then closed as his lips pressed against hers. She was cold as diamonds; he was hot as newly formed coal.

“Let me eat, and I’ll warm up again, then you can feed,” she said between his kisses.

“That’s not what I meant. Let me help you.”

She was delirious with heat. His need relentless. She was drowning in him. “The more we do it the more...”

“The connection between us deepens. We’ll figure it out later.”

Moaning loud, she kissed him back. Then she

pulled away from him. "No, I can't do this. The more we do this the more I feel for you. There has to be another way for us to keep warm."

*I need you, angel. You need me.* The unspoken words vibrated between them in the air they breathed.

*Feel me.*

He moved behind her, lifted her leg, and swiftly entered.

She knew he would break her heart. She was waiting for the moment to come. She wanted him inside taking her, whenever. She was a slave to his erection, to him.

She threw her head back, clutched the dirty couch. The seam binding ripped off in her hands.

"We're in each other's blood and mind. I belong in your body."

She clenched her eyes closed. "Can it be broken? Are you sure we can't stop this?"

"It has already begun and nothing will separate us." He looked down, his hair brushing against her breasts, then stared back at her. "Look at us. Are you afraid of enjoying it?" he asked.

"Are you?"

"I meant what I said before. I love you."

She covered her face with her hands shaking her head.

"Pretty breasts," he murmured as he dipped his head to kiss the valley between her breasts. He

captured one brown nipple between his teeth. She jerked as his pronounced incisors scraped her nipple, pulling and tugging it. His finger continued to stroke her. Her knees bent. Her hips jerked to another orgasm.

Finally, she let out a breath and relaxed, but not for long. His cool lips lowered to hers. "Wait! My lips are chapped."

"I know."

His tongue ran around the contours of her lips, wetting every curve and bump. He held her head, deepened the kiss. It was freeing to actually wrap her arms around his neck. His skin was cool. She rubbed his back, feeling the rippling muscles and bumpy skin move beneath her palms.

His penis slipped between her opened legs. She was thoroughly wet now and lost all coherent thought. And loved it. She gasped as she felt his penis push slowly inside her. He was being careful not to hurt her. Slowly he filled her up. She arched her back to receive all of him then a ripple of fear went through her. He was so large and hard as steel.

"Shush, Angel," he whispered in her ear. His lips captured hers swallowing her cries of pain and pleasure. His hips stopped moving. She caught her breath, and then he began the primitive rhythm. Soon she lost herself to it. His lips spread fire to her earlobe then neck. He nibbled her skin,

licked. Sweet pain became a lingering sensual ache. Her eyes drifted closed. She felt nothing except his constant sucking at her neck while his hips pummeled her.

And that delightful stiffness throughout her body... pure bliss. The rush of pleasure came over her. Daedalus moaned in her ears and his hips rammed her harder, forcing her into the cushion. He moved in and out then his magnificent body shook with spasm as his hot cum flowed into her body.

Ilida struggled to capture all of the images he fed her...

Daedalus as a young boy so sweet, beautiful with his blue-violet eyes. He was dragged away from his mother. A harsh voice hollered at him – cursed him. Pain...She felt the tearing in her back as Daedalus was lifted up by his wings...

The images were unrelenting. She felt the force of her body being ripped apart. The pain radiated from her back to womb. Anger and humiliation...

He was older now, changed to half cross. Daedalus seethed with anger, pain. Blood! So much blood. She felt the blood on her back on his back. Flesh torn from there. Unbearably hot steam surrounded her skin. The walls smoothed from... lava?

He was chained to it. The chains rubbed his skin raw. His wrists and ankles bled. Heavy

breathing, moaning — the heavy smell of sex in the air. He was forced to watch. She couldn't grasp that image fast enough. Then she felt a drawing from his body and hers. His spirit. Her spirit, collided, entangled bursts with pure incandescent light, then dropped back into their bodies.

His anger became hers. His rage became hers. The effect of his memories was shattering.

Her head lay on his muscular arm. It was the closest she'd ever laid against anyone.

Now she knew what made him tick. What made him the way he was. She wanted to kill the bastards who'd hurt him years ago. All she could do was offer a weak apology.

"I'm sorry, Daedalus."

\* \* \* \*

From the look in her face, she instantly regretted it. I survived insurmountable odds to stay alive. Pity was the last thing I wanted, but she was angry that someone attempted and went through with the rape. She cared.

I hadn't told a living soul, except Gauge, in centuries.

"You didn't rape me, Ilida."

I had to comfort her, reassure her, something. Her revulsion for my rapists was almost a living, breathing entity — it was that strong.

"You killed them didn't you?"

"Yes."

"They deserved it."

"Are you my dark angel?"

"I thought you were mine."

"You are taking this remarkably well."

"I suspected something traumatic happened to you. Does anyone else know?"

"Just Gauge. He saved my life that night." I stopped myself, not sure how much to reveal, but I'd come this far and I didn't want to back down now.

"You don't have to talk about it."

"After I killed the first rapist and freed the Vrykolakas clan, the ones that wanted to be free, I collapsed on the warmed ground. His blood coated my hands. I was a mess. Gauge cleaned..."

"I'm being...your friend. Continue, please."

"Shit ran down my legs. I didn't know vampires could shit."

It was subtle the change in rhythm. She held her breath as my hands, now warmed from rubbing her, dipped between her legs. Didn't want to talk anymore. I wanted to feel her around me. I wanted her to cocoon me in her safe loving embrace. I love... Ilida.

I found her throbbing and erect from my stroking. I caressed, teased her until she moved her hips against my penis. Whether she liked it or

not, the foreplay had begun. We had extended foreplay for over a day already. I continued to stroke her as she gazed into my deep, red eyes.

"I don't scare you?"

She couldn't speak through the sparks of desire firing off and ricocheting through her pelvis, through my pelvis. She managed to shake her head.

I had to be sure.

"You're nuts, but brave. Very brave. I like that. Do you like this?" I asked. I dipped my finger inside her. I stroked circled her inner valleys drawing out her desire and wetness until she arched her back, creaming my fingers. I knew I would be safe with her.

## Chapter Twenty-nine

Ilida's body pumped me empty of my seed. I fell over her, burying his face in her shoulder. I should stop, but it was pleasure beyond pleasure, like a drug, an addiction to a human woman.

I lifted my head. The heavy copper smell of blood filled my lungs. Ilida should be dead, but she was alive and lust filled her dark brown eyes. She was changing slowly before my eyes. I didn't want to stop it. I feared I couldn't at this point.

As if to punctuate my thoughts, my cock pulsed and hardened again. Her body, warm and wet, welcomed me to continue. She lifted her hips. I cried out shooting my cum into her again. Her muscles cleaved my semen as she cleaved my notions of love, sex, and being a vampire. Suddenly, I wanted her to be apart of me to know all of me. I bent down and grasped her with my fangs. I released my thoughts, emotions into her mind, into her body.



The tip-tap of snow hitting the ice, and the howl of the wind did nothing to distract her from my answer. After making love again, we talked. It was something I rarely encouraged with my previous partners. But Ilida has a gift. Until now, she'd talked nonstop. Her voice soothed and distracted me from my sorrows so I wanted to hear her.

It did other things as well. I shifted on the cushion next to her. Blood filled my center. "I finally shut you up."

"Six hundred years old. I don't think I've ever been dumbstruck in my life."

"I can believe that."

Her eyes flashed with quick fury. "Excuse you?"

He smirked. "You ask a lot of questions, and you don't come up for air."

"When I'm nervous I get verbal diarrhea. She shrugged her shoulders. "So sue me."

"Vampires don't sue. We have other means to settle disagreements."

She must have flinched for he rushed to assure her he was harmless, at least for the moment.

"I won't hurt you, Ilida."

"It was a reflex."

Last night I—we made love after biting her, and we didn't stop. Made love? It wasn't sex. We indeed made love.

I'm dangerous to be around now. Taking my

word that I wouldn't hurt her would take convincing.

"I was angry, starving and in tremendous pain."

"I understand that. This situation is stressful."

"We'll get out of here."

"I just thought of something. I have to keep eating to feed you," she said.

"You'll have to keep eating to gain your energy back after." We make love, I wanted to say. Can I get them out alive without revealing the bond we created?

"We'd better get out of here by tomorrow."

"Survival is my middle name. When I say we'll get out of here, I mean it. Besides, my people are looking for me."

\* \* \* \*

Finally, day became night. I watched her finish her second meal of ham from across the living room. She'd eaten twice to ration the food. It was time for me to feed and I found myself staring at her throat as it worked to swallow food. Her long throat could entertain a vampire for hours. Her body could entertain equally. Her voice could tame even the wildest beast.

The veins under her skin were highlighted. Okay, I needed blood. There was no getting

around it. I only hoped what happened before wouldn't happen again, but it was slim hope. My pulse began to beat fast at the prospect of holding her in my arms and...

"I have to feed, Ilida."

She swallowed hard. I strove for detachment, but it eluded me. She was vulnerable to me and that triggered my protective instincts—that's all it was.

She got up from the couch and opened the door. Frigid air and quarter size snowflakes flew into the cabin. She bent down to quickly wash her hands then closed the door. Then she said, "It's okay. Just do what you need to do."

So brave and giving. I'd been told vampire bites hurt. I was determined to not hurt her. I was in control of my needs now. I hoped. "Take off your shirt and sweater."

She did and walked to me exposing her neck and shoulder. She opened the blanket covering her and let it drop to the floor. I covered her with my blanket. I'd always known women were attracted to me. I'd always taken them to my lair in Manhattan, but I'd never allowed a woman into my heart. After the blizzard was over I would never see her again and that suited me perfectly. Until then, we had nothing to link us but the physical, symbiotic relationship we'd formed.

From neck to shoulder, my nose hovered over

her skin sensing the heat of her blood beneath. Her skin smelled faintly of roses even two nights later. Perfectly her softness molded to my hard body.

I licked her neck where her pulse beat as if she were running a marathon. With my fangs, I drove in deep, penetrating her vein. She rose on her tippy-toes and stiffened at my sucking. A moan rose out of her as I clutched her ass, pushing her to me.

She knew what I was thinking. I was angry with myself for doing even this. I didn't want this connection but was helpless to ignore or control it. She gasped, moving against my hardness. I backed her against the wall, pushed her legs around my waist and drove home into her warm wetness. Home! I was home if only for this instant.

But I had to go slow. I didn't want to split her in half.

The cold was temporarily forgotten and now replaced by heat and hunger. I slid into her with hot and urgent movements filling her completely. There wasn't one inch of her I didn't know.

Soon the stroking intensified from smooth and slick to thick, meaty strokes. With a final cry, I pushed her over the edge. I burst inside her bathing her organ.

Neither of us could move. Her hands tangled in my hair. Tenderly, I released her neck and licked,

sealing the wounds, then held her.

\* \* \* \*

"This is late, but are you dating that model?"

"We broke up before I met you."

I could never date anyone now that we're "married." It would make me physically and psychologically ill to do so.

Silence again. Her skin felt cool. To be safe I rubbed her arm. Rubbing her breast would warm her up faster. There was nothing safe about this, not when blood rushed to my cock like a broken dam.

"Were both of your parents Greek?"

"My mother is Greek and my father is Romanian."

"Why is it so hard for you to talk about yourself?"

I was trying to open up to her. The Hymeneal battled with my instinctual need for privacy. "It's not something I'm comfortable doing. My brother complains about that, too."

"Can I tell you something?"

"You can tell me anything you want."

She moved out from under me then lay on her side facing me. "I think that's why he doesn't trust me. He reacts as if I'm taking you away from him."

"I've known Alec for a year. "

"Did he grow up alone?"

"He did."

"Family may mean a lot to him."

"Damn, you're good."

"You look more Greek."

"Is your father still alive?"

"More or less. He's in a coma." It was easier than telling her Alec took our father's mind from him and now he's a vegetable.

She looked away for a moment contemplating my answer it seemed.

"You hate your father?"

She's perceptive.

She smiled sheepishly at him. "I'm empathic as well."

"You're full of surprises, Illy. My father hated all of his children. He gave me up when I was four—sold me to the devil of Santorini."

"You're leaving something out. You don't want tell me."

"Gauge is werewolf."

"What? Werewolf?"

"The night is filled with us freaks."

"I drove in a car with a werewolf?"

"You did."

"Go ahead."

"Radu found us, killed my stepfather in front of us all then he dragged me out by my ear to

Santorini. There I was sold to the Vrykolakas Clan where I was a slave for some centuries."

"Here I thought slavery was over."

"How did you gain your freedom?"

"That's a topic for another day."

She rushed not wanting me to derail her. I had a way of shutting her down. "Did he give you those scars?"

I shook my head in disbelief. I had to keep my mouth shut. "Not up for discussion."

I couldn't believe I wanted to tell her. I'd never shared my story with anyone, not even Alec. Alec knew better than any one what kind of vampire Radu was, but I never wanted to tell him about Manus. It was too ugly to utter aloud. I wanted to reach out to Ilida and tell *her*. What was wrong with me? "He...also gave me scars you can't see."

That much I knew about myself. Self-analyzing was never my style, but I knew I was messed up in some way. While others walked around happy and fulfilled with someone they loved, I couldn't get to happily ever after.

"Kids deserve to be happy."

I didn't think I could be more surprised by her sympathy. "You think all children should live an undisturbed life?"

Her cool hands touched my cheek breaking my thoughts. "Who wouldn't want that?"

Part of me wanted to run from her touch. The

other part wanted to burrow inside her where it was safe. He placed his hand on her waist on top of the blankets. "You're making me talk too much and you're freezing."

"Your story was helping me forget the cold."

"Come here," I said as I pulled her to me and wrapped my arms around her. I could have wrapped my arms around her twice. She was petite. I frowned at her hat. It blocked my path to playing with her hair.

"I'm sorry you had to go through that."

"I wish I knew you after that period in my life. I could have used someone to talk to about it."

"I'm here now."

"But not now."

"How about your mother?"

"She died in the volcano blast of nineteen twenty-six. Tell me about you?"

"I'm not as interesting as you."

"You're wrong there, Illy."

She stared at the snow avoiding my questions.

"I can't believe your mother left you."

Her eyes rounded in surprise. "Mothers leave their children often. She wanted to be a singer in Paris. Getting married and having kids wasn't her dream it was my father's."

"I see." She'd been abandoned like me.

"You do see, don't you?" she said.

I stroked the cool side of her face now admiring



the softness of her skin. "Do you have grandparents?"

"I only know one set and that's my father's parents. My mother's parents gave her up."

"Why?"

"Let's see... the story is that my grandfather didn't want to have a biracial child. He's white. My grandmother went along with him on the decision to give my mother up for adoption," she said bitterly.

Like the Vrykolakas gave up their daughters as if they were disposable trash. "Where is your father's family from?"

"Jamaica and Haiti. My mother's side is from the Sea Islands bordering the southern states."

"You're still shivering." I reached down under the blankets and felt the soles of her feet. They were freezing even with the socks on.

"I'm okay."

"No, you're not."

She shook her head. "We can't."

"We have to. I won't lose you to this storm."

"You won't. I'll eat soon and then warm up again and you can feed."

"That's not what I meant. Let me help you."

"The more we do it the more--"

"The connection with us deepens. It's happened already."

"And you keep finishing my sentences."

## Chapter Thirty

“Stay under the covers!” Daedalus barked. She wanted to be useful, so she wasn’t going to listen.

“You need my help.”

“There you go not listening again.”

It was a flaw of hers. She inherited her stubbornness from her father. Possibly her mom also—if only she knew her mother enough to validate that.

“Tell me about Juliana?”

“You met her.”

“Yeah, briefly. What was she like?” Her toes warmed up. She breathed feeling her body relax and take in the warmth.

“She was funny, flighty, a trouble maker, but in a good way.”

“You miss her.”

“I miss her with every breath. His grief was so acute to her that it was a tangible thing. “I loved my daughter, but I failed her. I was a shitty

father."

"I'm sure she knows you love her."

"I didn't know how to love her when she was alive."

"You tried to protect her."

"I suffocated her. A child has no choice but to rebel after that."

They lay on their stomachs now side by side. Daedalus had pulled the back cushions off the couch so they could have more room to spread out. They still lay close to each other sharing as much body heat as possible.

The lamp she'd used to see by when she stitched Daedalus back together gave the living room a warm glow. A large snowdrift blocked the window.

The sliver of light from the snow made objects near the window appear dark blue.

Daedalus continued to rub her. He concentrated on her back now. She'd gotten used to his touch since staying with him. He varied it from light to firm to light again. The night air had grown icy, but his touch dispelled the coolness... somewhat.

"This isn't working. You're still shaking," he said.

"What should we do besides what we've been doing?"

His voice dropped ten degrees below freezing when he answered her, "You won't like it."

"So far I have, Daedalus."

"In werebat form I could keep you warmer. You might not like how I look, though."

His violet eyes waited for her reaction. He was testing her. She was determined to pass the test. "Do you have the energy for it?"

"I'll have to bite you again."

"How much will you have to take?"

"Not a lot. Just enough to change and we won't have to have sex. Are you willing?"

Ilida didn't answer him and didn't need to. She knew what was needed to stay alive. It didn't make it easier to digest. The last time he was in werebat form he almost killed her.

She offered her neck. He lay over her, his mouth on her neck. His fangs extended pressed her skin down. Fire raced through her body. She fought for mental control, but it was no use. Her mind opened up to him as her blood ran down her neck and over her shoulder.

Every slurp made her womb contract. His pointy ears grew longer. Short hairs sprouted from his pores—tickled her skin. His body lengthened while on top of her. In this form, he'd tried to bite her—kill her after she hit him with her car.

Daedalus lifted his head after licking her wounds. His eyes were hard and icy as he wiped his mouth. He read her thoughts.

"Do you..." She stopped whatever it was he was going to say. As far as she was concerned, he didn't know how she really felt underneath her fears and misgivings about all this paranormal stuff. She only knew she wanted him and if he only wanted her for the duration of this mess, then fine. She could deal with that. She wasn't good at the relationship stuff anyway. So, he couldn't blame her when she reached for him. Long curly hairs crowned him.

"What are you doing?"

She didn't answer, instead, she opened her legs displaying herself to him – vulnerable to him.

"You don't want to do this."

Ilida positioned him at the entrance of her center. He was long and thicker. In human form, he was impressive, beautiful. In this form, he was intimidating, with an animal beauty. How could she get all of him inside her without splitting her in half? She giggled thinking about it.

"I almost killed you," he pleaded.

Ilida caressed his cheek admiring the strengthened cheekbones. She cupped his face and brought him down to her. She kissed his dark, dark lips.

"I'm no miracle," he said painfully. He still didn't trust her. He'd never done this with any of his previous women? Not even his deceased wife? No wonder he carried so much distrust for others

inside him.

Well, Ilida tolerated him, took care of him, and there was no turning back. She ran her hands down his shoulders feeling the hard implacable muscles flexing, fighting for control.

Ilida cupped his hips feeling the hard muscles clench in her palms. He dwarfed her like this. His body sensitive, even in this form. Eagerly she pushed him forward. She felt him stretch her. She clenched her teeth, fought for control as he slid against her inner walls.

He wasn't the most awful thing to ever walk the earth. He was beautiful, different and all hers. She sensed him trying to be gentle, but there was no need. She could take it. She wanted it... rough. They moved in unison, writhed, stroked.

Why couldn't he see she wanted him and there was nothing to be afraid of. His blood was in her veins, in every pore of her body. He was in the air she breathed. She wanted his dark love. Her back arched giving him full access. Then he buried his head in the nook of her neck. His soft waves tickled her. Finally, he came filling her.

Afterwards, they lay silently, listening to the sounds of winter around them.

\* \* \* \*

"Ilida? Our rescue party is here."

It happened quickly. Men dressed in North Face outerwear came in, handed them clothes. She got dressed under the blankets.

Silently they both dressed. Once outside she saw no less than twenty men. Were they like him, she wondered? He must be important to have had so many people looking for him.

She looked at all of them, then her eyes settled on one of them. He was tall like Daedalus. Alec.

Daedalus walked past her to him. His men circled around them blocking her view of them. His men—she assumed they were his men—stood around them. No words were spoken, but the men seemed to know what to do. They nodded their heads in unison and walked away. They were all telepathic, she guessed. It was a good thing she kept hers in check or Daedalus would accuse her of mental spying. They then parted and Daedalus headed towards her.

More importantly, they shared something in that tiny abandoned house. She was now privy to a world seldom seen by other humans and Daedalus trusted her with that knowledge. He'd given her a mental keepsake to have for the rest of her life.

One of his men escorted her to an SUV fitted with monster tires. Her car was hopelessly buried. Not that she was in a hurry to claim it. It was a wreck.

Finally, Daedalus approached her. He resembled a man caught between wanting to say more to her and wanting to forget she existed.

"I don't recommend going to the City now. The roads are hazardous."

"My father lives in Selden. I'll stay there until all the roads are clear."

He wasn't going to be honest with her. She could feel it. He looked uncomfortable, as if he wanted to be anywhere but there in front of her. He wanted to deny there was anything between them except the need to help each other survive. Was it possible for two strangers to have incredible intimacy and walk away?

Ilida knew there was more. She didn't enter into relationships lightly. The war of emotions fought for control. The sex had touched her deep inside and she didn't want to ignore it. She wished he felt the same way.

His blue-violet eyes shuttered by dark lashes as he said, "You're not going to your father's house. You're coming with me."

"Excuse you?"

"You're coming with me. No arguments. No discussions." Then he walked around to the passenger side of the jeep.

He'd already told her he was more than uncomfortable in this...she didn't know what to call it. She didn't understand it, but she wasn't his



Stepford wife. She squared her shoulders and said, "I don't take orders from you or anyone."

"A new day is dawning. Get used to it!"

"Wait a minute!"

"Wait nothing! I'm keeping you safe, Illy."

"I left all those people at Tilly House."

"They're gone. If they aren't dead then they've been changed."

Dead? Her thoughts scampered behind denial. There had to be someone left. Someone who got away? "I can't...I don't believe you."

Uncertainty crept into his eyes. Then he said, "You never leave witnesses behind."

She understood that thinking. Murderers never left witnesses. Why would vampires be any different?

"Terra follows the creed: humans will never know about us."

"I know. Are you going to kill me? Your brother looks like he can't wait to." She grabbed the door handle, yanked it open, and sat down reaching for the seat belt.

Cold air made her shiver after he opened the driver's side door. The look in his eyes made her quake. A hint of annoyance hovered there. "Don't start a war between me and my brother. You and I are in the Hymeneal. It can't be broken by him or anyone else."

"I'm engaged to someone who doesn't want to

have anything to do with me.”

“You can hate me after we get something warm in your body.”

She didn’t hate him. She just wanted her life the way it was two months ago. “I need clothes.”

“We’ll get something in town.”

“Someone will find my car once the snow melts.”

“It will be gone before then.”

“Why does Terra hate you so?”

“I foiled an attempt by her on my brother’s life.”

“She’s a sore loser.”

“Killing my daughter in response was out of proportion to that. She made it personal.”

“What will you do when you find her?”

He said nothing except turn the key in the ignition. The car’s engine roared.

## Chapter Thirty-one

They broke away from the motorcade and drove into town for supplies. Ilida needed clothing, underwear and a new cell phone. Daedalus waited patiently, this time sporting sunglasses. It was cloudy out, but the brightness of it must have bothered his eyes. The backs of her eyes stung, but she didn't call attention to it. She squinted blocking the light. They drove to the ferry landing.

"Is it a large ferry?"

"Medium sized."

"The only ferry I've ever taken is the Staten Island Ferry."

"Tena One is tiny compared to that," he smiled wryly.

"How many times a day. Sorry. Night does it run?"

"It only runs at night, and only comes when I need it."

"The Captain is telepathic?"

"Sort of. Here it comes now."

It slowly cut and pushed the ice in a steady straight path. "It's black."

"Yes, it is. Do you get sea sick?"

"Not me."

"Good."

She felt his hand pressing her back. She liked the color black. It was dark, elegant and it slimmed her ever-widening hips. When the black ferry pulled parallel to the dock she couldn't help but think about Charon and his ferry that took one to the Underworld.

The ferry sat quietly hardly moving except for when the icy waters of the Bay crunched and swayed it from side to side. What was more ominous was that no one on *Tena One* came out to greet them.

She scanned the window of the control tower. It seemed empty. She squinted her eyes to get a better look. No one was in there.

"After you."

"Where's the Captain?" she asked as she walked up the plank. She stepped onto the carpeted ferry floor. Daedalus followed behind her. He directed her to a seat and sat next to her.

"There is none."

She looked around, noting the dark wood paneling and the soft black cushioned seats.

"Second mate?"

"No."

"So..." The ferry moved slowly quietly away from the dock. She made a circular motion with her hand. "How are we moving?"

He pushed her back against the black cushions of the seat. "Why not sit back and enjoy the ride."

Her butt adhered to the seats. After enduring the sofa in the cabin, her body welcomed the simple comfort of reinforced cotton cradling her. "I would if there was someone piloting this thing."

"Some spirits don't cross over to the other side. They stay to assist or annoy the living."

"It's like a paranormal lalapalooza with you."

"Calm down, Ilida."

She shrunk down in her seat, hiked her knees up on the seat cushion, and wrapped her arms around her legs. She needed to insulate herself until she could get used to her new world.

"You have a lot to get used to."

"Spirits, huh?"

"You saw one when you tried to help the dying elderly man."

Ilida flinched. "That was five years ago. I made a point not to subject myself to that again."

Her heart flipped when he pressed his cool lips against her forehead. It was a kiss given to a friend. She didn't place any more importance on it.

"We're almost there," he said.

"Let's break out the Crystaal!" she said looking

around her, then through the window.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, Illy. I'm here."

*Tomorrow you might not be.* "Knee jerk reaction. Don't worry about it." She was determined to find her backbone and *get over it*. She'd been through enough to not let the ghostly captain or the Tyrian Guard Headquarters cow her.

"Look straight ahead." She followed the direction he pointed to. She walked to the bow of the boat. She tried to take it all in but couldn't. She couldn't find the words to describe the mansion. It was Gothic, but modern and not as weighted. Clean lines and beige stone gave it a distinct, sterile look, yet its masterpiece lay on top of its tower. Two stylized batwings reached up to the gray sky as if they were about to take flight.

"Impressive?"

"Very."

Tena One crept to the dock, stopped, and the door of the boat opened.

"Thanks, Captain."

"He appreciated that. Let's go."

They walked down the snow-covered hill. Daedalus carried her bags of new clothing. *It must look impressive in the summertime.*

*That's what I've heard.*

She spotted a round stone well. "I heard of Gardiner's Island, but never bothered to come here."

"Captain Kidd's treasure is supposedly buried here."

"Is that the Captain who ferried us here?"

"I'm not telling."

"It figures you wouldn't." It was minor compared to the sight before her. Up close, the Tyrian headquarters was intimidating. Gargoyles sat over the heavy ornate doors. She took the bags from Daedalus's hands. He held his hand over a computer console and then opened the heavy ornate door. Inside looked totally different.

Dark oak wood paneling gave it a cozy warmth. Tall floor to ceiling Gothic windows opened the expansive space. She heard activity through the doors to her right. Those doors were dark and ornate as well.

"The men are trickling in little by little. Once they're all here I'll introduce you."

"Do they know about me – us?"

"Not much until they found us."

"They know just by looking?"

"We smell and hear better than mortals and are telepathic. There isn't much I can keep from them."

They'd undoubtedly smelled sex in the cabin. Why did she suddenly see herself as a fifteen year old who was caught kissing her boyfriend by her father? She really needed to grow up.

Daedalus sported an uncomfortable look on his

face. Ilida didn't think he could be uncomfortable about anything. "What is it?"

"Would you share my room with me?"

He wanted to be *with* her.

"Yes. Yes, I'll share your room with you."

"You will?"

"I didn't think you'd ask."

"I'm not going to run away from us."

Suddenly she floated in a pool of warm euphoria. He wanted her and he wasn't going to deny what they'd shared in the cabin. He trusted her. She'd proved herself to him and to herself. They were home free.

"I'm going to buy food for you," he declared with the cutest, boyish smile on his face.

"Food?" The thought of eating made her ill. That ham she'd eaten earlier didn't agree with her. Or it was the Change? She really didn't care. She shrugged. "Okay. How about chicken noodle soup," she said. "Lots of it. Oh, and ginger ale."

"Soup? That's all you can stomach."

"I think so. I feel different."

"How different?"

"I feel the woven pattern of my sweater, and I smell things. Do you have to leave now?"

"You have different food in mind."



## Chapter Thirty-two

Water streamed down her chest. Her taupe thighs rolled against his stiff cock.

She bucked beneath him as he drew one milk chocolate nipple into his mouth. She tasted different from before. The vampire genes enhanced her scent made her breasts fuller. With her nipples distended, I easily sucked and licked her until she shook beneath me.

The light from the ceiling bounced off the streams of water on one nipple. It fascinated me.

To my pure delight her cries of desire in my ear blocked out the din of the shower water. What would she sound like when I had my cock inside her?

Shower water, soap and her natural taste filled my mouth. The steam enhanced the scent of her arousal.

I kissed her, licked her, and nipped where her flesh gave, but not drawing blood yet. Her back against the wet marble wall moved in an erotic

dance.

I grasped her thighs hooked her ankles around my waist and plunged in hard and deep.

Her screaming orgasm egged me on. I grasped her breast held it up and ran my tongue around her nipple. I devoured her peak, running my fangs up and down it.

I hated the Hymeneal! Yet, I wanted all of her. The ambivalence added to my desire for her. It was torture for her, too. I felt it in the way she tried to push me away then pull me back. Her soft groans begging me to stop then begging me not to. The passion, too much for both of us. It scared us. We were on the edge of a precipice.

I wanted her over the edge. Her sweet, yellow-brown breast bobbed as I pushed inside her. I captured one in my hand ran my fangs around her nipple. Her sweet powerful blood exploded in my mouth flooding my body with energy, flooding my brain with information.

My body absorbed as it absorbed her cries of abandons. She arched her back. I arched up like a bow. Her body broke, trembled as she sobbed. Her release pumped me as images of her forgotten past drowned me.

And then I knew her taste, finally at the worst possible time. Instinctively, I growled my anger, shock, and surprise. She stiffened around me. Her gasped vibrated through my chest. Another

orgasm wound its way through her.

Anger unchecked, I balled my fist and punched the wall next to her head. Bits of powdered marble fell from the crack in the wall.

Ilida froze. Her chest heaved with fear as I slipped out of her and lowered her to the ground. She moved away from me and climbed out of the tub.

Despair clouding me as my cock continued to leak.

“What is your problem?”

I stared at the woman I was falling in love with not knowing what and how to say what was needed to be said. “What was that about?”

I barely found my voice. “You are a Vrykolakas.”

It cracked and sounded like a dying animal.

“W – what are you saying?”

“Your blood reeks of it!”

\* \* \* \*

Ilida felt the anger, smelled it, which was odd at a time like that. Why would she be able to smell his emotions? Like an animal sniffing the air for prey, that’s exactly what was happening. She was the prey and Daedalus was the predator.

His teeth were enormous and menacing as he gritted to control himself. He took a step towards

her. She knew he wouldn't hurt her, but his anger was overwhelming. All five-foot-five of her stood her ground to his six-foot-four tower of menace.

"You're a Vrykolakas."

Everything he said to her she pushed away. It was poison and she wasn't going to hear it. "I'm *Ilida Davis*."

"Your grandfather was a Vrykolakas."

"You're wrong."

"How do you explain your psychic powers?"

"They were passed down from my aunt Cassandra."

When she said the name Cassandra his head shot back as if someone had slapped him. "Cassandra, huh?"

"Yes."

"What does your aunt *Cassandra* look like?" His voice took on a venomous tone.

"Medium dark-skinned, long amber dreadlocks. She's not a vampire. She's a crazy woman who lives in Prospect Park!"

"There was a ritual called the Breeding Circle. Women were collected like cattle from all over the world even from the village of Oia. They were passed around from vampire to vampire."

Her nightgown lay at her feet ripped to shreds. It felt like hours since they'd made love. She confronted him, "My aunt is from the Caribbean."

"Those women were bred out like brood mares.

If they had female babies, they were sent to orphanages on every corner of the globe. If they had male babies the Vrykolakas kept them. I killed the leader of the Clan. I tasted his blood. It took me a while to remember, but you have the same blood."

"My grandfather was from Haiti. He never had any use for my mother."

"Your grandfather was Manus, the vampire who raped and enslaved me and others. He was sired by Hecate."

Was he saying she's a descendant of a witch? Hecate was Persephone's maiden—an evil witch. He was afraid of being with her. It's a smoke screen. "You don't want to be with me, Daedalus. That's why you're saying this."

"I knew a Cassandra." He paced back and forth disturbing the shaft of moonlight. His penis stood at forty-five degree angle. "She was Manus' favorite. She was kind to me and paid a terrible price for it."

"How many women named Cassandra are there in the world?"

"She had sable colored skin with long wild, *amber hair*."

Ilida sank to the floor. Her mind shut down. "How long have you been free of the Clan?" Her voice sounded alien-far away.

"It's been eighty years."

"Are you out of your mind? She doesn't look a day over forty."

"Humans get certain benefits from sleeping with a vampire. A resistance to aging happens to be one of them."

"She would never have allowed herself to be used. Cassandra may be crazy but she's sharp, too."

"African-Americans didn't have freedoms back then."

"You're telling me my parents and my aunt lied to me. You're sick!"

"You need to pay your father a visit."

"And what if you're scared shitless because you love me?" She stood up pulled the sheet from under her feet.

"You'd want him to go to the grave without telling you the truth?"

## Chapter Thirty-three

I heard Tena One creep away from the dock. I collapsed on the edge of the tub she'd used not too long ago. The smell of her skin lingered in the damp air in the bathroom.

"I don't hate Ilida. I don't hate Ilida," I chanted repeatedly, until I calmed myself.

Alec tried to warn me. That son of a bitch half-brother of mine.

After washing and getting dressed in my Tyrian guard black, I entered the workroom downstairs. And who should I find in there but my brother and his wife leaning over the computers looking, supervising, getting in the way.

\* \* \* \*

Ilida's finger stalled on the doorbell. He'd had that doorbell for years and she'd pressed it zillion times in the past. It was her gateway to family. The familiar, not always copasetic, but it was her

family. Now it was something she could no longer trust. The bell... her gateway to loss. Just like losing her mom, she was losing her father, the one parent who stuck around.

*You have to know.*

*It doesn't make it any easier.* She blocked her mental contact with Daedalus and the emptiness was palatable. She pressed the doorbell.

The door opened to Leona, her father's new wife. Her dark brown, big round face always reminded her of a molasses gumbdrop. "Hi, Leona."

"We've been so worried about you."

Leona had a refined Caribbean accent that never failed to make her smile. "I'm okay. Hey, Daddy?" She rushed into his arms hoping to capture what they had three hours ago, a day ago.

He gave her a bear hug then arm-in-arm they walked to the basement door. "Playing pool?"

"Every chance I get," he said as he walked down the steps.

"I heard the news. What happened at the Tilly House?"

"Well," she cleared the steps then took off her coat. "I wanted to talk with you about it. Actually I wanted to talk about my grandfather."

"There's nothing to talk about." Her father's shoulder's tensed as he bent over, racking the balls. "Why do you want to talk about him?"



The warning in his voice was unmistakable, but since when did she ever heed warnings? After positioning the balls, he lifted the rack. She picked up her cue stick ready to play.

He continued talking. "Do you know how long ago that was?"

"I know, but it's family history, Daddy. Who was he?"

"Do you remember how to play?"

She sighed. "I remember." Ilida watched him assume the pool player position: legs parted, one knee bent and leant towards the table. He gripped the butt of the cue stick, slightly lifted his right thumb. His other hand made bridge and he moved the cue stick back and forth. He aimed then struck a striped ball. Two balls dropped in the left corner pocket. "You're grandfather was Greek."

That was common knowledge. She bent down, moved her cue stick back and forth, aimed, and then made her shot. A solid five ball dropped in the corner pocket. "What was his name?"

"It's ancient family history. Leave that nonsense be." He bent down made a shot and missed. "Damn!"

"I have a right to know." She had more than a right to know and her father knew it. How dare they both keep secrets from her about the family.

"Ask your mother."

"You know she won't tell me. She hates him and I want to know why."

"He got your grandmother pregnant with your mother. He talked your grandmother into giving her up for adoption."

"Why?"

"He was rich and white and wasn't going to help her take care of your mother."

"Not all white men are like that, Daddy."

"Is your boyfriend white?"

"Then what happened?"

"And what? What happened to you lately? You've never been demanding like this."

"I guess it's time I changed that."

Her father couldn't stand demanding women. His problem, not hers. She didn't want to be everyone's good little Ilida anymore.

"I thought Kevin..."

"We aren't together anymore and I want to talk about my grandfather. What was his name?"

"Manus."

He bent down again moved the butt of the stick back and forth. His shoulders leveled with his ears. Anger beat off his skin. Ilida had to keep pressing. Her relationship with Daedalus was at stake. Her father moved the stick back ready to aim.

"Was he a vampire?"

He struck the ball with great inertia. It shot

across the basement hitting the wood paneled walls.

"Who told you?"

"It doesn't matter now. Was he?"

"You need to take a vacation. You sound stressed."

"Was he a vampire, Daddy?"

"Watch your tone. I'm still your father."

"Who's kept something this important from me for thirty years." Ilida held back her scream of annoyance. Every second that ticked by she saw her old life slipping away.

His gait slowed and his shoulders slumped as he moved the table over to retrieve the ball.

"Do I have to read your thoughts to find out?"

That halted his steps. Her powers always made him nervous. It was her trump card.

"He was a vampire," he said gravely. "Who told you?"

Ilida wanted to laugh. She wanted to lose the tenuous control she had left over her emotions. "Someone who has a vested interest told me."

"A man?"

Her chest tightened. "W – was Manus from the Vrykolakas Clan?"

"He didn't want his daughter. He wanted a son. Your grandmother said he was obsessed with having a son."

*If they had male babies, they were kept by the*

*Vrykolakas to be raised.*

"I have an uncle who's a vampire?"

"Cassandra would be able to tell you all you need to know."

"He gave her up, too?" *Tell me he did. Tell me Daedalus didn't know more than she did.*

"Ilida, Cassandra is your grandmother."

"Wh—what? No, that's impossible!"

"You look like her, Ilida."

"He was right," she laughed bitterly as he walked to the old chair by the fireplace.

"Who was right? Ilida?"

"Manus is dead, you know."

"Good riddance."

"Yeah, sure."

"He did nothing but bring grief to your mother."

"Why did mom leave us? Really?"

He made a sound a cross between weariness and hesitancy. "Your mother was wild. She didn't want to be a wife or a mother. She didn't know she had choices. I'm afraid your brother inherited the wild streak from her."

"Do you still care about her?"

"It was exhilarating to breathe the same air as she. Hortensia could charm anyone. She could wake up a crowd, but I settled down after you came along. She didn't. We couldn't make it together anymore. She remained young while I

got older. She left."

"Maybe she realized trying to be normal was hopeless?" She'd learned it. She was far from normal.

"It wasn't so black and white. We loved each other."

"Why did she leave me?"

"Your mother couldn't cope with being what she was well. Being a mother made it that much harder."

"You didn't cope well, either. I have psychic powers and it scares you."

"I have my limitations, Ilida. That's why your grandmother stepped in. She had to teach you how to use it."

She stood up from the deep upholstered chair and walked to the fireplace. "That's why I left med school. I was open to too many voices. You never think about how frightened your patients really are, you know."

"You don't know how many times I wanted to tell you."

"Why didn't you?"

"How do you tell your children they aren't human? How?"

"What about Parker? Did you tell him, at least?"

"Your brother knows."

She laughed at the absurdity of it. How could he know and she not? Was he able to digest it and

go on with his life? He was resilient that way, while she hoped for normalcy.

"What?"

"I've been running away from what I am. I feel so stupid. Thank you for telling me, now."

"Why don't you stay for some dinner, Ilida."

Ilida hadn't heard Leone come down the stairs. From the look on her face, she knew, also. Everyone knew except her. "Thanks Leona, but I have to get back to my friend's house. I borrowed his car."

She didn't want to eat with them—break bread as if everything was okay. It wasn't okay. *It never will be.* Her relationship with Daedalus was over. How could she stay with him knowing what her grandfather did? It would take years to scrub the shame off.

"His car?"

"Yes."

"Not Kevin's?"

Her father's dark brown eyes looked hopeful. "That ship sailed and sunk, Daddy."

"I liked him."

"I wish you could meet Daedalus."

"Oh, I almost forgot a woman came here looking for you" Leona said. "A reporter."

Why did she get a strange foreboding sensation? "Did she leave a name?"

"No. She wanted to interview you about Tilly

House."

"You and Daddy stay here and don't invite anyone in."

"Ilida?"

"Please, Leona. Don't invite anyone in."

*Ilida?*

*A woman came to my father's house looking for me.  
I'll send guards.*

"Vampires, Leona. Bad ones. If that woman comes back don't answer the door. Don't open it. Please!"

Leona shut the door and locked it.

Ilida ran to Daedalus's car. After buckling herself in, she decided it was time to visit Tilly House.

\* \* \* \*

She arrived at Tilly to find she was correct. It was sealed off by yellow police tape. She smelled the remains of burnt wood and blood before exiting the car.

She got out and walked onto the snowy curb. It wasn't really a curb. It didn't have the cement high level of a curb like in the City. This had been her second home for five years. All those people she didn't know well but ... they'd died in front of her- killed by vampires or what passed as vampires. The very thing she was. She had to change her vocabulary quick.

Daedalus knew. He'd figured it out from the last bite he'd given her.

Her father she'd known all these years and didn't say anything. Cassandra wasn't off the hook. She knew also. What she must have suffered under the hands of Manus. What was worse, she couldn't look Daedalus in the eye after what her grandfather did to him.

Thinking about it now gave her the shakes, and a sour taste invaded her mouth. She swallowed it. Then took deep quick breaths. She didn't want to throw up. This was hollowed ground for her.

She knew that she loved Daedalus. She hoped he felt the same way but they couldn't go back now. Not ever. She started back to the car when she felt her mind tingle again. She whirled around too late. Pain and an intense acidic heat encased her right side. The world faded to black.



## Chapter Thirty-four

“Check on drug shipments from out of the U. S.”

Daedalus leaned over the shoulder of his communications expert. As he stood up his left side seemed to drop in temperature. Cold invaded his limbs. Ilida? “Damn!”

\* \* \* \*

Ilida fought to hold on. A woman stood over her, laughing. She could hardly see and she felt so cold. Blood oozed out of her neck. The burning spread to the rest of her body.

The woman leaned next to her. She thought she was going to kill her for sure. Instead, she drew something in the snow.

The woman disappeared and Ilida could no longer keep her eyes open.

\* \* \* \*

"Ilida! Hold on."

I read the message Terra left me in the snow. She took the time out to draw the word "DADDY" with Ilida's blood.

Her neck wounds. It wasn't a wound. Terra all but ripped her artery out. It was made out of anger, pain. I finally knew what her motive was. I pulled off my coat and laid it on Ilida.

Ilida's eyes opened, stared at me with death hovering. Her pupils were dilating.

"I won't let you die."

"Don't... help me." Her voice barely a whisper.

I ignored her, bent my head down. My scraggly beard brushed her cold cheek. I sucked on the wound Terra gave her, drawing the blood into my body. My vocal chords slowly burned with fire, then acid. I kept sucking.

Ilida gave herself over to the feeling of her blood being sucked out of her by me. It didn't take long. She was close to exsanguination. The acid refused to leave her system. Acute pain shot through her veins and echoed through me.

"Drink!"

*Let me die.*

"You'll just have to hate me." She watched me through heavy lidded eyes. I tore my sweater, exposing my chest to the elements. Instinctually my nerves and my brain tingled with the expected

joining. As if my body had been waiting for me to do this all along. I cut a line over my heart then lifted her up.

She didn't struggle but looked me in the eye as I held her to me. She drank from my heart. Her feeble sucking was enough to draw shudders from deep within me.

## Chapter Thirty-five

He was going to make her a vampire, the very thing she was afraid of, but Daedalus wasn't bad. He was good. Good.

Her lips touched his chest. She didn't have enough energy to suck from him. Cautiously she stuck her tongue out, licked him.

He shuddered. She licked again and suddenly her tongue gained enough strength to keep licking. Then her mouth closed over the cut. She sucked and sucked until he pulled her head away. Energy filled her veins instead of that sickening, acidic blood of Terra's. So much energy her body tingled from fingertips to toenails.

She felt weightless, moved. From far away, she heard the car door open, the smell of gas... warmth. Heat warmed her cold face.

She awoke and found herself in the room Daedalus had given her. Daedalus stood by her bed looking down at her. Worry lines creased his forehead. Then a formless gnawing pain advanced

in her stomach grew until she clutched it and howled.

\* \* \* \*

"You can't be serious?"

I was dead serious. And soon Terra will be dead. Tania knew that she was trying to delay the inevitable. "It's the only way out of this mess. There's no one else left I love for Terra to kill."

"The two of you believe in suicide missions."

Alec had let Radu stab him in the chest with his own sword to keep Tania alive. I could do no less for Ilida. "You and Alec can take care of yourselves. Ilida is just learning how to be a vampire. If I don't come back, you have to help her."

"Did you? Without her permission?"

"I had to change her. Her throat... It was the only way to save her life."

"What should I tell her when she wakes up?"

"Tell her everything will be all right."

"I shouldn't let you do this alone."

"You can't stop me, Tania," I warned her.

"You need backup."

"I'll contact you when the time is right."

"You love her don't you?"

"No matter what, make Ilida stay here."

## Book Three

## Chapter Thirty-six

I awoke to the ice cold of the steel table, smelling the scent of her previous victims including my daughter. The drug coursed through my body, but my bat self fought hard to counteract it. For once, I was grateful for my shape-shifting abilities.

“Don’t you know who I am?”

Terra paced back and forth like your proverbial mad woman. I only knew her as the vampiress who killed my only child. The vampiress I almost took pity on until she went after the woman I love. She had me beaten, shackled... I couldn’t believe it. *I’m shackled and drugged.* She didn’t know my well-kept secret. I couldn’t hold back the rage in my voice. “I don’t know you other than being a merciless bitch!”

She stared at me. Her violet eyes, eerily like my own, measured me then she spun around and paced. She stopped in front of a table. Her shoulders moved then the harsh ceiling light glinted off an evil looking syringe. I hoped my bat

self will be able to counteract the next dose. I had to remember to drop my head like one high on drugs. I crossed my eyes, tried to look wild one second and lucid the next.

She turned around and advanced towards me.

"Remember Santorini? The Caldera, where you had your way with countless of unsuspecting women?"

A growl rose from deep within my abdomen. She backed away from me with fear and anger in her eyes. "What about them," I said, remembering to slur my speech.

"The Breeding Circle. My mother was one of those women you raped, you pig!"

Was she serious? I only had sex with one woman and there was no glamour, no coercion involved. We gave to each other freely and then she gave me Juliana. "You investigated this yourself? You're off base."

"You liar! After she had me, you sent me to an orphanage, because I wasn't a boy. I'm worthless to you, is that it? You son of a bitch!"

She held the plunger over my arm, squirting some of that awful drug out. I had to act fast. Kill Terra, rescue Ilida, my brother and his wife, and destroy the last of the drug.

"This is liquefied Red Queen. Once I shoot you up with this you'll die, but I want to give you a chance to redeem yourself, Daddy Dearest." She



lifted my chin and I rolled up my eyes to look her in the face. "Tell me you love me."

I saw the hurt and anger in her eyes. Both emotions turned her violet-blue eyes a dark purple. I knew right then I did feel sorry for her. How many more women, not vampire but not totally human, walked around with this much rage?

If I had known how the Breeding Circle would affect these women, I would have killed Manus years before. Terra wiped my child off the face of the earth and her machinations almost killed Ilida, her niece. She had to pay and there was only one way to do it. The thought sickened my stomach. "I hate you!"

I've had enough!

*Illy?*

*The drugs are taking a toll on your body. We have to merge. NOW!*

*You aren't strong enough yet.*

*We don't have time to argue now.*

*Illy?*

*Now, Daedalus. I love you.*

"Daddy Dearest? No argument? You coward." She pushed the syringe into my skin, pressed the plunger down.

The drug was like liquid fire in my veins.

*Now!*

Instead of a burning that permeated every inch of my body, a burning that warmed my insides

swept away the acidity in my veins. Ilida shone like an angel glowing form within. She held me. I felt the insidious acid leave my body.

How stupid I'd been all this time. I could have joined with her, become one with her weeks ago. I knew then that I loved Ilida. Her patience and her bravery set me free despite my hesitancy.

*We're almost there Daedalus. I have to disconnect.*

*No, wait!*

*Oh God!*

*Ilida?*

## Chapter Thirty-seven

The Queen, King and acolyte found themselves in the lion's den. Zombies, some of them in various stages of decay, advanced on them like spiders on flies.

"This is our welcoming committee," Ilida said.

"You two need to get behind me," Alec said.

Ilida wasn't going to move. She wanted to see this through to the end for herself and for Daedalus. "I'm staying where I am," Ilida said.

Tania nodded at Ilida.

"Me, too," Tania said.

"Here they come." Ilida dumbstruck stared ahead at the advancing zombies.

They came at them crawling on the ceiling, on the walls running towards them on the floor. Tania aimed then pulled the trigger. The milk-filled bullets hit their targets. Thumps on the ceiling made them all look up. Three zombies crashed through the ceiling, landed in front of her.

She put her self-defense training to good use—

punching and kicking, fending them off. If she drew first blood, it would burn her skin straight down to the bone.

"We need to find Daedalus and get out of here."

"Duck!"

Tania fired off four rounds, hitting the zombies in the head and chest. More jumped through the hole in the ceiling.

"Come on, Tania."

Ilida saw Alec standing over four zombies. Their heads cut off. The smell of blood luring her. Then she saw the blood wasn't from the dead zombies but from Alec's arm.

"You're hurt."

He waved it off as he flicked his jagged-edged blade in the air ridding it of the toxic blood. It was some sword. Ilida realized these people played for keeps and she was now one of them.

"Let's find my brother," Alec commanded.

She ran ahead with Alec and Tania covering her. Hearing behind her the sounds of battle, Daedalus became her homing beacon. She could find him; she would find him alive.

She felt stronger, faster. She ran down the hall, every object a blur. She fought a giddy excitement. She had to concentrate on finding Daedalus. She came upon a closed door, his thoughts the strongest through it. She heard Tania and Alec behind her; she was grateful they were still alive.

"It's steel."

Ilida moved back as Tania and Alec punched a hole in the door. It was thick. Tania joined in punching, making dents, but it wasn't enough. At that rate they would lose precious time and more of those Red Queen zombies might be on the loose.

"Let me try to open it."

"How? You're strong but not strong enough."

"I'm also telekinetic."

\* \* \* \*

I focused on Terra. She cowered against the wall. The last of the drug leaked from my pores. A power sung in my veins; nerve endings rippled with pain, bones grew realigned. The restraints fell apart like cheap string and landed on the floor. Fur broke through my pores. I dropped on all fours then charged.

"I never participated in the Breeding Circle, Terra. Manus' concubines freed me from my imprisonment for one night." My voice sounded gravely like I'd swallowed rocks—foreign to my ears. "She showed me I wasn't a piece of filth. Two years later, after I killed Manus, she gave me my daughter to raise. The daughter you killed!"

"You would say anything to save yourself." Then she raised her hand to me. Heat then pain

coursed through my body. Sweat wetted my fur making my skin itch.

"Terra you're... already dead."

"Then who is my father?"

"He was...the former leader of the Vrykolakas... Clan."

"Where is he?"

A primitive growl ripped out of me. "I killed him!"

"You bastard!"

Just then, the massive steel door came down. Alec and Tania rushed in, followed by my Ilida. She was taller, more muscular and her body was covered in short dark hair. Her ears were pointy and her back sported medium length bat wings.

Terra relaxed her hold on me. I jumped on her opened my massive jaws and bit her shoulder. She screamed. Blood erupted in my mouth.

I let go, dropping Terra. Terra fainted from the shock of me biting her. The scorching liquid burned my throat. I reverted to human form and spit the blood out.

Ilida, the woman who dodged her psychic powers for five years, stood before me unashamed, nude and covered in hair. My female equivalent, Ilida the werebat. The huntress and my heroine. I was smitten all over again.

"How did you do that?" she asked, keeping her distance. The concern she felt resounded loud and

clear in my head and heart.

I wiped my mouth of the last of the blood. The little smear of blood on my hand singed my skin, and slivers of smoke floated into the air. I wanted to hold Ilida but the way we'd left things didn't give me much hope. I simply reminded her, "Gauge is my twin. How are you?"

Tania interrupted Ilida. This wasn't the place for reconciliation. "You rest, Daedalus," Tania ordered. "We can take care of Terra from here."

"That reminds me. I brought your sword." Ilida held it out to me in a respectful manner, remembering how I taught her how to hold it with reverence.

"Thank you."

"Sure."

## Chapter Thirty-eight

For the first time in weeks, I felt relaxed. Terra, the first Tyrian Guard prisoner, made little trouble in the three nights she'd been held here. Alec and I stood by one of the many windows on the first floor under the staircase to talk.

"You have to call the Death Decree," Alec said.

"Manus was Terra's father. Ilida is her descendant," I said facing him. "I'm killing off her family one by one."

"It's your duty, Daedalus."

I smirked, blew out a puff of smoke in another direction away from Alec's nose. "Duty."

"Does Terra know she's related to Ilida?"

"No."

"Will you tell her?"

I sighed knowing my decision would have repercussions eventually. "There's no need to."

"You stepped in it."

Yeah, I stepped in it. My foot was so entrenched in shit that I couldn't see my ankle, and the stink will never go away.



"I don't envy your position now," Alec said.

Nothing like familial sympathy to make the heart grow fonder. "That's good to know, Alec."

"I didn't mean it that way."

"What did you mean?"

Alec shifted his weight for the first time ever, looking uncomfortable in my presence.

"I manage to get my foot in my mouth whenever we talk."

"You noticed that, too?"

"Now you're giving me a hard time," he said.

"Sorry."

"I'm sorry. Ilida proved herself last night."

"She had nothing to prove."

"I know. She loves you."

Our relationship was thawing a bit. I didn't have the need to antagonize him. Finally, I was on the road to peace with my family. I leaned against the windowpane and crossed my arms. I wanted to walk down that path, take the ferry to the mainland and find Ilida. "She's also willing to let me go. That's some love, isn't it?"

"You two had an argument? I felt the tension between you after we'd found you."

"Ilida thinks I hate her."

"Because of Manus?"

Alec doesn't know about my rape. He doesn't need to know just yet. "Even from the grave that asshole is still fucking up my life."

"Don't let this fester, Daedalus," he said.

"I don't know how to have a real relationship."

"You take it one day at a time with Ilida and do it fast. Don't let her think you don't care."

"Good advice."

"Here's more: if you don't order the Death Decree on Terra. The Council could order a Treason trial for you."

*And give the baldies what they wanted? No way.*

"Play your cards well and you'll keep your head," he added. "Your heart is another matter. I don't want to lose you over Terra. You have to think of something."

I nodded my agreement. I have family and as much as I wanted to get away from them, I loved them. Terra wasn't worth it.

I made my way down to the underground holding cells. I had to talk with Illy, but this was extremely important and it had far reaching ramifications for her. It was a historic moment. Terra was our first offender. The guards opened the heavy steel doors.

Terra sat with her back to the cell bars alone, defeated. A great mind used to destroy her kin could have improved the lives of vampires and humans everywhere.

With a flourish she turned her slim body around, faced me with her violet-blue eyes, and said, "Ah, the great Enforcer here to gloat."

"I *should* gloat, but I'm not in the mood to."

"Whatever for? I destroyed your life, Enforcer." She grasped the bars separating us. "Kill me and get it over with."

I could easily snap her neck without opening the cell door. I wanted her to bleed inward first. Family is important to her. She craves it like she craves blood.

"Did you know you are related to the woman I love."

I heard the breath catch in her lungs. She stiffened and held the bars tight. The blood drained from her hands.

"Manus was her grandfather. That makes you her aunt, three times removed."

She moved her shoulder as if adjusting her suit jacket.

"In short you tried to kill your own niece. Congratulations on reaching another low."

"Why are you telling me this?"

I unlocked the cell door, pushed it over, and held up my sword.

"I assume you studied the bushido code."

"I had to, to understand you. You'll make this quick?"

"Yes."

I made M slash with the Katana, tossing it up as Terra's body split in two perfect halves. The sword made two revolutions in the air elegantly then

gravity grabbed it. I reached my hand out. The handle landed in my palm.

\* \* \* \*

Ilida lurched as she put away the last of the dishes. Then she felt relief soothe her. It couldn't have been her emotions, she was anything but relieved. She felt nothing but anger, confusion, and regret. She tested herself. No regrets. She'd loved every minute with Daedalus. They had challenged each other. They'd fed each other. They had fit each other like a glove.

"So why don't you go to him, Child?"

"Should I call you auntie or grandma? Which do you prefer?"

The only response from Cassandra was an audible sniff. Tears streamed down the face of the woman she thought was her aunt. She couldn't hold onto her animosity any longer. Her grandmother had suffered. They all had.

Wordlessly Ilida ran to her and held her. Cassandra's dreads brushed her cheek, tickled her ear. *This is my grandmother. My grandmother.*

She took in her different smells: sage from her dreads, shea butter from her skin. All the familiar scents she'd grown up with. She held her past and her future and she wasn't going to let years of secrecy ruin one more minute.

## Chapter Thirty-nine

**I**lida awoke the next night with a buzz. Beverly gave her strange looks. Her sleeping habits were off, but she couldn't come out and say, I'm a vampire—understand my strange ways. So she smiled and told her...what else was she going to do? The incident at Tilly House was still under investigation and though Daedalus's friend, Matt Rodriguez, reassured her that it wouldn't touch her, she was still nervous.

After catching the last call at the Wulf Blood bank on Pacific and Atlantic Streets, she took the IRT train to Thirty-Fourth Street in Manhattan.

Butterflies flew and crashed into each other making a ruckus in her stomach. Something—a voice—kept telling her to go back to Suffolk County. So she followed her inner voice.

From Times Square, she took the train to Riverhead.

She couldn't help but think about all the times she had taken the train back and forth from Long Island to Brooklyn. She must have been nuts to

make those four-and-a-half-hour combined trips. She believed in Tilly House, but she wasn't going to visit the remains of that place.

She jumped in the cab at the Riverhead stop and, with difficulty, described where she wanted to go. The cab driver complained but took her to where she thought the cabin was. Instantly, she recognized the service road and the slight turn where her car had skidded out of control on slushy ice.

Her heart lurched.

It couldn't be the same cabin. It looked brand new.

Then she knew when she opened her mind. He was in there waiting. Damn blood bond! Her pride and her need battled each other. She swore again. Her hand froze on the latch.

"Hey, lady, you staying? I got other pick ups."

"Uh sorry. How much?"

The meter whirled then spit out a receipt. "Twenty seventeen," he said.

She handed the cab driver twenty-six dollars then exited the cab. He thanked her then drove off grumbling about crazy women.

Without the snow, the cabin looked inviting. The windows were no longer dirty. The steps had been restored and the roof replaced. He'd added a porch just so you could linger and enjoy the outdoors before shutting it out.

She should have called first? He might have a woman in there with him. He was within his rights to move on. She knew better than most that Daedalus didn't have a woman in the cabin with him. Her indecision had a vise grip on her stomach. As a vampire, she felt so much now.

Before she could knock, the door opened. He stood there in jeans and T-shirt and bare-footed.

"Come in."

Ilida hesitated then took two wobbly steps inside and felt the warmth immediately. She hadn't planned on staying.

"Are you going to stand there in your coat or are you going to relax so we can talk?"

"I—I don't know why I'm here."

"My blood runs through your veins. You came because you needed to see me."

"I'll try to *ignore* it next time."

"I don't want you to. I don't want to ignore it."

"We can't be together because of what my grandfather did to you."

"You aren't Manus."

"No kidding. I'm not belittling what you went through with him, but for a while there I thought you hated me."

"I did hate you. Because of you I can't go back to the male I was."

"I can't undo what happened here."

"And fuck up the best two and a half days of

my life. Are you insane? I love you."

"No, no." She ran to the door; before she could open it, he was there with his arms around her holding her to him. She remembered the way his skin smelled; that odd mix of earth and blood. His heat so familiar...

"Don't do this to me. Not after what happened at the gargoyle house."

"I want to take that leap with you, if you want to take it with me. If you would just stop running away."

Well, now she wanted to kick his leg, but what would that do? She met his eyes, saw her reflection in them. She felt warmth on her ear and realized his thumb caressed her lobe.

He said he loved her but she had to be sure. Did he really want her or just the idea of her? "Certain people in your family dislike me."

He placed the barest butterfly kiss on her forehead.

"Alec sometimes doesn't know how to express his real feelings, and he doesn't hate you. He respects you."

"My father..."

"Will get over it. He married your mother, remember."

She felt his hands playing with the hair on the nape of her neck. Then he pulled her hat off.

"I missed playing with your hair."



He did just that, running his hands through its tight, tight curls.

"I can't believe I'm considering this."

"I want to be with you."

"We need to take this slow."

"We're beyond taking things slow, Illy."

She placed her hands on his chest feeling his heart beat at a frightening pace.

"My heartbeat matches yours."

"The Hymeneal is some trip, isn't it? Hearing his laugh turned her insides to mush. God help her, she was going to be with him. "Well, what do you recommend we do then?"

"Close our eyes and jump in with both feet first."

"You need to stop smoking."

He stepped back and smiled. He took out a pack of cigarettes, waved it in the air, then stopped. He took a cigarette out.

"The idea is to stop smoking?"

"I'll need one tonight."

"Why?"

"After the orgasms we'll give each other it'll be needed."

Then she followed his long strides to the kitchen and she hoped he was going to do it.

Daedalus pushed the lever of the steel garbage can down with his foot. The lid opened and he threw the pack of cigarettes inside then lifted his

foot off the lever.

"Now let's bring this cabin down."

"Hold on now. We still have issues to work out." She didn't know where they were going. She wanted something permanent from him.

"How about you move in with me?"

"And live at the Gargoyle house?"

"Live with me at the townhouse in Gramercy Park."

"That's a big step for you. Are you sure?"

"Are *you* sure? Why are you backing off?"

"I could go through the what-ifs all night."

"I know my rep precedes me, but I've changed, Illy. Believe me, please."

"Let's have a trial period, first."

\* \* \* \*

They moved in together. Beverly was happy for her and grudgingly began to soften towards Daedalus. Her brother was happy for her, too. Her father was a different story. Ilida stood her ground with him. It was her life and she wanted to live it the way that pleased her, not him, or anyone else.

Daedalus gave away most of his furniture to Goodwill. They shopped for furniture together and he taught her how to be a vampire.

Then one day she came across his little back book.

## Epilogue

Lida sat on the cement bench on the patio at Tania and Alec's penthouse apartment. They'd had dinner—sort of—a dinner without food. She was going to miss food, but she gained so much more so, she decided she would deal with it and not to gripe about what she couldn't change.

"May I join you?"

Alec's voice startled her.

"I didn't mean to scare you."

"You didn't."

He gave her the "yeah right" look. The male version of it.

"Okay, you did."

"No one should be able to sneak up on you."

"I have to work on that. You can sit here." She gestured to the empty space next to her. "It's your bench, Alec."

"You seemed like you wanted to be alone."

"I was admiring the view you have from up here."

"That's why I bought the penthouse."

He had something to say to her, so she waited until he was ready to talk. She thought it was sweet, actually. The king apologizing to the acolyte. *Daedalus and Alec are so much alike and neither one of them knows it.*

Even sitting down Alec towered over her.

"I'm sorry I was an ass earlier," Alec said hurriedly.

"You were protecting your brother."

"I could have found a better way than alienating the two of you."

"You thought I was going to take him away from you."

He looked down at her considering it, and then nodded his head. His green eyes sparkled like jade through the darkness.

"Daedalus said you are sharp."

"I'm just empathic."

"You are also modest."

"You love Daedalus and you wanted to protect your relationship with him. You saw me as an interloper."

"Again, I'm sorry."

He truly loves his brother she was happy to know. They had something in common now.

"All is forgiven it, Alec."

"Thank you, Ilida. Can we start over?"

"Sure."

"I have a proposal for you," he said.

"That sounds intriguing. I'm all ears."

"Because of the drug problem there should be a substance abuse center for addicted vampires. What if you headed it?"

"You all do things big around here," Ilida said.

"We love seeing mouths hang open like yours," Tania said, as she came up behind her.

Ilida hadn't heard Tania come out onto the terrace. Daedalus and Gauge joined them. Daedalus leaned on the cement ledge then gave her a reassuring smile.

"I'm flattered and thank you, but I love helping people. I prefer to be in the trenches."

"No reason why you can't do both."

"Thank you, but you two hardly know me."

"I think Alec knows you, and I think you should consider the job," Daedalus said. "You've been restless since Tilly House was destroyed. I haven't been able to sleep during the day because you keep walking the floors."

"Take the job, Illy, or they'll keep bugging you," Gauge said.

"Thanks, Gauge," Alec said.

"Take the job," Daedalus urged her.

"Okay, all right. When will the center open up?"

"Not for another year. We have to get permits and things. You know how it is."

*Man, what am I going to do in the meantime? "I could temp for a year."*

*"I'm not exactly destitute, Illy," Daedalus said.*

She knew that and not because he flaunted his wealth. Ilida crossed her arms wanting to convey her message crystal clear to him. "I want to pay my own way."

Daedalus crouched down so that she could only hear him. "I'm getting sick of this. Would marrying you help you feel more secure?"

*"Is that your idea of a marriage proposal?"*

*"Let's leave them alone, guys," Alec ordered.*

*"It is a marriage proposal. It won't get any more syrupy sweet than that."*

Since when had he ever been syrupy sweet with her? She didn't want that. She wanted honesty and he gave it. A marriage proposal ... well, she pictured the bended knee deal.

Ilida waited until everyone left the patio. "For the record, I like having my own money, like you."

Daedalus angrily ate up the patio floor. "When wolves mate they share everything for life. Just remember that."

*"Are you asking me to marry you?"*

*"I'm asking you to walk my dog," he said, irreverently.*

*"You don't have a dog, and are you sure?"*

He stopped in front of her, hands in his pockets.

His face darkened with indignation, but was controlled. "What the hell is wrong with you, Ilida?"

"Your black book."

"Ah!" He held it up in his hand. A flash of blue light, white sparks, then orange flame swallowed up the book. All that remained was the smell of burning leather, and the realization that he was indeed serious.

He cupped her face in his hands. She loved his strong, reassuring hands, and she saw the love in his eyes for her. This was much better than the bended knee deal, but she still had reservations.

"What is it?"

"Let's live together for a while and see where it takes us?"

"You don't trust me."

"I want to do this right, and I love you."

He nodded his head, but she saw the disappointment clouding his violet eyes.

"Daedalus?"

"You want to make sure we're on the same page emotionally?"

"Look at our backgrounds."

"I'm not going anywhere. I can wait."

"Thank you."

"Let's get out of here," he said, as he kissed her eyes, forehead, and chin.

"We can't leave. The dinner was for us," she

said between his kisses. Her knees grew weak with every kiss.

"Vampire lycanthropes have incredible sex drives," Daedalus moaned into her neck. "You have to accommodate."

"Kiss me instead."

He planted a kiss on her neck then lifted his head.

"I can do that."

\* \* \* \*

Later, inside the penthouse apartment, I kept a watchful eye on Gauge. After going through the first stages of Hymeneal, I knew Gauge wouldn't be far behind. We tended to mirror each other. It's only a matter of time before Gauge succumbs to the will of the Hymeneal and finds his mate. May the gods help the woman when he finds her.

"What are you worried about now, Daedalus?"

I wondered how best to answer Tania. She and Alec don't know Gauge as I do. That's partially my fault and Gauge's. If I'm out of town and the Hymeneal hits its crescendo, then he will have to depend on them until I can help him.

"I'm worried about the gathering storm."

"You mean Gauge?"

I nodded.

"Excuse me, Tania."



Gauge rubbed his neck and he moved as if he were in a cage. He slid the balcony door open and I followed him. I felt Alec, Tania's, and Illy's eyes on my back as I did so.

*What's wrong with Gauge?* Thank the Gods I had Ilida by my side this way as well as physically. I was a shell without her.

*I'll tell you in a few minutes. Don't worry, Illy.*

"You look as if you are ready to jump out of your damn skin," I said to Gauge's back.

He was about to jump out of his skin from my pheromones and Ilida's. The Hymeneal increased ones senses to pinpoint the whereabouts of ones mate. She must be near.

"I need to fight this..."

"You need to find her. Whoever she is."

"I'm seeing red."

His aggressive instincts activated. Three alpha males in one place don't mix well.

"Go before you rip my throat out."

His powerful body leaped with the grace of a wolf as he jumped off the balcony. Clothes ripped while his muscles and bone convulsed, elongated, and bulged. Fur covered his body and he was gone.

A torn piece of cloth from his shirt floated in the icy wind....

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

K.R. Wilson originally hails from New York City and now makes her home in Northern California. She is a former pastry chef and watercolorist that now puts all of her energy into writing. Her life consists of a preschooler, an over-worked husband, and too many romance novels. Wilson has an intense love of vampires, werewolves, bad guys who crave redemption, gymnastics, Royksopp, Jamiroquai, Pat Metheny, Star Wars, Harry Potter and H.R. Giger. This is her second novel.